

Amended Description
Doing Just without Doing Harm Conference
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The working title of my paper is *In the Name of Dignity: Misguided Justice and Disregarded Harm in Modern Abortion Theory – A Comparative Perspective*. The focus of this article is how the word “dignity” has been used improperly in recent years to justify a single-minded, agenda-driven view of justice, a view that has had dire consequences for unwanted, unborn babies. The paper will compare abortion, family planning, and reproduction laws in America with that of other countries, particularly those in Africa, Asia and Europe. In order to understand the effect of words like dignity, justice and harm, we must determine exactly what these words mean – both what they were intended to mean and how their definitions have been altered by case law and a culture all too willing to accept judicial decisions as gospel. True justice does no harm. But justice based upon a misguided definition of dignity destroys. In the paper, I plan to discuss the different cultural perspectives on family planning and abortion and relate that to state policy and private influence over that policy. There is often times a disagreement between the will of the people from a cultural perspective and the will of the state from a policy perspective.

Recent events demonstrate the decline in our cultural understanding of dignity. This country has moved from debating whether a newly conceived fetus is a person to accepting the sale of aborted baby body parts for profit. Fifteen years ago, Congress passed the Born Alive Infants Protection Act, a bill that allowed comfort care to be administered to babies who survive abortions. Just this past month, 177 members of the House of Representatives voted against a bill that would clarify that it is an act of murder to kill a baby who survives an abortion. Whose dignity are we protecting? What justice are we serving? Who is being harmed?

Maybe dignity is found in using abortion as a means of family planning, or avoiding giving birth to a baby with Down syndrome, or in freeing oneself from the problem of pregnancy and motherhood. These theories are found not only in American culture, but permeate communities world-wide through, for example, attempts to force birth control on women in African countries and the emergence of baby drop-boxes throughout southeast Asia.

Providing abortion on demand and pressuring communities with the use of birth control have often been referred to as forms of social justice. However, the harm that results to all involved (mother, baby, abortion provider, etc.) is simply dismissed as a necessary consequence of providing that form of justice. Abortion jurisprudence is complicit in this harm. In order to effectively address the harms caused by over forty years of legal abortion, it is necessary to revert back to the true meanings of dignity, justice and harm.