

HANNAH ARENDT 50/80

Memory, Responsibility and Human Dignity: From the Banality of Evil to the Ethical Challenges of Science and Technology

7 July 2026, 3:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m., Auditorium 1, Católica Medical School

The exhibition and the associated academic initiative constitute a unique opportunity to deepen reflection on one of the central concerns of the mission of Universidade Católica Portuguesa Institute of Bioethics: the promotion of interdisciplinary reflection on the human condition in the face of the challenges posed by science, technology, research and contemporary social transformations.

Marking both the fiftieth anniversary of Hannah Arendt's death and the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, this initiative invites us to revisit an intellectual legacy whose relevance extends far beyond the historical context in which it emerged. Arendt's reflections on the banality of evil, critical thinking, moral responsibility, the fragility of democratic institutions and the human capacity for judgement remain essential for understanding many of the ethical challenges of the twenty-first century.

The exhibition also highlights how processes of dehumanization do not belong solely to the past. From the concentration camps and the Nuremberg Trials to the experiments carried out on vulnerable populations throughout the twentieth century, history shows that scientific progress can be instrumentalized when it ceases to recognize the intrinsic dignity of every human person.

It is precisely from this historical awareness that modern bioethics emerge. The abuses committed during the Second World War led to the formulation of the Nuremberg Code in 1947, which established voluntary consent as a fundamental requirement for research involving human beings. This was followed by the Declaration of Helsinki of the World Medical Association in 1964, subsequently revised to respond to new challenges in biomedical research, and by the Belmont Report in 1979, which consolidated the principles of respect for people, beneficence and justice. Later, the development of Good Clinical Practice guidelines, ICH-GCP, in 1996, and current systems of ethical and regulatory oversight strengthened the mechanisms for protecting research participants.

Together, these milestones represent institutional responses to the need to ensure that scientific progress remains guided by respect for human dignity, human rights, justice and responsibility.

In this sense, the initiative is directly aligned with the strategic priorities of the Institute of Bioethics:

- Promoting human dignity as the foundation of social, scientific and technological life;
- Developing a culture of ethical responsibility and scientific integrity;
- Reflecting on the emerging challenges of medicine, biomedical research and artificial intelligence;
- Training professionals and citizens capable of exercising critical thinking and prudent judgement;
- Promoting dialogue between bioethics, the humanities, science and society.

General Objective: To reflect on the continuing relevance of Hannah Arendt's thought and on how historical memory can contribute to strengthening ethical responsibility, scientific integrity and the protection of human dignity in the face of contemporary challenges in research, medicine, technology and artificial intelligence.



PROGRAM

15h00 – 15h15 | Opening session

- José Manuel Pereira de Almeida, Vice-Rector of Universidade Católica Portuguesa
- Mara de Sousa Freitas, Director of the Institute of Bioethics, Universidade Católica Portuguesa
- Ana Folque Gouveia, Deputy Director of João Paulo II University Library, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

15h15 – 16h15 | Round Table I

Thinking in Order to Judge: Hannah Arendt, Memory and Responsibility in Contemporary Societies

In the face of the challenges of artificial intelligence, disinformation and the growing complexity of contemporary decision-making, how can we preserve the capacity to think, judge and act responsibly, which Hannah Arendt considered an essential condition of human freedom and responsibility? | How can we educate citizens and professionals capable of exercising critical judgement and ethical responsibility that resist the banalization of indifference, dehumanization and uncritical obedience? | What lessons from historical memory remain essential for protecting human dignity and strengthening democratic institutions in the face of the scientific, technological and social challenges of the twenty-first century?

Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, this round table will reflect on the relationship between thought, judgement and moral responsibility, exploring the contemporary relevance of the banality of evil, the risks of dehumanization and the importance of historical memory for the defense of human dignity and democratic societies. The discussion will also address the contribution of education, literature, the humanities and citizenship to the formation of people capable of exercising critical thinking, moral discernment and ethical responsibility in the face of the scientific, technological and social challenges of the twenty-first century.

Participants: Alexandre Castro Caldas | Marta Brites | Maria Telheiro | Mara de Sousa Freitas

Moderator: Sofia Menéres

16h15 – 16h45 | Coffee Break

16h45 – 17h45 | Round Table II

From Memory to the Future: Human Dignity in Clinical Research and Artificial Intelligence

What lessons from the history of research involving human beings should continue to guide biomedical research, the use of health data and the development of artificial intelligence? | How can we ensure that scientific and technological innovation remains guided by human dignity, justice, transparency and the common good, without compromising society's trust? | What forms



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of governance, ethical oversight and scientific integrity are needed today to ensure responsible research and responsible artificial intelligence, centered on the human person?

Starting from the ethical lessons arising from the abuses committed throughout the twentieth century and from the birth of modern bioethics, this session will reflect on the challenges that biomedical research, data science and artificial intelligence pose to the protection of human dignity. The debate will seek to identify the principles, forms of governance and mechanisms of ethical oversight and scientific integrity needed to ensure that scientific and technological progress remains centered on the human person, promotes justice and strengthens society's trust in science.

Participants: Miguel Oliveira da Silva | **Rui Tato Marinho** | Daniel Macedo | **Maria Cunha** | João Condeixa |

Moderator: Mara de Sousa Freitas

17h45 – 18h00 | Final reflection and closing

What does Hannah Arendt ask of us today? Final summary and challenges, by Mara de Sousa Freitas

Closing of the HANNAH ARENDT 50/80 exhibition, by Ana Folque

This initiative seeks to affirm memory as the foundation of ethical responsibility and human dignity as the guiding criterion of science, research and technological innovation. By promoting dialogue between bioethics, the humanities and the health sciences, it strengthens the role of critical thinking, moral discernment and scientific integrity in the formation of professionals and citizens capable of responding to the challenges of our time. In this context, the **ETHOS Hub – Bioethics and Humanities** constitutes an interdisciplinary platform of the Institute of Bioethics of the Catholic University of Portugal, created to strengthen dialogue between the humanities, bioethics, science and society, promoting critical reflection on the major ethical challenges of our time.

More than remembering Hannah Arendt, this initiative invites us to reaffirm the responsibility to think, judge and act. At a time marked by artificial intelligence, data science and profound scientific and technological transformations, true progress is measured not only by the capacity to innovate, but also by the capacity to place the dignity of the human person at the center of science, research and technology. With this initiative, the Institute of Bioethics of the Catholic University of Portugal reaffirms its commitment to research that is scientifically robust, ethically responsible and oriented towards the common good, in the conviction that human dignity must remain the foundation, the purpose and the measure of all progress.