diagnostic excursus Economies of Life and Power

In the early 2000s, at their annual meeting, the American Academy of Religion convened a session on the now well-worn theme of “philosophy’s return to religion.” The session brought together a slate of thinkers that included, among others, the theologian John Milbank, the cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, and the philosopher Alain Badiou (who failed to attend). On one level, those present in the overfilled hotel ballroom could have been forgiven thinking this group a rather peculiar collection, considering the sharp intellectual and dispositional divergences among them. John Milbank had become the central figure of the self-named “Radical Orthodoxy” theologians; his antisecular and antiliberal vehemence was almost as polarizing as his efforts to revitalize the notion that theology is the “queen of the sciences,” enjoying a comprehensive, and to that extent superior, analytic position relative to other modes of thought.1 Žižek, of course already a highly visible critic, had in the previous half-decade captured the attention of religious scholars, who did not know whether to be drawn to or repulsed by his sardonic writings that both praise and parochialize Christianity.2 Alain Badiou in his counter-Nietzschean writings on St. Paul had made sure that his readers did not overlook his credentials as an atheist and that he was only taking religious themes so seriously because of their crucial conceptual ramifications.3 On another level, of course, no one in the room took this particular collection of participants as anything but obvious and propitious, if potentially polemic. In the previous few years each had produced much-debated works on the question of “religion” and its philosophical “excesses”—to say nothing of the fact that each of them was simply, in their respective niches, academic stars, stars whose profiles had risen, at least in part, as a result of their work on questions of power and the contemporary fate of religion.
One thing immediately clear to those in the room was that the polemics that had attended some of the previous exchanges between some of these thinkers had very little to do with why they were finding it fruitful to interact with one another on this particular day. The energy in the room was generated by something else, namely, a shared diagnosis of the character of “the problem with the world today,” particularly with regard to the question of the religious and the political. To simplify, though not to misrepresent, the diagnosis these thinkers seemed to share was that the ills and evils of the modern world could in one way or another be traced back to the dominance of the “liberal political imaginary” and its “biopolitical” formations. The shared diagnosis is familiar and not particularly complicated: the problem with the relation of politics and religion today is that governmental forms of power in the “West” tend to be predicated on the questionable idea that politics is a way of giving order to a world otherwise dominated by nefarious power and that the state’s monopoly on intervening into these fields of power is predicated on the presumption of an ontological distinction between the secular and the religious. These two notions are, of course, at the heart of what is presumed to be a more or less unified political logic operating under the sign of liberalism. And liberalism—or neoliberalism—is ostensibly the defining rationality of the age. Politics, under this (counter)liberal vision, is constituted by and of the never-ending management of violence, and the ontological reality (and therefore political necessity) of the secular allows the state to establish an order of things in which spheres of existence, which might otherwise be the source and warrant of violence, can be kept apart. Everyone in the room seemed to agree that the heart of the problem today is that liberal regimes cannot understand, let alone curtail, the multiple ways in which their disciplinary and normalizing regimes are actually the structural source of the violence that they purport to stand against. The work of thought, it is taken to follow, consists in exposing the pathologies of secular liberalism so as to put them into question. It was taken as evident that such critique constitutes a uniquely pressing demand of the day. In this way, the shared diagnosis in the room could be cast as something of an inversion of what is promulgated as the “dominant” critique of religious politics by avowed secularists, namely, that religion remains a dangerous anachronism whose continued presence in the modern state needs to be judged “a stain on what should be a more spotlessly secular present and future.”

At the time of this encounter, I had just begun to work in earnest on the themes that would eventually generate materials for this book. The exchange on philosophy and religion proved both troubling and catalytic. It was troubling for the simple reason that the critique of liberalism circulating among and between these thinkers—a critique consistent with a range of counter- and postliberal projects in philosophy
and the human sciences—functions analytically to reduce the figure of human dignity, as well as the venues and practices connected to it, to nothing more than a residue of liberalism. It was catalytic in that this session was the first time I had gotten clear, for myself, about a fact of the contemporary academic world and its reigning analytical doxa that I should have been clear about from the outset of my project. Despite the fact that human dignity and the apparatuses connected to it, especially human rights apparatuses, are clearly a predominant feature of the world today, there is in certain philosophical circles something of a disdain for thinking seriously about them on their own terms. The disdain is articulated differently, but the core rationale is more or less consistent: human dignity, and human rights in particular, are only the latest manifestation of a long history of humanism, a history whose modernist variants, whether liberal or Marxist, have played themselves out either as a source of interest or political possibility. They have played themselves out because, despite the fact that they are often articulated in a mode of resistance, they are part of the logic of the political worlds they claim to resist and therefore part of the political failings of modernity. Human dignity and human rights, in this view, are taken to be exemplary of the turn to a kind of anthropological universal in politics that can only issue in the kind of violence identified by the philosopher Carl Schmitt, wherein the universally human provides the justification for casting one’s enemies “outside” of what counts as human. They are likewise taken to be exemplary of the problematic turn to a kind of universal individualism—the notorious universal autonomous subject of liberalism—which is neither empirically nor ethically tenable. In any event, it was not until I attended this session at the AAR that it became clear to me that for many of those at the putative vanguard of cultural criticism the question of human dignity really held no serious interest. It held no serious interest because if something more is being demanded of power in a liberal age—and it certainly is—then a response keyed to human dignity can only be, at best, to quote Giorgio Agamben, “a dream of peace,” which allows the worst excesses of liberalism to be covered over in the ethics of the “human family,” for which there will always be a permanent “exception to the rule.” Or, at worst, the turn to dignity and human rights is taken as no more than one more universal mode of self-justification taken up by those instituting “the bloody mystification of a new planetary order.” In any event, the idea that secular liberalism is the secret clue to understanding the essence of a nefarious modern political epoch means that anyone persuaded that human dignity is nothing other than a residue of the liberal will fail to take seriously the possibility that it constitutes anything like a significant event in the relations between truth and power—except as a failed attempt to inflect those nefarious relations that have come to dominate the modern.
THE CONTEMPORARY AND THE BIOPOLITICAL

As I explained in the preface, my reasons for beginning the project on human dignity were basically pragmatic: I had been working as a junior bioethicist when the political-theological debates in the United States and, then, in a reconfigured fashion, in many other parts of the world, concerning human embryonic stem cell research, first exploded. I had been working with and studying the Geron Corporation, which had funded Jamie Thomson’s successful derivation of human embryonic stem cells, and I had been directly caught up in the ensuing politics. One of the twists of that politics was the way in which it seemed to transform the practice of bioethics, for a few years, definitively shifting moral attentions to the question of human dignity—a shift that proved as consequential for the figure of human dignity as it did for bioethics, as I will discuss in the next chapter. For my part, I contributed to the effort, taken up by many bioethicists, to articulate definitions for human dignity that might help make sense of how this figure of human life and worth could be made to relate to questions of the body and of health at play in stem cell research. I had become increasingly troubled by what I have described as the “intellectual blackmail” attached to these debates: one was either for or against human dignity. What human dignity was as a term of political and ethical reasoning, where the term had come from, what kinds of practices it might or might not facilitate, and how it might or might not help make sense of, or intervene into, the contemporary political situation were questions that were simply not being posed among the major actors involved. This lack is somewhat surprising given that the figure of human dignity was not particularly new to bioethics, per se—although its ascendency to the status of a defining term for the governance of the sciences had only really begun in the early 1990s. With the formulation and expansion of the human genome projects in both the United States and Europe, the figure of human dignity had begun to take shape as a major site of bioethical concern and debate. This was obviously not the first time the notion of dignity had been elaborated in response to developments in the biomedical sciences. As I will explain in the next chapter, in the early 1970s, with the early professionalization of bioethics, the question of death with dignity, so-called, had intensified. Also in the early 1970s, and in a kind of parallel fashion, the question of human dignity and the definition of life were posed in relation to in vitro fertilization technologies. These debates were connected in quite a direct fashion to the legacy of Vatican II. Neither in the case of dignity and death nor the question of dignity and life, however, was there any attempt to formalize the notion of human dignity as an institutional factor in the regulation of the life sciences—at least not in anything like what would happen two decades later following genomics and stem cell research. Moreover, the question in
the 1970s really concerned the “human person,” that is, the question of what constitutes “personhood.” With the advance of human genomics, and then the advent of somatic cell nuclear transfer (cloning), and then acutely with human embryonic stem cell research, the question of the relation of human dignity to the material body of the biotechnical sciences was made central.

It was as part of an effort to move beyond the polemics connected to the debates over human dignity in bioethics that I first began to take up the work of constructing something like a “history of the present.” It soon became clear to me that what I needed, more than a fully developed genealogy of human dignity and its attendant politics, was simply a clearer sense of how human dignity had been brought to articulation and made to function in key twentieth-century settings, as well as a minimal understanding of the logic of those articulations and those functions. Hence my eventual focus on the venues within and through which the figure of human dignity was put into the play of serious discourse about the political and ethical excesses of late modernity. It was for this reason that I also began to think about human dignity as a “contemporary problem.”

It seemed to me that most of those arguing in bioethics that human dignity was at stake in biotechnological manipulations of the human genome and human embryo were tending (analytically speaking) to operate according to an ethos of “tradition,” wherein biotechnical developments needed to be weighed against a longer history of respect for and commitment to dignity. Those inveighing against the use of this term as a meaningful or useful response to biotechnology seemed to be operating according to something like an ethos of the “modern,” in the sense that they saw the rhetoric and politics of human dignity to be a tired mid-twentieth-century invention and a philosophically thin term to which any political or ethical position might be attached. In this way, as Rabinow had argued, “tradition” and “the modern” were not being opposed but paired in contrastive ratios.

My initial examinations of the early developments in the United Nations and the Second Vatican Council had suggested that neither of these dominant rhetorical positions nor their associated politics were illuminative of the historical character of the use of the term human dignity and certainly not of the place of these recent polarizations within and as part of that history. In that light, Rabinow’s concept of the contemporary seemed apposite and worthwhile as conceptual equipment for analytically moving beyond my impasse. Particularly helpful was Rabinow’s characterization and critique of the tendency of twentieth-century “modernists” to fixate on “the new” and the correlated resistance of “traditionalists” to such fixation. The identification and valorization of the new over the old have frequently been tied to a more or less explicit philosophy of history in which those involved posit that seemingly diverse domains of practice and history are actually held together by
certain defining characteristics—characteristics that warrant treating this diversity as a unified and coherent epoch or era. As Rabinow argues, analytic dissatisfaction with such epochal thinking has become widespread, despite its persistence. This dissatisfaction has issued in, among other critical projects, historical studies aimed at demonstrating the contingencies and inconsistencies underlying the apparent unity. Another approach, one that Rabinow endorses and practices, is simply to abandon epochal thinking as an analytic a priori and begin instead to examine the ways in which, in many domains, “old and new elements coexist in multiple configurations and variations,” some of which might be coherent, widespread, and stable but are not thereby diacritics of epochs or eras. These sights of coexistence and configuration are what Rabinow designates the contemporary.

Whatever else might be said about the developments at the Vatican and the United Nations concerning human dignity and the eventual developments in U.S. federal bioethics, they were marked by the configuration of old and new elements. The task and challenge for all three consisted in discerning how, in these situations, such diverse elements could be brought together and assembled. The analytic task for the observer of these configurations is to discern their distinctive form as well as the significance of those forms. In this light, I began the work of recasting my approach to the religious politics of the stem cell debate and its connections to the history of efforts to figure human dignity more as a matter of how to understand the logic of the present debates, and the way in which they form part of the specific character of the contemporary, and less as a matter of contributing directly to those politics in their present form.

Part of this effort to recast my work consisted in trying to identify contemporary thinkers whose work was related to the problem of human dignity, or other closely adjacent ethical and political themes, and whose intellectual dispositions might be characterized by something like a feel for the contemporary. It was in this spirit that I first began reading the work of the so-called Radical Orthodoxy theologians and in a connected fashion other critical theorists working on the question of the religious and the political. Given that bioethics and the stem cell debate in the United States had, from the outset, been framed and elaborated as a matter of political religion, and given that the work of the Radical Orthodoxy group, and especially John Milbank, was, at that time, a flashpoint in political theology, it is hardly surprising that I would turn to that somewhat eclectic group of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians as one possible resource for “getting outside” of the polemics. These theologians, broadly speaking, were dedicated to something like a Counter-Reformation agenda and were pursuing lines of work consonant with the legacies of Maurice Blondel and Henri Bergson very much in the spirit of the problematics raised at the Second Vatican Council; it did not seem a stretch to think that they
might have something to teach me pertinent to the politics of human dignity as they were unfolding in relation to the sciences.

The Radical Orthodoxy theologians had dedicated themselves to a thoroughgoing rejection of “the modern,” or “the secular,” or “liberalism,” variously conceived, rendering each as a kind of post-Reformation pathology. Milbank’s writings were exemplary in this regard. His celebrated *Theology and Social Theory* had been stylized as a kind of genealogy of the secular taken as an epistemological bastard of post-Reformation metaphysics of power, which, in Milbank’s view, had contributed directly to the rise and development of the modern state and its logics of governmentality. A central claim of his work, one both explicit and tacit, is that his intellectual project was to get beyond the limitations of the modern. To do this, the critical thinker, in Milbank’s view, must set aside “modern social theory” as a mode and tradition of thought. Social theory, on his assessment, is ultimately bound together and bound up with the presumption of a secular order in the world that is taken to be metaphysically autonomous from a religious or spiritual order and that therefore proceeds in assessing reality without reference to the transcendent. Breaking with social theory and the presumption of the secular allows the thinker to conduct a “skeptical demolition” of social theory as well as a “dismantling” of sociologically dependent philosophical and theological perspectives, generating an “idolatrous” acceptance of the view that the world can be understood without reference to the divine as the real source of political and ontological peace. This is not to say that Milbank rejects interaction with the social or human sciences out of hand; on some level his status as an intellectual elite has depended on such interactions, however polemic. It is rather that these interactions can only be undertaken with those who are sufficiently post-Nietzschean, in the sense that they have given up on the problematic enterprise of constructing secular theodicies, according to which “nature,” saturated with violent power relations, finds peace through the counterbalancing and management of those forces through politics. And, likewise, they need to be sufficiently post-MacIntyrean in that they have to have given up on the idea that the modern world can manage modern power relations through a supplemental return to ancient virtues, practiced nonetheless in a world of individuals that remains otherwise liberal.

Given his thematics, it seemed to me during the early phases of my project that Milbank’s work was worth exploring in connection to the politics of intrinsic worth, even if only as a kind of critical exercise by way of which my blocked situation in bioethics might be loosened up by running the elements of human dignity through the paces of Milbank’s diagnosis of the secular modern. Given my attempt to think about human dignity as a *contemporary* problem, however, Milbank’s diagnosis proved limiting twice over. First, his diagnosis of the modern was obviously
epochal, despite his frequent references to “history,” “praxis,” and “difference.” Second, and by way of the first, his epochalist reading of the modern was characterized by an ethics of denunciation in which modernity could never be anything other than a “fall from grace.” Taken together, Milbank’s work and self-stylization, it seemed to me, could easily lead one, as Foucault put it, to “despise the present,” a posture that could only issue in an ethos of disdain. Analytically and ethically such an ethos struck me as at best unhelpful.

It was in the midst of a growing unease with the Radical Orthodoxy project and its countersecular and counterliberal theological politics that I nonetheless decided to attend the session on philosophy and religion at the AAR meeting. On one level, the session served to reinforce my sense that these thinkers were not going to offer equipment for moving beyond the troubled polemics of the debate over human dignity. In this sense, attending the meeting might not have been worth my time—other than the pleasures of seeing Žižek at his sardonic best and Milbank perform his acerbic rejection of the secular. However, Milbank’s presentation, quite unexpectedly, proved to be something of a catalyst. The question, it occurred to me, was less whether or not the work of these thinkers was helpful for studying the politics of human dignity. I was already clear that they likely would not. The question, rather, was: how is it, exactly, that they were not likely to prove helpful?

That day at the religion meetings Milbank offered a working paper, which he ultimately published as “Paul Against Biopolitics.” The title alone sparked interest; for the previous year I had been working with Paul Rabinow and Anthony Stavrianakis in thinking through the limits of the concepts of “biopower” and “biopolitics” for thinking about the contemporary. It had seemed to us that, whatever Michel Foucault had meant by these evocative terms, they were not markers of an epoch in anything like the way in which they were being used by major figures in contemporary philosophy. Our question—which I will return to below—was how to get clear about the salient elements of these terms so as to test them against current developments in the world. Moreover, I had begun to suspect (although I would not characterize it using these terms until later) that the use of “biopower” and “biopolitics” had entered into the play of the “modern,” in Rabinow’s sense of the term—a moving ratio of the new and the old in which the new is valorized against the old. In the works of thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and the philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the “biopolitical” had been cast as a term of novel insight capable of opening up the secret nature of the age. Milbank’s paper began with a summary of his core position. He sternly asserted that “liberalism” presumes and advances the idea that politics is fundamentally a problem of self-governance in which the challenge is the “capture and disciplining of natural forces of aggression and desire within the framework of a cultural game,
governed by civil conventions and instituted laws.”

In this view of the nature of politics, a kind of paradox is at work. On the one side, liberalism imagines that the “naturalness of life” is always self-regulating, in that the play of forces calls forward and institutes mechanisms of management. On the other side, liberalism imagines the world as “intrinsically wild and untameable.” Through this paradoxical framework a kind of threshold of order is crossed and a kind of secular and pagan theodicy achieved. Despite the play of violent forces, life can be managed, and, indeed, life is that which self-manages. Whether the form of liberalism is contract theory or Scottish political economy, the theodicy works itself out: “it is deemed that, by nature, a spontaneously competing and to a degree co-operating (through natural mutual sympathy) human multitude erects an artificial framework that will channel this spontaneity for further mutual benefit. Life itself is seen as generating contract and law. Contract and law are seen as disciplining life, but only in order to further it.”

Up to this point, Milbank’s thesis was familiar and followed the lines of his previous work. Milbank, however, concluded his opening diagnosis by inflecting the terms of his critical project, saying that given this paradoxical play of self-regulating life and the violent play of natural forces, liberalism is rightly thought of as “biopolitics.” Unifying diverse voices under the sign of this term, Milbank stated, as though it were self-evident: “As Walter Benjamin and later Michel Foucault argued, liberalism concerns the biopolitical.” In his published article he would further add that from Darwin forward a biological account of life is coterminous with violence and that Foucault defined this set of events in terms of the “biopolitical paradigm in the sense that I am discussing it here.” As the climax of this opening foray, a foray that provides the setup for his theological reparations, Milbank proposed that “it is finally Giorgio Agamben who makes the crucial connection between biopolitics and the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt (ultimately it is a Hobbesian legacy that binds all this together).”

In his book *Homo Sacer*, published a half-decade earlier, Agamben had asserted that the notion of biopolitics reveals that there is a fundamental link between “bare life and politics” and that this fundamental link is the key to understanding how modern life is “secretly” governed. Contemporary politics are portrayed as fundamentally oriented toward the domination and exploitation of the “vital existence” of political subjects. Biopower, he proposes, names the ways in which modern politics bears on humans as mere living animals, a politics that finally drives toward death and elimination. Two points are noteworthy about Agamben’s proposal. First, he tells us that, by way of Aristotle, Benjamin, and Foucault, he (Agamben) has hit on and revealed the secret logic governing modern politics—and perhaps even the hidden logic of politics per se.
Foucault’s 1977–1978 lectures on the art of government begin with the statement that the lectures should be received as a reflection on “biopower,” suggesting that governmentality, and hence the form of power characteristic of the modern world, might be summed up in that term.21 His 1978–1979 lectures, entitled The Birth of Biopolitics, implicitly carry the thesis that the art of government characteristic of late modernity is “liberalism.”22 According to Agamben, Foucault’s thesis “needs to be completed” and brought through to its full implications. Citing an oft-quoted line from the first volume of Foucault’s The History of Sexuality—“For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question”23—Agamben adds that “modern life is not so much the inclusion of zoë in the polis—which is, in itself, absolutely ancient—nor the simple fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of State power.” Rather, the characteristic of modern life is that “exception [that is, taking human life despite human life being ostensibly sacred] everywhere becomes the rule, [and] the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoë, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible distinction.”24 It is in this sense that Agamben claims to have discovered that biopower is the secret of the age.

In one fell theoretic swoop Agamben covers over what had been Foucault’s subtle and incisive accomplishment. Through a detailed analysis of shifts in relations between modes of reasoning and modes of governing, Foucault had demonstrated that something quite unusual and unprecedented had emerged in the modern world, a relation between the state and the management of biological life that had never before existed in quite the same way. Loosening up Foucault’s terms and shifting the grounds of analysis from historical particularity to epochal essence, Agamben provides us with a total answer to the question of politics in the modern world. It bears acknowledging that, in the end, it is not altogether clear what analytic work Foucault wanted the terms biopower and biopolitics to do for his thinking about things modern. His few references to the terms cover over an unsettled range of meanings. Like many of his other highly experimental and highly generative concepts, however, the worth of these two terms is that, minimally, they indicated new problems and problem spaces. They facilitated inquiry into those problems and problem spaces precisely because, whatever their range of meanings, they referred to a very specific set of historical arrangements. They did not—and Foucault is clear about this—reveal the essence of the age.25 Of course, according to Agamben, this is precisely what Foucault either missed or did not have the courage to embrace.

The analytic costs of presuming such a total explanation under the sign of “bio-
politics” are, in my view, obvious, in that one no longer needs to attend to the specificity of things. There is, in addition to this, a somewhat less obvious pragmatic price to be paid for Agamben’s shift from inquiry to theory, one that I found in Milbank and one that I judged to be too high. In connecting Agamben’s epochal diagnosis of the biopolitical with his own integralist project, Milbank enjoys what he takes to be a kind of Foucauldian ratification of his core thesis: the theological presumption of an ontological schism between nature and the supernatural carries over into social theory in the form of the “purely” secular as a space of political thought and practice in which power becomes concentrated on “bare life.” In the constructive portion of his paper Milbank goes on to suggest that Agamben, despite the prescience of his diagnosis, cannot find a way out, insofar as he too retains the secularist and immanentist suppositions about the nature of the secular and the political. Milbank writes: “is there a secular, immanentist way out of the biopolitical? No, I shall now argue that there can only be an authentically religious route out of the biopolitical.”26 His proposal is consonant with that put forward at Vatican II: the Christian vision for the ecclesia as the community of resurrected life is the only way out of the biopolitical situation in which human life has been targeted as bare life in a state of permanent exception.

The problem is that, whatever else one makes of Milbank’s theological conclusions, it is not at all clear that there even is a biopolitical situation human life needs to get out of—or at least not one of epochal proportion. It might be argued that Agamben’s claims to have revealed the secret essence of modern political life is meant to be a kind of fictive and productive overstatement. It is fictive, an advocate might say, because he does not intend for it to be read as a kind of map to empirical practices. And it is productive in that it nevertheless lifts out a kind of essence of modern politics in relation to which one must be alert and vigilant. Bios, life humanly lived, is in a state of permanent threat. Perhaps there is something to this reading of Agamben’s intentions. But whatever is the case on Agamben’s side of the ledger, through Milbank (and others), his revision and inflation of the notion of biopolitics found its way into the ethos of the modern as part of the diagnosis of the contemporary world.

I say “found its way” and not “has found its way”—the latter implying that it is still with us. It is not obvious that it is, or at least not in the same fashion. The biopolitical understood as the key to the epoch seemed to hold the attentions of the philosophical and theological elite for roughly a decade, and although Agamben’s Homo Sacer and the Empire series by Hardt and Negri remain common references in certain circles of political thought, they are no longer en mode in quite the same way. Biopower as epoch, in this sense, was something of a brief norm in the modernist style: it thrived as a part of the moving ratio in which the new could be valorized
against the old. As theory, however, biopower and biopolitics are no longer new or fashionable. In this sense, the place of such theoretical renderings of these two terms today can be taken up and analyzed as part of the recent past being configured with the near future—that is, the fact of the declining fashion of the biopolitical is a fact of the contemporary: “The contemporary is a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (nonlinear) space that gauges modernity as an ethos already becoming historical.”

The biopolitical as a master trope is already becoming historical. Or, said differently, one need not accept or reject the notion of the biopolitical as a master trope marking the signs of the time; one can, rather, take up the fact that it has served as just such a trope as part of understanding the contemporary. The virtue of this contemporary view is that it might now be easier to take up the biopolitical as a term of analytic precision and not just as an attractor. In this way, one might be able to get clearer about the specific ways in which the figures of biopower and the biopolitical remain part of the contemporary world. The virtue of such clarity for my own project, in turn, is that it facilitates the work of thinking through the figure of human dignity as the marker of a distinctive event in the history of truth and power and not merely as a biopolitical or liberal remainder. Getting clear about the distinctions and connections between biopower and human dignity, moreover, is crucial for understanding how these figures and their attendant political equipment have been further troubled by developments in bioethics.

BEYOND BIOPOWER

After several years of frustration with the analytic dispersion and subsequent analytic devaluation of the concept of biopower, in 2006 Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose undertook efforts to formulate a tighter and more conceptually rigorous definition. Rabinow and Rose noted that, thanks in large part to the publication of widely read works of political philosophy, the term biopower was increasingly being taken up not as a tool for the orientation of inquiry but as an explanation for the “nature and essence of the present epoch.” It was being assumed that biopower explains the way in which present politics bears on humans as mere living animals, driving certain populations toward death and elimination. In addition to the philosophical fault of explaining nothing by explaining too much, inflated uses of the term seemed to suggest (1) that biopower is always pathological and (2) that liberal modernism, as a form of biopower, should also be seen as pathological.

Following several evocative but underdeveloped uses of the terms biopower and biopolitics in his lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault offered a relatively more systematic, if still somewhat general, elaboration of the concepts
in what has become a critically important ten-page section of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*. In that section he promised to refine the concepts in one of the five projected volumes to come. Fundamental shifts in the orientation of his research, as well as his untimely death, cut short these efforts. Foucault’s initial elaborations are well known: the terms formed part of his effort to conceptualize the ways in which human biological life and practices of governance had become connected and mutually formative in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, generating a regime of truth and power that could be distinguished from regimes associated with classical forms of state sovereignty. In an oft-quoted turn of phrase Foucault wrote that where the sovereign power of the classical age can be characterized by the right to “let live and make die,” the new rationality of modern biopower can be characterized as the political obligation to “make live and let die.”

Following from this distinction Foucault used the term to clarify a rather precise set of developments: the term biopower, Foucault explained, designates a set of arrangements that brings two related but distinct objects—the disciplined individual human body and the normalized human population—into a single field of political relations, regulated by a single, if general, political rationality.

In their article, Rabinow and Rose proposed that if the term biopower is to prove analytically fruitful, it would again need to be delimited by a specified set of characteristics. They argued, through a close reading of Foucault’s ten-page passage, that four characteristics are particularly important. A regime of power relations can usefully be referred to as biopower when it is marked by (1) a set of truth discourses about “the ‘vital’ character” of individual and collective human life, (2) experts authorized to speak competently about such truth, (3) strategies and technologies of intervention advanced in the name of increasing life and health, and (4) modes of subjectification by which individuals engage in self-formation, also in the name of increasing life and health.

Although Rabinow and Rose specified the term biopower in much stricter terms than is typical of its circulation in contemporary discourse, their specifications nevertheless retained a kind of flexible generality useful for orienting research.

Since the publication of their article on biopower, both Rabinow and Rose have continued to work on economies of life, science, technology, and the politics of biology. Both doubt, however, that biopower, even when defined more carefully, is the most useful term for clarifying contemporary configurations. A few years after their article, Rose proposed that biopower might yet be useful for bringing into analytic view “a whole range of more or less rationalized attempts by different authorities to intervene upon the vital characteristics of human existence.” Taken in this sense, he would continue to use the term. But even defined as a somewhat broad orienting term, the notions of biopower and biopolitics have fallen away from the center of...
Rose’s analytic attention. Rabinow, for his part, has moved through biopower to what lies, as it were, analytically beyond it—beyond not in the sense of a linear progression where one configuration replaces another but beyond in the sense of giving attention to formations in the world today that simply cannot be explained as instances of biopolitics.

In our joint work, Rabinow and I began attending to contemporary events, formations, modes of practice, scientific objects, and sociotechnical venues, in which formerly biopolitical apparatuses have become vectors of ethical and scientific contestation and transformation. In order ultimately to move beyond the term, we have proposed a still tighter reading of biopower: as a figure that designates assemblages of power and knowledge marked by a series of rather exacting characteristics. Above, all, analytically, one can say that biopower names configurations in which modes and forms of power take populations and bodies as objects of normalization to the end of ameliorating health, wealth, and security. It is clear that whatever else is happening in the medical and biological sciences today their interfaces with ethics and power are no longer characterized primarily by the effort to normalize populations and bodies. Since the 1990s the genomic sciences and the so-called postgenomic sciences have been given a privileged role by governments and industries in defining the character of life and the vitality of humans and other beings. Alongside these biotechnical efforts and sometimes in connection to them, talk of human rights as the locus of human and environmental goods has continued to function as a predominant counterdiscourse in both national and international settings. The analytic work of bringing these two sites—bioscience and human rights—together and making sense of them remains a pressing task, one for which the concepts of biopower and biopolitics will likely be only partially helpful.

Approached in an anthropologically more careful mode, it seems clear that whatever else might be said about its logic and significance, human dignity is not simply a liberal remainder or a biopolitical residual—and certainly not merely a point of resistance that marks out an otherwise biopolitical age. The analytic payoff of a more careful specification of biopower is that, even if biopower can be used to explore a certain amount of what is happening in the world today, it nonetheless can be seen to have an analytic outside. Although apparatuses of biopower might be connected to many things in the world—including the discourses and practices of human dignity—it does not comprehend those things. Whatever human dignity has consisted in—at least in the case of the constitutional work of the United Nations or the Second Vatican Council—it is neither an ethics nor a politics indexed to the normalization of populations. Nor is it simply the external limit on such normalization. It consists, rather, in the call for a mode and form of practice in
which the archonic is simultaneously a point of limitation as well as a demand for new and positive actions.

An analytic move to the outside of biopower constitutes a challenge for a contemporary mode of inquiry in that it introduces objects and relations that remain underdetermined and in the process of formation. Foucault, recall, operated in a mode he called a history of the present. The problems and objects he took up in such a mode may continue to bear on the contemporary, but their forms have long since stabilized. The archive for Foucault, one might say, was closed. Keeping this modal distinction between an analytic of the contemporary and a history of the present in mind, there is nonetheless much to be learned from Foucault's approach to biopower for thinking about human dignity today. In his 1977–1978 lectures Foucault proposed that the problem of the art of government began to emerge in response to a demand for “something more from power.” The epigraph from Foucault opening Chapter 3 gave articulation to this point. Speaking of sovereign power in the sixteenth century Foucault wrote that “in relation to the pastorate, something more is demanded . . . something different, something else. This is government. It is more than sovereignty, it is supplementary in relation to sovereignty, and it is something other than the pastorate, and this something without a model, which must find its model, is the art of government.”

Taking this quote as a prompt, two important aspects of human dignity can be better diagnosed. First, something similar, though not identical, to the emergence of governmentality has happened with human dignity. In quite a direct and explicit fashion, with both the Second Vatican Council and with the UN Commission on Human Rights, something more is demanded from power. Where this demand is similar and not identical is that, in the case of governmentality, a “general economy of power” begins to take shape. Whatever else Foucault means by this idea of a general economy, it involves a fundamental shift throughout multiple domains spread across multiple centuries. Whether or not the demand that human dignity become an object of care ever results in such a widespread and long-term shift remains to be seen. Initial indications are that such a shift would be unlikely. Although venues and practices are increasingly appealing to the figure of human dignity as a justification and point of orientation, these venues and practices are frequently integrated into other apparatuses, governmental and nongovernmental. Moreover, unlike shifts concerning the art of government, the invention and reorganization of practices connected with human dignity is still under way and is arguably characterized by more destabilization and reconfiguration than the durability and stability implied by the idea of a general economy of power. That said, it is the case that human dignity continues to be appealed to as an object and objective of power across a broad range of domains and problem spaces; the archonic has proven re-
markably susceptible to reinvention and remobilization. As is evident in the cases of the United Nations and the Vatican, this appeal to dignity has produced shifts in how to think about and care for things human, shifts “without a model” producing venues that “must find a model.”

Another diagnostic point should be made in connection to the above quote from Foucault: this concerns the challenge of specifying the care of human dignity as an analytic “outside” of governmentality. At a particularly reflective and reflexive moment in Foucault’s analysis, he poses the question: “Why should one want to study this insubstantial and vague domain covered by a notion as problematic and artificial as that of ‘governmentality’?” His first answer: “in order to tackle the problem of the state and population.” He straightaway notes an objection: “but we know what the state and population are, or, at any rate, we think we do.”

Thousands upon thousands of pages have been written on the population and the state, so why introduce this obscure notion of governmentality? Foucault’s further response to his own question is to remind his listeners of his more general project. From the outset of his work as a historian, he explains, he has been interested in analytically “moving to the outside.” What he means by this is that from the first he has been interested in a mode of analysis that gets outside of venues such as the asylum, the hospital, the prison, the clinic, and so forth in order to conceptualize and diagnose the redistributions of power and knowledge within which these venues have taken their specific historical forms—the milieus within which these venues have taken form.

With the concept of governmentality and the notion of the art of government understood as the “conduct of conduct,” Foucault is looking to make this analytic move to the outside once again. Here it is a question of moving to the historical milieus that allow one to take up an analytic position outside of the modern state.

Where does this take me with regard to the problem of human dignity? On one level, my approach to the problem of human dignity uses an analytic strategy Foucault means to avoid—I am moving to the inside of specific venues in order to see how they have constituted themselves in relation to human dignity. But such a difference in approach can be explained by the contemporary character of the problem space I am working in. As I have noted, the milieus within which the politics of human dignity is being formulated and responded to are still in motion, unsettled, and unsettling. On another level, however, I am seeking to elaborate an approach that borrows tools, at least in part, from a kind of “analytic of the outside,” one that is not dissonant with Foucault’s treatment of governmentality in that my aim is to understand better how human dignity has become an event in the history of thought and practice, to distinguish it from other modes and forms of practice, and thereby to put its worth and critical limitations to the test.
RECONFIGURING PASTORAL POWER

As I explained in the introduction, in his efforts to distinguish the modes and forms of power characteristic of the modern state from other economies of power, Foucault proposes to characterize a logic and order of power that he took to be a vital antecedent to the modern, one whose breakdown, reconfiguration, and partial incorporation contributed to the emergence of governmentality. Foucault referred to this previous economy as “pastoral power.”

Given the dominance of the notions of governmentality and biopower in critical theory and the human sciences over the past two decades, it is perhaps not surprising that Foucault’s concept of pastoral power has received relatively little attention. As I explained at the outset, it is an orienting proposition of this present study that this concept and Foucault’s initial analysis of it have provided me with a number of analytic variables that I have used in my research to help distinguish and characterize the distinctive features of human dignity. In the first two cases presented in this book I proposed that human dignity today can be read as a reconfiguration of classical forms of pastoral power. In this excursus I propose to unpack that initial claim and meditate on its relevance for further inquiries into the politics of intrinsic worth.

With pastoral power Foucault, as was his habit, set out to render visible a historically and analytically specific configuration of relations and practices. His introduction of the concept in his lectures was provocative and experimental. It amounted to a schematic outlay, which he described as an “extremely vague sketch, not of the history, but of some reference points . . . possible tracks for you, if you wish, and maybe for myself, to follow.” However underdeveloped, Foucault’s vague sketch, and the distinctions and the points of reference it opened up, put into play a series of analytic distinctions that are, in my view, fruitful for delineating the specificity and significance of the contemporary figure of human dignity.

In his February 8 lecture from 1978, Foucault begins with a question. He asks his auditors: what is the meaning or meanings of the term “to govern”? Passing through several nuances and variations, he proposed that, whatever else, “to govern” means “to conduct someone.” If (as Foucault would eventually argue during his course that year) the notion of governing, of conducting someone, of “conducting the conduct of conduct” of someone, became one of the dominant modes of exercising power in the West, then it is important to ask: where did this mode of power come from, what is the source of this kind of political logic? Offering a very brief sketch of forms of rule in the Greek polis (which he later returned to in considerable detail), Foucault offered this assertion: “generally speaking, I think we can say that the origin of the idea of a government of men should be sought in the East, in a pre-Christian East first of all, and then in the Christian East, and in two forms: first, in
the idea and organization of a pastoral type of power, and second, in the practice of spiritual direction, the direction of souls.”

By the end of the February 8 lecture Foucault had tightened this assertion: the conduct of conduct as a mode of power characteristic of the West, a mode of power that first takes form as pastoral power, is “introduced into the Western world by way of the Christian Church. The Christian Church coagulated all these themes of pastoral power into precise mechanisms and definite institutions, it organized a pastoral power that was both specific and autonomous, it implanted its apparatuses within the Roman Empire, and at the heart of the Empire it organized a type of power that I think was unknown to any other civilization.” The conduct of conduct, as an economy of power, is introduced through and is coextensive with the Christian Church.

Over the course of several lectures Foucault proceeds to enumerate a series of defining features of pastoral power. I propose to recapitulate those features here that I think remain especially salient for an inquiry into human dignity. I will lay them out as two sets of three variables.

The first element in the first set of features is that, as Foucault reminds his listeners, the notion of the pastorate as a metaphor for political power derives from the shepherding cultures of the ancient Near and Middle East. The notion that God is the shepherd or pastor of things human is referred to frequently in these cultures, as is the idea that the king, as God’s representative, also serves as a kind of shepherd. This notion is particularly important in the Hebraic tradition; the Hebrew king represents God’s shepherding of the people. Foucault notes that this metaphoric connection between God and the king through the idea of the shepherd is not at all common to the Greeks. The ancient Greek gods are territorial gods, gods of privileged places, towns, and temples. The Hebrew God, however, is a God of a people, of a multitude, a God who moves from place to place. It is a God who shepherds a flock.

The second element, the second feature of pastoral power, is that it is “fundamentally a beneficent power.” The shepherd must look out for the good and the salvation of the flock. This notion of power as fundamentally a matter of beneficence, Foucault tells his audience, is again more typical of the Hebrew God than the Greek gods. The Greek gods exhibit a range of characteristics, including splendor and power. Of course, the notion of God’s power is part of the notion of the shepherd, who, after all, must look out for and protect the flock. But this power is a saving power and a power that acts in justice for God’s flock. The Greek sovereign may exercise power for the good of the people as well, but there is something particular about the notion of salvation when connected to the shepherd. Salvation here is first of all a matter of subsistence. The shepherd tends to the daily needs of the flock.
The flock lives its daily life under the careful management of the shepherd. In other words, pastoral power is a matter of care. This also means that the king, in the place of God, has a duty to care for the flock. The obligation of the ruler in pastoral power is to care for and to be the salvation of the flock. This is the second feature of pastoral power: it is defined by beneficent care to the end of the salvation of the flock.\textsuperscript{58}

The third feature of pastoral power connects the first and the second. Foucault suggests that pastoral power is “an individualizing power.” What he means by this is that the shepherd “counts the sheep; he counts them in the morning when he leads them to pasture, and he counts them in the evening to see that they are all there, and he looks after each of them individually.” This fact of counting the sheep is significant. It means that the shepherd is not only responsible for the totality of the flock, which of course the shepherd is. But the shepherd is only responsible for the totality of the flock by way of caring for, looking out for, the salvation of each individual sheep. This notion of counting the sheep, of caring not only for the totality but also for each member of the flock, is a central and defining feature of pastoral power. It is a feature that I have argued connects the classical model of pastoral power to the challenges of caring for human dignity. This defining feature is, of course, the mandate of \textit{omnes et singulatim}.\textsuperscript{49}

This mandate proves to be the great practical challenge for the Vatican as well as the United Nations. What does it mean to care for all and for each one at the scale of humanity? This was the great problem of \textit{tekhnê} and \textit{paraskeuê}, of the art of care and the form of care, for the power of the early Christian pastorate. In a different form it will also be a problem for modern governance. But in the case of the state and the \textit{raison d’état} the problem will not be so universal. The boundaries and differences—the autonomy—between and among states will set off a kind of outside horizon to the governing responsibility of state. When the problem of \textit{omnes et singulatim} is taken up into the Vatican and into the United Nations, by contrast, the object of care is a universal multitude, a universal multitude that must be cared for to the end of its salvation. With and alongside that multitude, alongside humanity, is each and every human. Each human, which both exemplifies and must be made part of humanity, must be cared for to the end of its salvation: \textit{omnes et singulatim} as the object of care for a pastor who saves. These are the first three key features of the classical model of pastoral power that will bear on those responsible for the care of human dignity.

The second set of three features also bears on questions concerning the object and mode of care but concentrates more directly on the form of pastoral power. Foucault tells his listeners that the conduct of conduct as a mode of power typical and definitive of the West is, in the first place, connected to and coextensive with the Christian Church. Although the notion of the pastorate might be a widely
circulated model of power in the ancient Mediterranean, pastoral power is given a form and refinement in the Christian Church, which is quite unlike the notion of pastoral power elsewhere. These differences concern the organization of power into a pastorate and the application of pastoral power in practices of spiritual discipline.

Foucault explains that formalization of the Christian Church brings about fundamental shifts in pastoral power specifically, and also in relations of power in the West more generally, when, as an institution, the church claims as its responsibility the need to “govern men in their daily life on the grounds of leading them to eternal life in the other world, and to do this not only on the scale of a definite group, of a city or a state, but of the whole of humanity.” Pastoral power is refined and extended such that beyond a given domain, place, or people the Christian Church will take as the object of its responsibility “the whole of humanity.” The whole of humanity must be governed in the daily details of life. Put the other way round, pastoral power is imagined and constituted as a matter to be taken up within and by a very particular, which is to say unique, venue: the church.

This refinement, extension, and institutionalization of pastoral power are carried forward with regard to the second set of three key features. Reading through a series of texts Foucault takes to be crucial to the early development of the Christian pastorate, he proposes that the first way in which the Christian Church refined, extended, and institutionalized the pastorate concerned the notion of salvation. The notion of salvation is, of course, central to pastoral power, as I have already noted. Its central and defining objective is to shepherd the individual sheep as well as the whole flock on the path of salvation. One of the crucial features of the idea of salvation in pastoral power is that there is a common destiny in the salvation of the flock and the individual sheep: it is a scandal (even if sometimes it is a necessity) either to sacrifice the individual for the flock or the flock for the individual. We saw this emphasized in the interlinked poles of the human and humanity in Gaudium et Spes. But there is also a kind of reciprocal relation between the common destiny of the community and the individual with the pastor. The pastor is saved only to the extent that the community and the individual are saved.

This total reciprocity is distributed and carried out in a particular way in the Christian pastorate. The Christian pastor leads all and each one to salvation differently. First, the pastor has an analytic and not only numeric responsibility for each sheep. The pastor must not only count every individual but must understand and account for the actions and states of grace for every individual. This means there is a need to devise mechanisms for a fine-grained understanding of each member of the flock. The second particularity is that the pastor shares in a transfer of merit and goods with the flock. The experiences of good and evil for each individual will be experienced by the pastor as his own experience of good and evil. And, on the
other side, the flock is also always vulnerable to the evils and demerits of the pastor. The question and problem of this transfer will, of course, be crucial to the multiple crises of authority and legitimacy in the history of the church, most consequential in the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation. A third particularity is thus a kind of sacrificial reversal: the pastor must be willing to die in the place of the flock or in the place of any individual sheep in response to their reciprocal burden of goods and evils. \(^{52}\)

So, the first refinement of pastoral power by the Christian Church concerns the problem of salvation. All of this is, of course, problematized and reproblematized throughout Christian history and particularly so in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation debates with regard to the question of who can act effectively in the name of salvation, in what venues, and to what ends. This first refinement of pastoral power will also prove to be a site of significant reconfiguration with human dignity. A fine-grained analytics of the soul, the transfer of merits, and the willingness to sacrifice in the name of \textit{omnes et singulatim}—none of these will be practices formally constituted at either the Vatican or the United Nations, but the shadow of the expectation of a salvational refinement, of a salvational specificity, transfer, and reversal, will remain present and a challenge to the legitimacy of these institutions in their claims to caring for human dignity.

The second refinement of pastoral power in the institutionalization of the Christian Church concerns the relation of the pastorate to the law. Power obviously had a relation to the law before the Christian Church reconfigured things. However, to quote Foucault: “for individuals and communities to earn their salvation, [pastoral power] must make sure that they really submit to the order, command, or will of God.” \(^{53}\) Among the Greeks the master speaks the law in order to persuade the student, and the sovereign may enforce the law so as to preserve the city. But with the Christian pastorate a whole system or network of practices are put into place by way of which obedience to the will of God can be secured in a fashion that is an end in itself insofar as obedience is made to coincide with salvation. It is a crucial peculiarity of Christianity in its self-differentiation from Judaism that it is explicitly not a religion of the law, but this does not mean it does not require obedience. Christianity “is a religion of God’s will, a religion of what God wills for each in particular.” \(^{54}\) The beneficent shepherding of the church must include practices to help the flock discern and follow God’s will.

These practices of discernment and following—of obedience to God’s will—include several key components. The first is that, in addition to analytic and not only numeric care of each individual, the pastor needs to be able to treat each soul as a case according to its own specific needs. There is no generic application of the law. Such specification carries with it a kind of subordination in which each individual
must submit not only to the will of God but to one another and particularly to the pastor as the expert on the state or condition of one's salvation. The model for this submission is, of course, the monastery, in which the monk is the person who obeys the subditus. The second key component is that these practices of submission to God's will and to the mediating authority of the pastorate is not a form of practice with an end or discrete horizon; rather, it is a permanent form of life. One submits to God's will not in order only to have obeyed; one submits in order to live a life of obedience. Foucault quotes St. Benedict on the figure of the good monk: "They no longer live by their free will, ambulantes alieno judicio et imperio, in marching under the judgment and the imperium of another, they always desire that someone command them." The third and final key component of obedience is that it will include the problem of "the flesh." This problem is not simply a question of controlling the passions, as it is with the Greeks. But rather, as St. Augustine will argue at length, it is a question of managing the flesh with the will as a means of and as a process through which one conforms to the will of God. Mechanisms for the renunciation of the flesh, and not only for the virtuous control of the passions, will need to be put in place in order to live the life of obedience successfully.

So, taken together, the relation of pastoral power to the law will shift in the church to be a matter of obeying the will of God. Further, this matter of obedience will be a mediated practice carried out through the course of one's lifetime, involving submission to others and particularly submission to the analytic mastery of the pastor. Although the need to be obedient is a general and reciprocal rule (pastors must submit as well), it is a strongly individualized practice in which the individual must be constantly sure about the form of life. This includes all of one's being, including the alignment of the flesh with the will of God through renunciation.

To repeat a point made above, this question of the complete obedience and submission of the object of pastoral power to the mechanisms of authority and obedience will be put in question with the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The question will certainly remain one of authority, but it will also be one of practice. The Reformation put the salvific capacities of the church—the ability of the church to offer salvation—into question. And once the salvific capacities of the church are put in question, the problem of the mediating practices of obedience to God's will have to be rethought as well. This will play out, again, as a question of which authorities, in which venues, and which practices, to what end, and so on. All of which will need to be rethought again with human dignity: far from the object of pastoral care being that which must submit and obey to the mechanisms of governance, the dignified human in the United Nations, and in a different way in the Vatican, is itself authoritative, and its needs must be obeyed. The human is archonic insofar as the human, in its primordial nature, is that which needs to be obeyed.
This obedience will be shifted from the object of care—the flock as obedient to the pastor—back to the pastorate who must live a life dedicated to meeting the needs of the flock. The pastorate, the one called to care for human dignity, will need to submit to the command of the archonic. The pastorate must protect human dignity from violation, and this protection, this obedience to the moral rectitude of the dignified human, must be taken up in a permanent and complete fashion. This is the way in which the pastorate’s responsibility for a beneficent care for human dignity plays out: the dignified human does not need to submit to obedience; rather, the pastorate submits and obeys, and this obedience is a permanent form of life.

The first factor in the Christian Church’s refinement of pastoral power as the conduct of conduct concerns salvation. The second concerns law and obedience. The third, Foucault explains, concerns a particular relation to the truth. Pastoral power in Christianity, as with other modes of the exercise of power, concerns a relation to the truth. Salvation and submission will turn on, be mediated by, and be oriented to the acceptance of particular truths. What changes with the Christian pastorate is the means by which the truth is approached, established, and practiced.

The pastor, of course, has a teaching task in relation to the flock. The pastor will be responsible for teaching the truth. This was clear in the analysis of the first case. The problem, after all, was how to reconfigure the teaching authority of the church so that it can serve a pastoral function. The teaching authority on one level has always been relevant to the pastorate. The challenge with Vatican II was how to change a model of the pastorate into a practice through which the church could speak the truth to those who are not, strictly speaking, part of the church but who are, by dint of being human, nonetheless objects of the church’s pastoral care. What is not new about the challenges at Vatican II is that teaching the truth has always been part of the pastorate. What is particular to the classic model of the Christian pastorate, a particularity that we see articulated in terms of the notion of the call in Gaudium et spes, is that the pastor must not only provide liturgical or theological instruction. The pastor must also teach by example. The life of the pastor must embody the life of truth. All of the verbal teaching will be nullified if the pastor’s life is not exemplary.

Again Foucault emphasizes three dimensions of this need for the pastor to be exemplary, dimensions that can be used to indicate something about the contemporary problem of human dignity. First of all, this exemplary teaching must be a matter of daily conduct. The pastor will need to teach what must be known and what must be done in general. But these general teachings will also need to be given form through daily modulations of practice; the daily integration of the truth needs to be carried out in a fine-grained and exhaustive manner. Connected to the analysis of the soul and practices of submission, exemplary teaching also must be turned
into a matter of practice and thereby integrated into the reciprocal life of the pastor and the flock.  

Second, and following from the first, this exemplary teaching will need to be carried out through practices of spiritual direction. These practices too will find their exemplary form, their model, in the monastery, forms that will ultimately be institutionalized and extended to all believers. Spiritual direction in the church will be characterized by the direction of conscience. The pastor is not only an example in his or her own life; the pastor is also the one who conducts the conscience of the believer. This means, among other things, that spiritual care will not be circumstantial, not a matter of responding to difficult times. Rather, it will be a permanent way of conducting one’s life. What is more—and this is the third element—insofar as spiritual direction is connected to obedience to God’s will, spiritual direction will not be discretionary. It is absolutely necessary that the Christian soul must be guided under the shelter of the shepherd’s direction. Finally, with regard to this question of truth and exemplary teaching, of pastoral power in the early Christian Church, if spiritual direction through the course of one’s life is absolutely necessary, then the pastor will be required to establish a multitude of structures and techniques by way of which work on the soul as the subject and object of truth and the exemplary life can be carried out.

This third element of pastoral power, involving careful integration of truth into the daily practices of Christian life under the guidance of the pastorate and to the end of salvation, this too will be put in question with the Reformation and the rise of the modern problem of governance. As is well known, a central question for the Reformation was the question of the extent to which the daily practice of Christian faith could be made to contribute to the end of one’s salvation. That question extended to and critically involved the authority and capacity of the pastorate as an aid to salvation. As I will discuss further below, the problem of salvation, which was central to Reformation and Counter-Reformation debates, was played out according to the question of who was spiritually fit, who was capable of caring for the soul. Martin Luther’s famous proposal that the fallen soul can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ thus had tremendous effects on the practice of pastoral power and the regimes of direction and obedience connected to it. No pastorate, in this view, is spiritually up to the task of mediating salvation. Salvation is God’s work alone. The notion of a relatively unmediated relation with God implied in Luther’s view of salvation, as well as the notion that one could do nothing to participate in one’s own salvation other than to turn to God in faith, was as much a matter of working through the problem of pastoral power as it was a matter of confessing a different theology. The question of who is fit to care for and bring about the salvation of the human, of humanity, in view of archonic dignity reflects a similar problematic in
that it involves a critical reworking of regimes that have a bearing on the affairs of
everyday life, as can be seen in the debates about the kind and number of human
rights to be included in the Universal Declaration.\footnote{189}

So, pastoral power as reconstituted by the early Christian Church and pastoral
power as co-extensive with the institution of the church will not only be a matter
of the shepherd’s beneficent care for all and for each one—though it will certainly
be this. It will also be a matter of inventing modes and forms of practice, as well as
institutional structures, for the facilitation of practices concerned with salvation,
obedience, and the truth. Salvationally, the analytics of the soul must be given a
form. In terms of obedience, submission to one another and to God will need to be
given a form. And with regard to truth, forms will need to be developed that allow
for a kind of hermeneutics of the soul to be carried out under the pastor’s spiritual
direction in a permanent fashion. Again, all of this will be put into question during
the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which is to say, during that period of
time in which the art of government will begin to be as much a problem for the
state and for the sovereign as it was for the Christian pastorate.

This classical model of pastoral power will similarly be reconfigured within ven-
ues that take human dignity as their object of care and the care of human dignity
as their objective. The demand for something more from power, something more
from ecclesial power and something more from political power, was taken up as a
question of how to be attentive to, how to organize one’s activities in light of, hu-
man dignity. Whatever we might say about what was going on at Vatican II and at
the United Nations, we must recognize that this response to the demand that power
be more, be something else, played out as a demand for a return to the mandate at
the heart of pastoral power. It was a demand for a kind of beneficent care for the
salvation of “all and for each one.” The challenge connected to this demand was not
unlike that faced by the early Christian Church or for that matter by the state in the
face of the demand for an art of governance. It was a problem of modes and forms
of practice that could be facilitated by specific kinds of venues.

More important, just as the problems of salvation, obedience, and truth changed
with the Christian pastorate, they changed once again with the appeal to human
dignity. In the first place and with regard to salvation, unlike the soul or the flock as
the object of care, the archonic will not need to be governed and cultivated in the
daily affairs of life. Rather, the archonic will only depend on the saving practices of
the pastorate insofar as the archonic needs to be protected from those forces in the
world that would compromise and violate it. Neither will the human as archonic
be in need of a reciprocal relation of merits with the pastorate. The good of the
pastorate is not transferred to the good of the archonic, or vice versa—although
the legitimacy of the pastorate will certainly be in play. Human dignity for both
the Vatican and the United Nations is a primordial good. What matters is that this primordial good be attended to and cared for. Lastly, the archonic, unlike the soul, will not need to be analyzed in specific detail and in an individualized fashion relative to the will of God. The archonic will demand a kind of pastoral analysis, but not of itself. It requires an analysis of those things in the modern world that might violate it. A kind of pastoral hermeneutics will in fact be necessary, but only one that discerns the state and fate of the archonic in the face of contemporary developments. Of course the archonic, as the object of pastoral care, will not need to obey, as I have already said. Rather, a kind of reversal of authority takes place. The archonic will demand the moderation of practices in other venues (the CHR will declare that international peace depends on the recognition of, and hence a kind of obedience to, dignity). Those who would care for human dignity will need to obey the commands of the archonic. And the truth of the human insofar as it is a being of archonic dignity is neither that which needs to be exemplified, nor is it that which needs to be instilled through the daily conduct of conduct. It is that which needs to be allowed to unfold into the actuality of what it is in itself. This does not mean that the archonic is autonomous. Human dignity does not obey and protect itself. Rather, the human as archonic is nomic. It commands the pastorate to protect it.

This demand for protection will be the central challenge for venues constituting themselves in the name of human dignity. What practices are sufficient to such a demand, especially when the forces weighing against it, whether the secular or the sovereign, outstrip and exceed these venues in terms of the daily exercise of power? These venues will need to have a very particular relation to mechanisms of government and to the dynamics whereby the conduct of humanity is conducted. This particularity is constituted in part by the fact that human dignity does not require the conduct of conduct in order to be itself. Dignity is primordial. Human dignity, however, is figured as requiring that the forces of governance be understood and moderated such that it is not violated. This means that the venues taking human dignity as their object and objective of care need not themselves be sites of governmental power. The church cares for the ecclesia ad extra. The United Nations cares for humans insofar as their humanity exceeds their place in the world as citizens. They do need to have a relation with the powers governing everyday life such that the integrity and rectitude of human dignity can be assured. In the face of the demand for something more from power, something that will take account of the salvational care for all and for each one, the challenge for venues caring for human dignity consists in the problem of discerning or discovering appropriate modes of care and in discriminating or designing forms of care appropriate to the archonic.
THE CRITICAL LIMITATIONS OF PASTORAL POWER

I have made references to the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation as key juncture points in the history and formulation of pastoral power. My purpose in referencing these juncture points is to identify elements of a problem that I think has purchase for thinking about human dignity today. While recognizing the obvious differences, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation problem nonetheless resonates with the contemporary problem of human dignity in that questions of power relations, venues, and practices of care were being put into question through institutional breakdown and reconstruction. These questions played out in relation to the church’s role in mediating grace, in relation to the limitation of human capacities for participating in their own salvation, in relation to the extent of human sin and human virtue, and all of this was connected to the question of what can be done, if anything, in the face of the desire for salvation. All of this has bearing on where we are today, not because the prior formulations or responses to these difficulties remain sufficient to our current problem but, rather, because the elements of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation problematic alert us to aspects of the present situation that we might have otherwise overlooked.

In the last of the 1977–1978 lectures devoted to the theme of pastoral power, Foucault posed the question: where and in what way did resistance to the classical model of pastoral power begin to emerge? What were the forms of “counterconduct” that were oriented against the practices of ecclesial governance? I think that Foucault’s answers to these questions not only tell us something about the critical limitations of pastoral power in the sixteenth century—in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation—but they also indicate something useful about the critical limitations of efforts to care for human dignity today. Specifying these critical limitations, in however brief a manner, will orient us to the third case: the question of human dignity in bioethics, a case in which the critical limitations of pastoral power and the archonic begin to show themselves, leading toward a breakdown and reconfiguration of the practices of care formulated at the Vatican and the United Nations.

Foucault’s lecture begins with a proposition: in the late Middle Ages pastoral power in its classical forms began to shift locations and change form. The governmental mandate of pastoral power, the obligation of the shepherd to conduct the conduct of the flock, began to break free from the Roman Church and reappear in other venues. As Foucault put it elsewhere, a major threshold for the modern world consisted not only in a separation between church and state but in the change in institutional settings for those who called themselves ministers. These shifts, this loosening and reformation, certainly did not spell the end of pastoral power in the
church. But beyond the church pastoral power did begin to reconfigure, allowing, among other things, for an intensification of the demand for governmental power within the spaces of everyday life that would eventually fall under the purview of the modern state. The central thesis for Foucault is that a principal vector for this set of shifts and redistributions concerned the internal conditions and constitution of pastoral power itself. Certainly external factors such as developments in the European economy, the emergence and combat of extra-Christian and “heretical” sects, and the intensification of nonecclesial state powers were a major factor in the repositioning of classical pastoral power. While acknowledging these factors, Foucault gives particular attention to those sites of resistance and transformation internal to Christianity and the practices of pastoral power which drove reassemblage from within.

Among these sites or zones of resistance Foucault identifies “counterconducts” as particularly important. If the goal of pastoral power was the conduct of conduct, counterconducts constitute those places where existing forms of pastoral power were actively resisted. Foucault details five forms of counterconduct that he takes to be particularly crucial. Each of these bears on and contributes to the problematization of the three key elements of pastoral power as an extension of the Christian Church—salvation, obedience, and truth. Many of these sites of counterconduct are familiar and constituted the heart of Reformation and Counter-Reformation developments. The five forms are: new forms of ascesis, or spiritual practice; doctrinal disputes turning on the question of how to constitute a Christian community; the rise and proliferation of mysticism and the authority of mystics; questions of eschatology; and the changing role and authority of scripture.

The particulars of the constitution of each of these forms and sites of counterconduct are less pertinent here than the conclusions Foucault is able to draw in examining them. The first conclusion is that pastoral power begins to loosen not primarily because something from the outside infects the pastorate but because the exclusion of certain critical elements of Christian life can no longer be sustained. To pick a key example, the turn to the question of the authority of scripture and the spread of access to original scriptural sources ultimately served to undermine previous practices of submission to pastoral authority. Or to pick another example, the constitution of religious communities in relation to new ways of thinking about the ecclesia or salvation worked to disrupt the tight networks of institutional practice that had previously sustained pastoral power by reproducing its mechanisms of governance. These limitations on pastoral power did not come from the outside but rather from internal modes of counterconduct.

The second conclusion Foucault draws is that the emergence of other modes and forms of practice as well as other venues within which new practices could be
conducted (and, eventually, the emergence of governmentality) takes place as much in response to the limitations of the church in the face of new internal demands as it does the dominance of external factors. That is to say that other modes and practices are called for when settled forms of pastoral power can no longer be sustained in the face of a whole series of exclusions (for example, counterconducts) by way of which they were originally constituted.

One of the difficulties faced by both the Vatican and the United Nations in conceiving how to care for human dignity is that they knew that they did not have recourse to the conduct of conduct in anything like the early church or the modern state. What this means is that if we are to begin to assess the critical limitations of pastoral power as it is being reconfigured today, a primary analytic point of orientation is not likely to be counterconducts. It is the case that since Vatican II and since the original development of the bases of human rights at the United Nations multiple adjustments have been made by these two institutions in response to the challenge of turning the recognition of human dignity into a practice. The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to pick just one example, has developed mechanisms for facilitating the kind of pastoral hermeneutic equipment proposed in *Gaudium et spes*. The United Nations has reworked their human rights apparatus in such a way as to move closer to the moderate demands of the Universal Declaration, such as constituting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In both of these cases, one could look for sites of breakdown in their ability to meet the universal demand to care for human dignity. For the sake of the analysis here, however, inquiry into such breakdowns would be premature. What needs to be attended to first is how the formulation of dignity as archonic, whatever the other advantages of this figure as a point of universal critique, actually created a new range of difficulties for the actors in these venues.

In the case of the Vatican, the conditions of internal limitation connected to the archonic figure of dignity were obvious from the outset. The demand was for a form of pastoral care in which the teaching authority of the church could address itself to that which is not the church. The response to this demand was to conceive of things anthropological in such a way as to show how the human, per se, in its own being, is called to union with the divine and union with humanity. A feature of this anthropology is precisely to put in question the legitimacy of the secular as a space of absolute distinction and autonomy from the ecclesia. How does one care for that which is beyond the church? One shows how what is beyond the church, that is, humanity, is really constituted as what is proper to the church, or, more accurately, that the church is proper to humanity: the called and the community of the called. The structural joint between the church and the world is the human as archonic. But for those who are outside the church this anthropological solution
simply denies the premise of the problem. There really is no *ecclesia ad extra*, strictly speaking. Nature is folded into the supernatural. At the crux of this integration is the Christian notion of Jesus as the incarnate Christ.

The price to be paid for the Vatican’s archonic solution to the pastoral demand is that those who are not part of the church may not accept the church’s teachings as a “purely” anthropological proposal, which of course it is not. What is more, there are those within the church for whom the price to be paid for Vatican II’s integralist solution is too high. Some theologians read *Gaudium et spes* not only as the supernaturalizing of nature but also as the naturalizing of the supernatural. They read the constitution as a warrant for claiming that the church cares for that which is properly and immanently dignified, and for this reason they called on Christians to make common cause with nonecclesial venues in the care of human dignity—even those who reject the notion of the supernatural altogether. The pastoral apparatuses of the church, in this view, certainly teach us things we might not otherwise know about the relation of the human and the divine, but Jesus as the Christ is more model than mediator.

In the case of the United Nations, the internal conditions of limitation are conceptually less obvious but politically more straightforward. From the outset, the CHR had to contend with the fact that powerful members of the commission were committed to the preservation of the rights of sovereignty in the face of interpretations of human rights that might disrupt or diminish existing power relations. But the notion of human dignity and human rights clearly does pose such a disruption. This is clear in their turn to the archonic: relations of power are not just a matter of managing populations and citizens. Such relations also concern the dignified human. And what is this dignified human? It is that being whose violation will compromise peace and whose lack of recognition will cost us freedom. If the *raison d’état* is a form of practice in which the question of power is calibrated to the nature of the object being governed, governance must now attend to the nature of human dignity. But human dignity is not thereby integrated into the art of government. It does not become another principle of self-limitation within the logic of the *raison d’état*. Nor does it simply exist as a juridical outside to sovereignty—after all it is the member states themselves who are formulating the declaration. Human dignity is left in a zone somewhere between the outside and inside of government. The advantage of placing the archonic in such a liminal position is that it can be put forward as a means of moderating sovereignty in situations where rights are thought to be violated; as adjacent but not altogether internal it moderates the practices of government. The price to be paid for this liminality, however, is that the mechanisms for the enforcement of human rights are easy to block. The claims of human dignity do not call for the constant management of state sovereignty; they only call
for monitoring the actions and inactions of sovereign states so as to identify the exceptional moments where intervention in the name of dignity is warranted.

In terms of internal conditions of limitation, we see in both cases that there is something basic that is underaddressed. The figure of the human as original, and as that which commands, produces situations in which internal conditions of limitation become points of critical limitation. It is at these points that the figure of human dignity and the equipment attached to it are no longer taken to be adequate to the problem of power and human worth. These situations and these points produce breakdown, as we will see in the case of bioethics. The first point of critical limitation is that the archonic, though seemingly robust as an anchor point for a wide range of practices styled as protective of dignity, does not figure the human as that being whose dignity must be fostered, elaborated, or cultivated. One of the characteristics of bioethics, however, as I will discuss in the next chapter, is that since at least the early 1980s the work of the moral imagination has been cantoned off into the far future. Insofar as dignity is put into the service of elaborating a future, then something more than protection is at stake. In this case it is no longer obvious how care for the archonic ought to be made into a practice. One effect of this point of limitation is to generate practices of the imagination in which futures that are taken to be counter to dignity are simply proscribed. Imagining how to proscribe futures that might violate human dignity becomes a proxy for the protection of human dignity. The question remains, however, of what one does about the fact that the question of human worth and human goods in these situations may not only turn on the primordial but also on the proleptic, that is, the question of how the fostering of a bioethically good future places demands on the present. The second point of difficulty that will show itself in bioethics is that the archonic allows only those truths to count that cohere with the archon, that is, with a mode of and form of being that justifies itself and so must be recognized and declared. In the case of the Vatican this limitation is accommodated by making the practice of care consist in reading the signs of the times so as to adjust the affairs of contemporary human life to the demands of the archonic. And in the case of the United Nations, the task is to elaborate new rights and to declare and protect those rights as an outward sign of the protection of the inward, that is to say archonic, reality of dignity. In the case of bioethics, a different problem will appear: how to map the archonic onto the human biological body and biological future. What does it mean to say that the archonic is the character of that embodied being whose vitality and future are the object of biological technologies? Said differently: if human dignity is treated as the spiritual essence of the human family by the Vatican and the United Nations, the turn to dignity in bioethics will provoke the question of how it is that human dignity is the essence of the biological body.
THE QUESTION OF CRITIQUE

Foucault’s lecture on counterconduct and pastoral power was given on March 8, 1978. A little more than two months later Foucault gave another lecture, this one to the French Philosophical Society. His lecture on that occasion was entitled “What Is Critique?” In that lecture Foucault suggested that one of the marks of the history of the Christian pastorate was that its efforts to establish and sustain practices of spiritual governance leading to salvation were always accompanied by the critical question of whether or not to govern or to be governed in this or that manner. This critical question exploded with the proliferation of counterconducts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Reformation critique of pastoral power, after all, did not consist in the desire “not to be governed at all.” Rather, the critique turned on “how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them.”

At the critical horizon of the classical forms of pastoral power and the emergence of the art of government, the counterconducts of the Reformation and then the Counter-Reformation were constituted, in part, by an art of critique. This art of critique put into question and thereby put into play the problem of political spirituality. Luther—to pick perhaps the most visible figure—certainly contributed to the reformation of doctrine, but his attacks on doctrine took form as a fundamental rethinking of how, where, and under which conditions power could be legitimately exercised in secular and spiritual affairs. Luther put the regnant modes of pastoral power into question by cracking open the politics of salvation: the question of legitimate modes and forms of salvational practice, the effects and countereffects of such practice, and the venues within and through which such practice ought or ought not be facilitated. One of Luther’s definitive formulations of all this was his doctrine of the two spheres of creation, a demarcation and segregation of sacred and secular powers. Luther dealt with the problem of salvation, political spirituality, and pastoral power by reimagining the demarcations among and between spheres of life as fundamental. As the Catholic debate over integralism has shown, such a doctrine of separate spheres is no longer sufficient to address the problem of pastoral power in the modern world. That said, it may also be the case that the lesson learned from the history of counterconduct is that the wholesale rejection of the metaphysics of the modern world—liberal, biopolitical, or otherwise—won’t be of much help either. The question might be, rather: how should we think about things human today, which venues need to be reformulated or reconstructed, and which modes and forms of practice are called for in light of persistent problems of human worth and the exercise of power?
In his paper “Paul Against Biopolitics,” Milbank, following Agamben, diagnoses the modern, tout court, as dangerous and excessive, summing up that excess in terms of biopolitics and connecting this biopolitical excess with secularism and state politics arranged under the sign of liberalism. The modern is biopolitical, it is secular, and it is liberal. And insofar as it is defined by these things it is taken to be spiritually and materially dangerous. Milbank connected his denunciation of liberalism to the broader diagnosis and repudiation of modernity offered by Henri de Lubac, namely the proposition that the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation were a kind of theological “fall from grace” in that they imagined the world in terms of an ontological break between nature and the supernatural, paving the way for the discontents of the modern world. Milbank, in short, makes common cause with those who understand us to be living in a biopolitical age, one that is, in the end, dangerous and illegitimate.

A year after the event at the religion meetings, when Milbank published his paper, he proposed, in passing, that the notions of human rights and their secular connections to human dignity are nothing more than a biopolitical residue—nothing more than a form of resistance to biopower that ultimately borrows so heavily from the presuppositions of the world it resists as ultimately to be defined by it. The fact that Milbank cast the world of today in terms of a modern epoch of the biopolitical, and the fact that he thereby obscures the need to pay attention to the character and logic of human dignity, is, on some level, inconsequential to the analysis developed here. His work, however, has served as an occasion in the development of my project. His easy dismissal of twentieth-century talk of human dignity as a biopolitical remainder served as an irritation and a prompt. To repeat the point made above, whatever else Foucault intended by the term biopower, he certainly did not mean for it to be used as the instrument of philosophical or theological epochalism—the sign of the times. For all of the talk of history and practice and difference in Milbank’s work and in the work of other “critics of the age,” he and they in fact do not offer us a feel for the particular. Rather, what is offered is an exercise in what might be glossed as historical metaphysics—an exercise of presuming that the modern world has an essence and that this essence is illegitimate and even pathological. It is not a far step from Milbank’s rejection of the modern as the bastard of a Reformation metaphysics of power and depravity to Agamben’s grave insistence that the epoch of biopolitics shows itself in the logic of the death camp. It is some consolation that the presumption that biopolitics is the diacritic of the age has itself become part of the recent past and therefore can be thought of and situated as part of the modern already becoming historical. Such resituating itself facilitates the work of thought.

I stated in the introduction and repeated in my examination of the Vatican and
the United Nations that much of the consternation over the phrase “human dign-
ity” has arisen in response to a demand for something more from power. If I have
tried to think through the figure of human dignity as a distinctive response to that
demand, it is in part because I think the significance of human dignity in twentieth-
century thought and practice adheres precisely in the attempt to bring into being a
different kind of object, practice, and logic of power. Denunciation of the essential
evils of the liberal or the modern or the biopolitical simply covers over these differ-
ences, and it covers them over in the name of, on the one side, epochal continuity,
and, on the other, the need for a radical break: the fall into the modern and the
break toward a total exit. My project is attentive to events and discontinuity not as
breaches in history that open up epochs or eras but rather as sites of indeterminacy
at which the stakes of thinking and practice become unsettled and reconfigured.
Discontinuity in this sense is not only a mark of the modern; it is also a useful tool
in the analysis of the relationship between truth and power.

Radical Orthodoxy theologians have called for a world made on a classical
model—the hope that “there can be again a cosmos, a psyche, a polis.” In this,
it seems to me, their rhetorical flourishes risk obscuring what their work actually
risks: it risks shifting analytic attention and energy away from the concrete practices
by which and through which the politics of intrinsic worth connected to human
dignity have been formulated and made to ramify. While recognizing that their
reference to the “cosmos, a psyche, a polis” may be only provocation and styliza-
tion, the question of how to conduct inquiry into matters of truth and power today
cannot be answered by a return to the ancients, however cherished they may be as
philosophic friends.

The approach taken by Milbank and his cohort is not, as some critics have ar-
gued, “conservative.” There is no real sense in which they are trying to preserve a
tradition. Tradition for these scholars is, I submit, “a moving image of the past,
opposed not to modernity but to alienation.” The question for this present study,
by contrast, is not at all one of alienation. The question, rather, is how to establish
a different relation to the contemporary, one in which we might take stock of the
fact that we are part of the history of ramifications attendant to the figure of hu-
man dignity, and the by now more or less stable problem of pastoral power that has
been reconfigured and put into play because of the politics of intrinsic worth. Both
analytically and ethically, this contemporary relation demands more than denuncia-
tion and exit. It also demands a spirit of remediation in which and through which
the problem of human dignity might first be rendered through a different analytic
media (for example, case studies of knowledge and power) and perhaps thereby be
made better—whatever that term might eventually mean.