



PM GLYNN
INSTITUTE

**Ethos
2022**

**The future
of Australia**



ACU

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Ethos

Ethos is a new series of major events focussed on the big public ethics issues of the day and what they mean for the future of Australia.

LEADING DEBATES

Ethos events draw together leading thinkers and figures shaping public discussion to tackle current and emerging challenges for our life in common.

Speakers and participants are drawn from Australia and around the world, ranging across academia, politics, government, business, the media, culture, and the arts.

CONNECTING THINKERS

Each event connects thought-leaders and practitioners from a wide range of fields with ACU scholars and experts to discuss the issues shaping the national conversation and some of the questions they raise for public ethics.

AUSTRALIA'S IDENTITY AND THE AUTHORITARIAN CHALLENGE

Ethos was launched in 2021 at an event with Nine News Political Editor Chris

Uhlmann and Chief Executive Officer of the Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre Rachael Falk, discussing the need to strengthen a shared identity to meet the challenge posed by the rise of authoritarian regimes led by China.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The first Ethos 2022 event will look at the role of social media in Australian society, the ethical challenges it poses for politics, debate and wellbeing, and what social accountability means for social media.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORK-LIFE VALUES

The second Ethos 2022 event will discuss the changing nature of work and the shifts in values that are reshaping our expectations of work and our attitudes to it, with reference to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Australia's future

Ethos is about ethics, public affairs and issues of value raised by our complex society.

Ethos is a forum for thinking about how the everyday decisions we make and the value positions we adopt shape what sort of country Australia is. At the level of public life, institutions and politics, Ethos considers how ethics is intertwined with public policy.

PUBLIC ETHICS

Ethos takes as its focus public ethics, which is concerned with the ethical dimensions of what is required to build and sustain a good society.

It touches on a wide range of questions such as, how we can create opportunity for those in need, foster participation and initiative, practise politics, grow the economy, protect the vulnerable, strengthen a shared culture, and renew and maintain the institutions which structure our life in common.

In short, Ethos provides an opportunity to reflect on Australia's future as a good society, and how it responds to the challenges that confront it.

ETHICS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Ethos draws on ACU's expertise in ethics. While it is important for Australian universities to cultivate this expertise, it is even more important to make it available to engage the most important and pressing issues for Australia's future.



Making social media accountable

Social media began with high hopes. What it has delivered has not always lived up to expectations.

A FRIEND OF DEMOCRACY?

Social media seemed to promise a revolution in the way we practise politics. It increased the capacity for people to participate, organise and mobilise, and provided a way of by-passing and blindsiding traditional party and political structures.

Its use in attempts to manipulate elections, however, has now overshadowed this, and attempts by tech companies themselves to pressure governments have only deepened concerns.

OPENING UP DEBATE OR SHUTTING IT DOWN?

At first, social media worked to erode what little censorship remained in the West, and made it much harder to silence anyone. It accelerated the breakdown of political, media, and institutional consensus and the control of information.

Inevitably, its misuse by criminals and terrorists required limits to be imposed. More followed to respond to disinformation and trolling. The limits now extend into political debate, with mobs silencing dissenters, governments requiring views to be filtered, and the platforms themselves determining what is hate-speech and what is not reliable information.

EXPRESSING YOURSELF OR HARMING OTHERS?

A powerful part of social media's appeal is the scope it provides for self-expression; and it can be addictive. At the same time, the pressures it creates, especially for children and adolescents, can be intense. Some of the platforms' own research highlights body image and mental health issues this can exacerbate.

The amount of time spent connecting on screens can foster loneliness and isolation. Social media allows you to find people and connect, but it also allows the bullies at school to follow their victims home. Uploading videos can raise the alarm when people have been hurt or crimes have been committed, but it can also be used by criminals to further intimidate and humiliate their victims.

COMING TO TERMS WITH TECHNOLOGY

From one perspective social media is just another application of technology that human beings will misuse, and the tech giants are just another type of large corporation navigating how to use their power responsibly.

The problems, however, remain and the challenge to solve them ethically will have powerful consequences for our life in common.

How do we reset the defaults of social media so that it becomes more of a force for good?

What do workers want?

The pandemic has changed work.
Is the balance with life now better or worse?

The identification of common human goods and their balance within a good human life is one of the major preoccupations of ethics.

WHEN DOES WORK STOP?

Working from home underscored how difficult it can be for some workers to clock-off and leave it until tomorrow. Having too much to do in the available time is a regular source of anxiety and stress for many workers across occupations, reinforcing a tendency for work to become all-consuming.

One consequence is a growing trend for people in senior roles to step back from work and re-order their priorities, just as the experience and expertise they have built up has become most valuable to their employers. How are people's aspirations changing, and how does work need to change to meet the shifts in people's values?

WHAT SORT OF WORK?

Flexibility has emerged as a major factor for employees in many occupations, extending not just to the hours they work and where they work, but also to the sort of work they do. Finding ways of rethinking work to attract and retain people with skills and experience is a growing challenge for employers.

For other workers, however, casualisation of workforces and dependence on the gig economy has made work more insecure and unreliable. It has also made them vulnerable to being underpaid and exploited. This deepens the divide in the workforce between those who have flexibility and those who have insecurity. This is now a major justice issue.

WORKPLACE VALUES

For many people, work is the main collaborative activity in which they are engaged outside their families on any sort of regular basis.

Large workplaces often articulate a set of values for their activities and conduct in the workplace. While many of these values would be commonly shared, others may not be. Do employer values match up with employee values? What impact does this have in attracting and retaining staff?

WHAT WE WANT FROM WORK

We look for different things from work at different stages of our lives, and what work can give us varies significantly across occupations and roles. For some people, work is almost an end in itself – satisfying, meaningful, a contribution to society and personally fulfilling. For many others, however, work remains largely a means to other ends.

The humanisation of work achieved in Australia by unions, employers, social reforms and legislation has been an extraordinary achievement, but not one that can be taken for granted. Keeping work humane, not just for many or even most workers, but for those on the margins as well, remains unfinished business. Ensuring that changing work-life values do not lose sight of this is a critical task for public ethics.



PM Glynn Institute

Ethos is an initiative of the PM Glynn Institute, ACU's public policy think tank.

BRIDGING DIVIDES

The Institute's contributions to policy discussions and public debates encourage conversation across the divides of political, intellectual, and religious life, to help build a good society where everyone can flourish.

PUBLIC POLICY

With this in view, the Institute has produced recommendations on policy issues such as protecting religious freedom, the provision of palliative care, constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians and the role of schools in fostering social cohesion.

PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

The Institute has also produced a range of publications discussing larger issues such as religion and democracy, the future of human rights, political tribalism, and the major political traditions in Australia.

ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the Ethos events, the Institute holds a number of regular events each year to engage the national conversation on public policy, including the PM Glynn Lecture on Religion, Law and Public Life, and the Greg Craven Lecture on Ethics and Politics.

NEW AUDIENCES

Ethos 2022 events will be pitched to a engage new audiences with the expertise and thought leadership in ethics that ACU offers to the community.

The PM Glynn Institute was established by Australian Catholic University (ACU) in 2016 as a public policy think tank to analyse issues of concern to the Catholic Church and the wider Australian community. Its focus is public policy for the common good.

pmg@acu.edu.au

pmglynn.acu.edu.au

Cover image: Aerial view of arid desert dry landscape and blue lake in outback Australia

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