



Senior Symposia

THE BROTHER DAVID S. BAGINKSI FSC
SCHOLARS PROGRAM

CLASS OF 2021







*Senior
Symposia
2021*

Hans Holbein the Younger
The Ambassadors, 1533
The National Gallery, London



SENIOR
THESIS
DEFENSES
2021





WELCOME

SEVENTEETH ANNUAL SENIOR SYMPOSIA

CLASS OF 2021

Welcome to the seventeenth annual Senior Symposia for The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program. This forum is an opportunity for students to showcase some of the interesting discoveries they made while working on their theses projects. It is also an opportunity for the Central Catholic community to experience the intellectual vitality that is created when talented students work under the direction of dedicated faculty and outside researchers. This combination of discovery-based learning and mentorship has been transformative for everyone involved.

The breath and scope of the oral presentations reflect not only a wide range of academic interests; they also speak to the caliber of the students themselves. Enterprising and thoughtful, these students have delved into a deepened knowledge within a specific field of study. They worked on multiple drafts of their theses and discussed them with their peers in a thesis-writing seminar. Last March, they stood before a faculty panel and advanced an ethical position through rigorous defense and argument. These experiences have enriched their education, sharpened their skills in critical thinking and strengthened their self-confidence as scholars.

Every year, our symposia takes inspiration from a literary or artistic theme. This year, the seniors chose Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors*, painted in 1533. It is one of the best known and most admired works from the Renaissance. The students first learned about the work in Mr. Lloyd's AP European history class. Their choice seemed fitting also because of the deep friendship between the painting's two sitters: Jean de Dinteville (Sieur de Polisy) and Georges de Selve (Bishop of Lavaur). There could not be a better way, we believe, to honor the exceptional friendship in scholarship and play that has grown in this year's senior class.

Many of the theses include a recommendation section. As such, the symposia are very much a celebration of our Seniors' noble efforts in advocating for positive change in the world. Some of the pressing issues they tackled this year include: the humanization of foreign policy, gentrification practices in Pittsburgh, the rising problem of political fragmentation caused by social media, a reexamination of "third" spaces, sustainability in the automobile industry and communitarian responses to a neo-eugenic threat of CRISPR-Cas9.

We extend our sincerest thanks to all of the Second Readers for their generosity of time and expertise in guiding the students work. Their names are included under each of the abstracts. We are most grateful for their efforts.

Enjoy the symposia!

DIRECTORS

Patrizia Costa
John J. Allen

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Justin Belardi
Sara Budacki
Glenn Campbell
Todd Rooney



SYMPOSIA OVERVIEW

May 18, 2021 6:00 pm

Welcome and Prayer

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC

Opening Remarks

Patrizia Costa

Student Presentations

May 19, 6:00 pm

Reassembly

Distinguished Mentor Award

Student Presentations

May 20, 6:00 pm

Closing Remarks

John J. Allen

Student Presentations

Thesis Awards



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CONGRATULATORY REMARKS FROM THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Congratulations on the effort that you put into this program. I hope that you take the opportunity to reflect on your successes before transitioning to the challenges that are ahead of you next year. Please also continue to challenge yourself intellectually. We need bright, thoughtful, and moral young men like you to become our future leaders.

Justin Belardi
Faculty, Science

Famous book proprietor George Whitman once commented that, “All the world is my school and all humanity is my teacher.” Continue to study and learn from the world; thrive with your achievements and follow your future with a compassionate heart. Congratulations on your completion of the Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program!

Sara Budacki
Faculty, English

A definition of a scholar is a learned or erudite person, especially one who has profound knowledge of a particular subject. While this is admirable as a base, a true scholar is someone who is well-rounded intellectually, a lover of learning about many topics, someone of eclectic tastes. I hope your Central Catholic education has started you on this journey.

Glenn Campbell
Chair, History and Social Studies

While congratulations are certainly in order, especially given the particular challenges you faced this year, be sure to see your completion of this program as the start of something lifelong. Now more than ever, the world needs disciplined and inquisitive minds. Your work in the Baginski Scholars program must lay the foundation for your life's work, whatever and wherever that may be. Be always like the son in Seamus Heaney's poem “Digging” who, upon watching his father drive his spade deep into the peat, says of himself:

“Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it.”

Todd Rooney
Faculty, English

INTRODUCTION

It is important that within the school there exist an experience of justice in which values, such as solidarity, communion, and participation are top priorities. Otherwise the school runs the risk of duplicating the system and preparing students for a society of privileges, training them in the competitive struggle where there is no solidarity. It is precisely this situation which we have to try to avoid. —Brother Alvaro Echeverria, FSC, Superior General

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the seventeenth annual Br. David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program Symposium Presentation. This event represents the culmination of thoughtful research and disciplined thinking by some of the best young minds at Central Catholic and in Western Pennsylvania.

I keep on my desk small book entitled *Lasalle University and its Catholic Lasallian Mission*. It is a primer on our charism and includes prayers and reflections that provide examples of what sets our schools apart from others. I believe that reflection by our former Superior General captures the core of the Scholars Program. It has been a privilege, first as a teacher and then as principal to witness the extraordinary work done by our scholars and I am constantly amazed at the depth and quality of their work. What has been revealed to me over time, is the depth of the community that is developed and nurtured through this program. A foundational aspect of this program is to build a respectful community where the back and forth exchange of ideas and critiques is conducted in a spirit of improvement for the growth of everyone.

I commend the co-directors of the Scholars Program, Dr. Patrizia Costa and Mr. John Allen, who have carried on the tradition of the program begun by Br. Ernest Miller, FSC in 2002 and further developed by Matthew Sudnik. Having co-directors has allowed the program to further evolve and to provide deeper and more varied opportunities and perspectives that ask the scholars to wrestle with the perennial questions: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live a moral life?

I congratulate our scholars on their successful completion and defense of their theses. I look forward to hearing the oral presentations and taking part in the question and answer sessions. To the Scholars: Continue to use your minds and talents together in the pursuit of justice.

Live, Jesus, in our hearts. Forever!
Fraternally,

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC
Principal





"Souvenor"





DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE


The Virtue of Friendship in Holbein's *Ambassadors*

Gracing the cover of our symposia book this year is a portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger which has hung in the National Gallery of London under the title of *The Ambassadors* since they acquired it in 1890. It counts as one of the best-known and most admired works in the history of art and has generated an impressive body of scholarly literature, some of which has captured the interest and imagination of our very own Mr. William Loyd in the history department. No student completes his AP Euro course without an intimate look at the painting. More than experiencing it as a staple of his lesson plans year after year, the students have come to embrace it as a venerated tradition. And they never forget. It was there that some of our scholars first got acquainted with this Renaissance masterpiece, including Pierce Sebastian who, in turn, suggested it as a theme for this year's thesis defense announcements and the symposia. Fellow classmates eagerly supported the idea. We also dedicated a class to the painting during a not-so-busy week in Senior Thesis. It is truly a painting for all times.

The painting features a double portrait of Jean de Dinteville, Sieur de Polisy, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur whom Holbein met at the court of Henry VIII around 1533 (the date inscribed prominently on the floor in the painting). It was the eve of the English Reformation and both Dinteville and Selve were serving as ambassadors. One was a member of the secular nobility (or *robe courte*—to use a distinction used by their contemporaries). The other is from the sacred nobility (or *robe longue*). It seems that Holbein was asked to record the sitters' participation in a critical episode of English political life and the schism between Protestants and Catholics.

The range of still-life objects—including a celestial globe, an open hymn book, various instruments used in astronomy for measuring time as well as a well-curated array of musical instruments—was certainly intended to demonstrate Holbein's virtuosity for representing complex three-dimensional forms in illusionistic space. Many of the scientific instruments represented would have been of particular interest to contemporaries, on account of their rarity and novelty. Art historians have also gotten accustomed to relating the upper shelf to the heavenly realm and the bottom to earthly pursuits. And what to say about the bizarre object in the foreground of the painting? It was once thought to be a cuttlefish bone, but it is actually a skull hidden in plain sight. It can only be seen when the viewer stands at a particular angle from the painting.

Figuring out what each object in the painting is and does (symbolically-so) is the exercise that students love most. Yet, the primary focus of the composition are not the objects but the two full-length, life-size, sumptuously dressed, socially distanced (they seem to comply perfectly with the 6-feet apart mandate of our present COVID-pandemic condition), and superbly rendered ambassadors. Dinteville and Selve are as integral to the composition as any other theme in the painting. Both occupy the same position within the left- and right-hand halves of the



painting. Both gaze directly at the viewer and stand with their bodies turned slightly towards each other. Their inner elbows rest in mirror-like fashion on the upper shelf. These symmetries are strongly suggestive of likeness and analogy and art historians have gone so far as to suggest that these poses evoke the ubiquitous classical topos of the friend as a second half. The exemplary friendships of antiquity—Orestes/Pylades, Achilles/Patroclus, Damon/Phintias, Cicero/Atticus, and Theseus/Pierithous to name a few—reverberated through the humanist discourse in Renaissance times. Desiderius Erasmus, the erudite Catholic humanist, gave the theme fresh currency in Holbein's time when he accorded this saying in his *Adages*: “Amicitia aequalitas; amicus alter ipse” (Friendship is equality; a friend is another self). This humanist friendship was almost without exception between pairs of male friends. In painting, the theme was characterized in the form of two male sitters in a single portrait. There are many such examples in European art.

Dinteville and Selve were, indeed, close friends. They, and their families, are described as *intime ami* in contemporary documents and letters; and the objects that occupy the central part of the painting suggest their shared knowledge, interests, and pursuits. Holbein represented them as friends, therefore, through the visual evocation of the notion that these friends hold much in common.

There is also more: Salve's robe represents a smart but informal way of dressing in the early 16th-century by the clergy and laity alike. As such, it suggests an informal encounter and a corresponding degree of familiarity between the two sitters. The same may be said of the Royal Order of St. Michael pendant that Dinteville wears around his neck. Even though the knights of this most prestigious French order were forbidden to ever part with the medal, the statutes of the Order published in 1512 permitted on certain occasions, including when at home or in private, *en autres lieux ou ils n'auront aucune compagne ou assemblée de gens d'estat*” (in other places where they will have no company or assembly of statesmen), the pendant of St. Michael might be worn on a gold chain or silk lace rather than suspended from its ceremonial collar. Dinteville is portrayed with the pendant hanging from a simple (but still-prominent) gold chain, as if to suggest that his represented encounter with Selve belongs to an intimate, off-duty relationship rather than a formal meeting between two statesmen.

Another indication of the close relationship between the two is afforded by, of all things, the pattern of the curtain behind them. In the Renaissance, furnishings and textiles served as clear indicators of wealth, status, and purpose. Holbein's luxurious curtain, made of silk damask with a large repeat was recognizably expensive. The pattern incorporated diamond rings (clearly visible above the celestial globe and the polyhedral sundial on the upper shelf). This denoted the strength of friendship between the two men. Diamonds and diamond rings were associated with the virtues of constancy and fidelity due to their proverbial durability. They were also deployed as a sign of enduring friendship. In 1519, for example, in a letter of thanks to Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, from whom he had received such a ring, Erasmus of Rotterdam described the gift as “amicitiae nostrae momentum” (a reminder of our friendship).

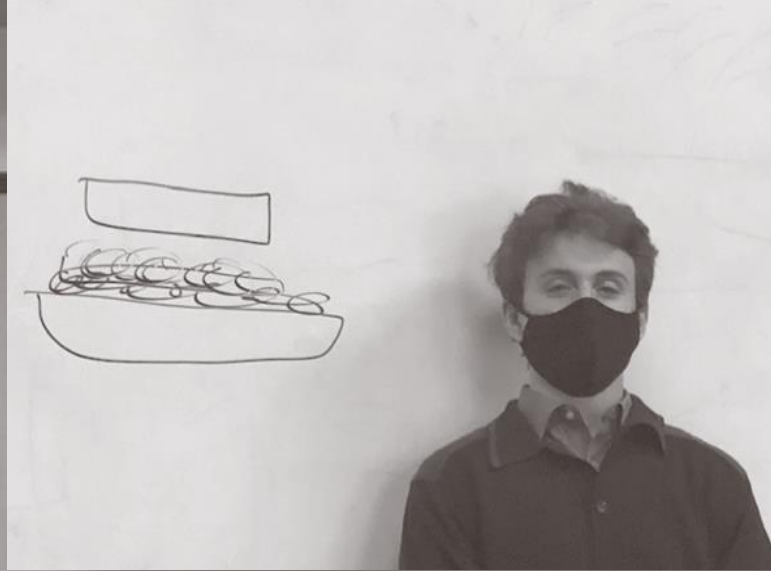
In the context of Holbein's portrait, these well-established conventions for the representation of friendship would have been perceived as all-the-more meaningful to his audience. It can be read as a friendship intended to secure both earthly and heavenly immortality through the Catholic faith. Which brings me back to our scholars in the 2021 class: out of all the virtues and qualities that they have nurtured and invoked most this year, the one that stands out to me is *friendship*. It has been apparent in their cohesiveness as a class, their use of communitarian ethics in giving shape to their recommendations and conclusions, and their resolve to have fun with and for each other in an academic year filled with social restrictions due to the pandemic. Friendship—the kind that values the sacredness of Christian charity and serenity—truly defined their intellectual community.

There is a further and very beautiful reminder of the importance of friendship in Nicholas Marshall's thesis titled *Humanizing Foreign Policy: The Postwar Us-Iraq Relationship*. Quoting the work of Prof. Nader Al Jallad at the University of Córdoba in Spain, he writes, "the most important person after yourself is your friend." He offered that perspective as an important part of understanding how two countries can establish friendly accords and, ultimately, peace. This is a friendship that does not negate the self-interest in working relations but instead allows for self-interest so long as the friend is made immediately secondary. Thus, true friendship consists of the voluntary yet necessary relationships, especially during the "difficult moments in life."

What a pity that we cannot extend an invitation to Holbein's dapper *Ambassadors* to this year's symposia. They would have been so pleased to see our seniors working in friendship and with great diplomacy to solve some of the world's problems.



Patrizia Costa, PhD
Director, The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program





DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The Impasse of “Social Justice” and the Pedagogical Power of Virtue Ethics

“Never rat on your friends, and always keep your mouth shut.” ~*Goodfellas*

As I sit in the back of the classroom on another day of group presentations, my ears perk up when I hear a student presenter make the following claim to his classmates—“No one wants to be the one who rats out their friends, right?” The presumptive answer elucidates a clear pedagogical insight for teaching ethics: students already understand more than they, or we as teachers, might expect. I do not mean this in the Platonic sense of recollection of some innate knowledge, like that elucidated in the *Meno*. I also do not mean to suggest that young people can already articulate the divergent theories of consequentialism, or libertarianism, or natural law. I have observed, however, that students feel a certain logical pull in particular directions and tend to employ the language of ethical thinking, even without fully comprehending what it is they believe or why they believe it. While there is much to problematize about the epigraph’s context of “mafia virtue,” the logic of communal solidarity is sound and speaks truth to young people. The remaining challenge is to teach developing moral agents the ability to discern when, in what context, and for what reason one should *not* “keep your mouth shut.”

The student presenter exploring the obligatory test of Kantian deontology—“what do you say to a Nazi who asks if you are hiding a Jewish family in your basement?”—has unknowingly made an appeal to virtue ethics. This student has imagined himself in such a scenario, and discerned (correctly) that there could be no worse action than the betrayal of the Jewish family. While he cannot yet be sure where he stands on the categorical imperative, the student certainly knows, at an almost unconscious level, that true friendship and true citizenship require the virtues of loyalty and courage. Loyalty to the state of fascist Germany should not, in this case, trump one’s bond of loyalty to the innocent family endangered by that regime. In order to respond virtuously in this scenario, the individual will need to understand the complexities of the virtue of justice and employ the virtue of courage. Although this student never uttered the word *virtue*, nor would he naturally choose to use that term, he is certainly capable of working through this kind of reasoning with his classmates. The remarkable lesson to be learned is that teaching philosophy and ethics to high school students is not, as many presume, casting pearls before swine. But rather, by meeting students in their own experiences, teachers can effectively engage with and expand the language of value and virtue that is hidden beneath the surface of ordinary, practical living.

In a world that has distanced itself from teaching ethics at the high school level, the term “social justice” can have little more than a subjective meaning. In such a state of affairs, students lack a coherent moral language, yet frequently (and strongly) assert their opinions, inevitably

grasping at contradictory justifications. The best indication of this linguistic moral impasse results when students are asked to explain why they reject what should be obvious moral evils, like slavery. The classroom dialogue usually proceeds as follows. All students say, “that is just wrong!” but most are unable to articulate *why*. The first typical explanation is that society rejects such behavior as bad. This sort of majoritarian argument fails to hold up against the claim that society used to think otherwise or that some societies could still think that way again. I urge students to dig deeper to appreciate what specifically makes the practice of enslavement wrong. Someone is bound to bring up human rights, or in a particularly Catholic class, someone will throw out words like “human dignity,” or “immoral.” Very quickly, the class devolves into trying to find some authority that could grant “rights” and “dignity” to human beings or could dictate what sort of behavior is “moral” or “immoral.” Often, the first answer is God, before I point out that in a pluralistic society such as ours, people believe in many different versions of God, and disagree on what constitutes a human right. The next logical answer given is “the government,” which could mandate strict adherence to an established legal system. As soon as the class gets on this track it is not long before most students realize that the nation’s laws once upheld segregation and slavery, that legal codes differ across cultures, and that there are current laws in so-called “advanced democracies” that many would consider unjust, but others would not. The final straw occurs when a staunch defender of “dignity” takes a position against slavery but in the next breath is *unwilling* to condemn the state sanctioned death penalty or indiscriminate drone bombings of civilians abroad. At this point, the class will sit back in frustration at their inability to denounce what everyone in the room agrees upon—slavery is wrong.

The consternation that students feel is but a reflection of the societal-wide collapse of a shared moral language. The collective reaction, then, is often a lapse into moral relativism or individual expressivism—something is “good” for an individual based on personal preference and something is deemed “bad” for another group because of the opinion of that group.¹ In this case, there does not seem to be agreed upon standards of moral adjudication, thus, the discipline of ethics finds itself in a desperate predicament. For the average high school student, ethical deliberation and moral authority becomes either radically individualist or determined by the majoritarian assertions of raw power by the nation-state. Deprived as we are of moral language and moral criteria to rationally debate normative standards, there appears no way to justify any particular life choices over any other, nor are we capable of advancing or critiquing the collective choices that we make together as a society.

Personal questions of “ought” and “ought-not” as they pertain to everyday living cannot be left for children to work out on their own. Even with innate instincts about the good, no parent or teacher of children (or adults for that matter) would be so foolish as to confuse someone’s good disposition with virtue. As philosopher Julia Annas articulates, virtue must be something that is persistent, reliable, dynamic, and characteristic of the person.² In other words, one good action does not a virtuous person make (parents of teenagers can surely attest). While it is true that human beings may be born with natural tendencies and motivations, virtues can only be acquired through educational formation in consultation others, and by practical experience and habituation.³ All moral agents, especially young ones, need to play around in the sandbox of the virtues—discussing, imagining, reflecting, and practicing. Good dispositions and life-lessons will

be squandered without the occasion for teachable moments in the relative safety of the classroom. Learning how to choose well requires other people; or to echo Charles Taylor, “one cannot be a self on one’s own.”⁴ Individuals engaging the world around them cannot make sense of its rightness or wrongness without acknowledging their “web of interlocution”⁵—the ongoing process of self-identity that references one’s communal embeddedness. If the tradition of ethics is excised from classrooms, young people are left, much like the post-apocalyptic scientist in Alasdair MacIntyre’s thought experiment of *After Virtue*, to form their individual worldviews from the pieces of disparate frameworks. The goal of teaching ethics in high school then, should be to arm students with the linguistic facility to better articulate their already-held convictions and to authentically challenge their pre-conceived societal notions, encouraging them to raise their voices in protest of injustice.

Since I started teaching at Catholic high schools, the in-vogue way to relate to young people has been to teach “social justice.” But this phrase, “social justice,” is in danger of being reduced to a buzzword, muddled with virtue signaling, or worse, a political litmus test in the already contentious and divisive “culture wars.” Those who are prone to use the phrase positively seem rarely to have a good sense of what it means, philosophically or theologically, and act as though the expression were merely a self-explanatory slogan. Conversely, those who have been politically primed to respond negatively to “social-justice-warriors” (or SJW’s for internet trolls) are quite adept at deconstructing the partisan agendas that often govern such viewpoints. These opponents of SJW’s would nevertheless still speak of “justice” or “law and order” when it comes to criminality, illegal immigration, or terrorism. So, whose justice are we talking about?

In the end, “keeping one’s mouth shut” on social issues of injustice can only ever be contested if we, as a school, a city, a community, a nation, are willing to enter a dialogue that effectively defines what words like justice mean. If we are unable to have this conversation, then merely asserting that we deal with “social justice themes” in curriculum meetings still leaves students trapped in a cul-de-sac of moral thinking. The goals of justice within Catholic Social Teaching can only be explained and taught if the perspectival language games are kept at bay. Since teaching in a Catholic school is no longer enough to warrant Baltimore-Catechism-level-obedience to particular viewpoints, schools must seek to find new ways to respond to these questions and to articulate a coherent narrative that is relatable to the experiences of young people. Schools and communities of faith, like Central Catholic and the Brother David S. Baginski, FSC. Scholars Program, have resources within their traditions to engage students on issues of virtuous living. Ultimately, students need practice with, and education about moral reasoning, which necessitates a turn toward teaching the language of virtue.

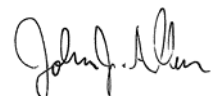
1. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

2. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-10.

3. This is a synthesis of the language used by Julia Annas and Alasdair MacIntyre.

4. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 36.

5. Taylor, 36.



John J. Allen, M.A.
Director, The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program



LET'S PRAC



Area of a Triangle
$$A = \frac{1}{2}bh$$

The area of a triangle is half the product of its base and height.







Listen Closely: Applying a New Criticism of Popular Music to the Study of Progressive Rock

Liam Tinker — Popular Music Studies

This thesis constructs a new framework for formal discourse about popular music based on the communicative, rather than aesthetic, capacity of music. It begins with a brief discussion of the philosophy of music, juxtaposing the autonomous definition of music with a communicative one. By analyzing the history of popular music criticism and its original evaluative norm (authenticity) it is argued that critics have tacitly conceded an aesthetic view of music. The dissolution of music criticism in recent years is shown to be a result of this fact, as social media has eliminated the need for the aesthetic critic, or reviewer. Starting with the aforementioned communicative definition of music, the thesis builds a new framework for formal musical discourse based on Edward Cone's conception of the critic. A philosophical vocabulary derived from Wittgenstein's language theory and the concept of qualia is then assembled for use across the remaining chapters. The latter half of the thesis applies a new critical attitude toward music to the analysis of the progressive rock songs "Aqualung" and "Man-Erg" by Jethro Tull and Van der Graaf Generator, respectively. By interpreting the songs in question, the thesis explores and demonstrates the ability of mature music criticism to deepen the listening experience, and validates the need for a rich discourse of popular music generally.

Reader: Justin O'Connor, English





The Senior Defense by Christian Farls, 2021.
Loosely based on Rudolf Julius Benno Hübner's *Disputation*, 1863-1866.



HUMANITIES

Third Spaces that Bring Communities Together: A Narrative Inquiry into Pittsburgh's Polish Hill, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Central Catholic High School

William Koloc — Philosophy

As the sprawling suburbs grow and neoliberal life leads us deeper into postmodern anomie, the number of shared communal spaces in America continues to dwindle. These “third spaces”—the informal gathering areas that allow people to unwind and develop a sense of belonging in their communities—seem to be all but a thing of the past. Using the work of urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg and Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre as a framework, this thesis offers an account of the collapse of third spaces in America and examines three case studies: Polish Hill (a once-vibrant Pittsburgh ethnic neighborhood turned post-industrial ghost town), Alcoholics Anonymous (an international fellowship of addicts who hold meetings to aid in recovery), and Central Catholic High School (a private Pittsburgh educational institution). These spaces may seem like eclectic and unrelated entities, but they come together to form a robust narrative of third spaces that explains what happened, what options we have left, and where we can look to enact change. The first part of the thesis involves a spatial historiography of Polish Hill that offers insight into the specific social phenomena that prevent the formation of third spaces in contemporary America. Then, the thesis pivots to study of Alcoholics Anonymous that includes an ethnography based on my observations of Zoom AA meetings, which reveals that recovering addicts are still able to engage in third spaces because of their shared purpose of maintaining sobriety. The last section offers a reflection on the space defying Central Catholic and how the insight gained from the tight-knit community of Polish Hill and the unifying end goal of AA can be implemented to allow the school to become a more effective third space environment. Ultimately, this thesis reveals that spaces where we can explore ourselves outside of work and home are pivotal to building meaningful human relationships and finding out who we are, and we must orient our narratives towards shared ends grounded in a retelling of the past to rebuild third spaces.

Reader: Justin O'Connor, English

Do-*ing* The Right Thing: How White Filmmakers Fail to Challenge the American Power Structure

Jude Sweeney — Humanities / Film Studies

This thesis demonstrates the problem with black filmmaking and white filmmaking representing black lives in Hollywood. The major question of this thesis is whether black films are appropriately represented in Hollywood and if black films about black lives are more well-regarded than white films about black lives, two very different perspectives on Americanism. The thesis' hypothesis is that black films about black lives are less well-regarded because they are more challenging to the white, American way of life than white films about black lives and racial tensions are. The goal of this thesis is to examine this phenomenon by focusing on the award practices of the Academy. By examining four films, two directed by Spike Lee, and two by white filmmakers that overshadowed Lee's films at the Academy Awards, this thesis demonstrates that, because of the challenging nature to the power structure of America present in Lee's films, they are less well-regarded at the Academy Awards, and white films, much less challenging to the power structure, are much more well-regarded, shown in 2018's *Green Book* and 1989's *Driving Miss Daisy*, in comparison to Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* and *Do The Right Thing*. Using these findings, it was concluded that these black films that are challenging to the power structure of white America are less recognized and lauded than their white counterparts.

Reader: Darius McGhee, Freshman Dean



The Negation of Communal Meaning as a Postmodern Film Trend

Riley Walsh — Film Studies

Though often regarded for its entertainment value, film is a medium through which metanarratives can be conveyed—overarching ideological beliefs. Be it Enlightenment rationality or Marxist class struggle, the human experience has long been defined by our subscription to these ideas. Film, as a loci of these metanarratives, once unified the audience behind its content. Yet in recent decades, a new style has emerged in American popular cinema: the ‘postmodern’ film. Eschewing a central message altogether, these works task audience members with devising their own individual meaning. This thesis observes how popular film has abandoned its communal function and considers what is now at stake. It begins by tracing the history of cinema back to Soviet montage theory in the 1920s. The postmodern philosophical project is examined, particularly how its tenets pervaded into the film industry during the French New Wave of the late 1950s. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of public and private reality is employed as a framework for understanding how films communicate meaning to their audience. Two case studies are then analyzed: Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* (1941) as a modernist film and Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994) as an exemplar of postmodern film, which together illustrate how the medium has departed from what it once was.

Reader: Justin O’Connor, English

SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Echo Chamber of Drone Warfare: How a Lack of Transparency has Led to Stagnant Reform

John D. Evans — Foreign Policy

Drone strikes have become one of the most common ways for the Central Intelligence Agency and the United States military to fight terrorism in the Middle East. In the eyes of several top United States generals and the past two presidents, this strategy has been extremely effective in fighting against terrorism since 9/11. However, the evidence seems to strongly disagree with these assertions. I highlight the major issues that were seen with the Obama administration with regards to drones strikes. Such issues include a lack of transparency, false reporting of civilian casualties, illegal drone strike practices, and severe backlash from nations where drones operate. In the Trump administration, those same issues still exist, but greater use of the CIA and more vague definitions of who is considered a terrorist have caused severe issues as well. Several options for reforming drone strikes have been offered in recent years. However, these plans do not account for the issue of feasibility and assume that these reforms would be automatically practiced and adhered to. I argue that because of lack of transparency and oversight, past precedence, and unwillingness for change within drone warfare, there is no possibility that these changes would be adhered to fully, let alone implemented by the CIA and the United States military. This results in an endless cycle of either purposefully ineffective reform, damaging reform policies, or no true change from the status quo.

Reader: Justin Morgan, English

Separate and Unequal: An Examination of Systemic Racial Inequality in American Public Education

Anthony Gatti — Education / Social Work

The racial inequality in the American public education system is a pervasive issue that has no simple solution but can be improved upon by addressing multiple factors that feed into it. In this thesis, I explore the three main types of inequality—economical, geographical, and societal—to show how they each require a separate solution to best combat the injustices at hand. I give a background of the various funding models to show how there is often a sizable divide in the distribution of capital between the affluent white schools and the urban, primarily minority schools. Shifting to a geographic approach, I give an analysis of redlining and the gerrymandering of attendance zones and how they work to continue segregation in modern schools. I address the ineffective curriculum development of school boards and the social effects that stem from the previous issues as well, particularly the psychological consequences that are instilled. By giving a background for each of these routes I demonstrate that it is a complex, multifaceted issue, most effectively fought this with a three-pronged approach that individually combats each of the three aspects of the issue. This is intended to be a guide for addressing how the aforementioned problems manifest in any given city and how to approach the ramification of inequality instead of a universal targeted solution.

Reader: Darius McGhee, Freshman Dean



Humanizing Foreign Policy: The Postwar US-Iraq Relationship

Nicholas C. Marshall — International Relations / Political Science

This thesis asserts that the US has a duty to aid Iraq's people in building a robust government and improving their quality of life through the provision of humanitarian aid. US foreign policy is designed, as Donald Trump's administration euphemized, "America first," with the goal of protecting American interests even at the expense of other countries. However, the US must recognize its role in foreign wars and their destructive impacts on other countries' civilian populations. This thesis is especially focused on a postwar Iraq and its relationship with the US. In order to examine that relationship, I have to work from an idea of what relationships are and how they are formed. I find this information in the English and Arabic texts of the *Strategic Framework Agreement* and then use this to guide the recommendations. The recommendations and historical analysis are guided by Afghanistan's President, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, and an American historian and policy advisor, Dr. Jeremi Suri. This work focuses on Iraq yet leads to an approach that can be applied to many US relationships with other forgotten or broken countries.

Reader: Matthew Sczweck, History



SOCIAL SCIENCES

Combating the Complex Issue of Racism by Re-examining Whiteness

Christian J. Moreland — Ethnic Studies

One version of race, and racism, doesn't suffice. After all, they are complex and contemporaneous forces. Instead, there are multiple definitions of race and racism and the desire for more: working together, even if in different areas of the culture through a clever division of linguistic labor. It is a disease, a plague, a card, or Original Sin. For much of American history, race has been black culture's issue; racism, a black person's burden. Or, substitute black people with any person of color, and you've got the same problem. Whiteness, however, has remained, as Amiri Baraka states, the "changing same:" a fluid concept that remains dominant, and a specific definition of race is essential. My thesis examines whiteness and the reality it has fabricated. Oversimplified metaphors, implicit bias, colorblind racism, the social construction of race, and a connection to institutional control and legal authority reveal a mind crazed by dominance. By examining the works of various authors—and critically analyzing the racial disparities in Pittsburgh in particular—my thesis argues that we must recognize that whiteness has only instigated injustice by creating a multitude of definitions that result in a misunderstanding of racism. By establishing its systemically internalized nature, my thesis works towards redefining racism by re-examining the problem outside of black culture.

Reader: Ashley Salamacha, Department Chair, English

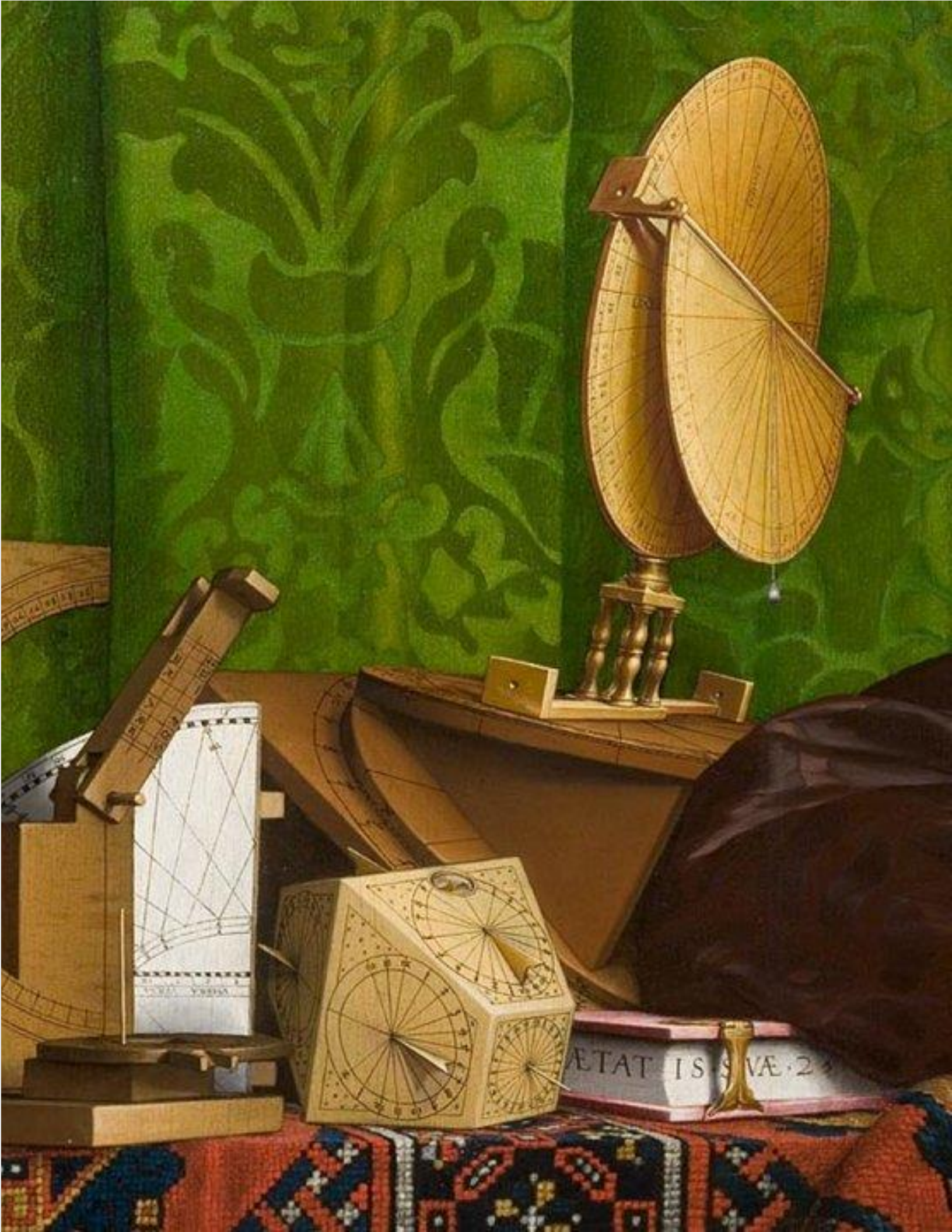
SOCIAL SCIENCES

Politics and Clicks: Amending Social Media's Problem with Political Polarization

Thomas J. Muha — Political Science / Communication

This thesis works to assess the rising problem of increased political fragmentation in the United States that is caused by social media. Through examining increasing division in America, as well as on social media, I have created guiding ideas for future legislation that works to create a social media that no longer promotes extensive division amongst its users. The past, present, and probable future of political fragmentation and polarization is first examined to understand the previous causes of great increases in tension compared to the rise of tension seen from 1990-2021(current day). The thesis then shifts to focus on the current regulation of social media along with how it has lent to the current rise of division. This examination provides insight into where the greatest problems are within its current state and what are the sections most in need of change. Through an understanding of the previous instances of heightened division in the nation as well as an understanding of the highly problematic parts of social media that have directly lent to the rise of restlessness, I then compare plans to create new regulatory ideas for social media that work to regulate and assure that political polarization will not rise beyond its current levels as a result of social media.

Reader: Chelsey Rovesti, Director of Communications



Beyond the Black and Gold: The Results of Gentrification and Redlining in Pittsburgh

Kaleo A. Rodriguez — Community Organization and Advocacy /History

This thesis exposes the history and impact that redlining and gentrification have had on the historical city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and how the two processes have caused the destruction of neighborhood's communities and culture. Understanding and knowing the past is crucial to working through and evaluating the present day. This thesis gives an assessment of where these issues began as well as how they became known as what they are today through the use of historic documentation as well as analyzing the research that has been done on the topic. I also assess the impacts on the city and the people that live there and how the community and culture as a whole has been affected. I analyze two historically Black neighborhoods that have been subject to the effects of redlining and housing discrimination as well as how the city plans to restructure the areas through the plans that have been proposed by the city and neighborhood. By breaking down and analyzing these documents, it shows how an area changes through the gentrification process as well as how it came to be a subject of the process in the first place. Finally, I assess what possible solutions there may be in order to correct for the wrongs done in the past. In addition, this thesis clears up some of the misinformation that came about recently as well as shows how we, as a whole, are still affected by the past.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English



SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Death of the Beautiful Game: Why Professional Football Must Reexamine its Values Amid Rapid Commercialization

Oliver P. Sebastian — Sports Economics / Ethics

European soccer is hurting. Problematic practices in all facets of the game, particularly on the business side, have only been amplified by the coronavirus pandemic. At the highest level of the sport's governance, primarily concerning FIFA and UEFA, attempts to regulate the finances of clubs has largely resulted in a massive wealth and competitive disparity. The sport has become disinteresting, with it increasingly more difficult to dislodge the elite teams of spots in European competition. Fundamentally, those below the "top 1%" of clubs in terms of wealth face a massive gulf in competitiveness. There may be a solution, however. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre proposed in his famous 1981 book, *After Virtue*, a system of ethics attempting to bring Aristotelian virtue ethics into a post-structural world. A clear connection between MacIntyre's virtues ethics and soccer became apparent. To show how his ethics can be applied to the sport's decision-making, this paper will first provide an outline of MacIntyre's ideas. Secondly, the complexities of European soccer will be explained. Next, the ethical issues that need remedied will be explained, as well as how they connect to MacIntyre's ethics. After that, examples will be given of clubs who exclusively prioritize either external or internal goods. Finally, a synthesis will be proposed of the club that can treat virtue as a necessity yet remain highly competitive.

Reader: Kurt Retenauer, English

Sustainability in the Automotive Industry as a Social Issue in Modern America

Henry Shaver — Environmental Studies / Ethics

With an increase in globalization and consumerism, the Earth faces countless challenges with regards to its natural well-being. What's more, humans are tasked with the responsibility of enacting positive change yet remain largely unable to do so. This thesis examines the role of the automotive industry within America, focusing on numerous car types and their ability to serve as practical and sustainable options for the American population at large. Factors such as affordability, accessibility, and functionality are analyzed in order to contextualize the plight of the automotive industry and the direction which it is heading in. This thesis provides a multifaceted approach whereby the consumer and the automotive industry itself can be evaluated. Delving into the motivations of the consumer through the lens of De Tocqueville in addition to examining the products of the automotive industry ultimately presents the most effective option to combat negative environmental impact. Previous research indicates that the most sustainable automobiles are often the least affordable, in turn comprising a minute portion of the automobiles within America. Not only does the industry lack practicality, but the population of America itself lacks an element of social awareness necessary to make use of the products provided. Outlining the current economic and environmental impact of various types of vehicles, this thesis provides relevant background in order to incorporate a basic element of everyday life and adapt it to create meaningful change from a consumer standpoint. Embracing collective responsibility and motivating individuals within their own communities will create the social climate necessary to foster environmental progress. This thesis concludes that a perception in which realizes environmental issues as social issues that are personal to each and every one of Americans will allow for widespread positive change and provide the framework necessary to apply the benefits of a certain type of vehicle in each area of life.

Reader: Andrew Sweeney, Mathematics



More Than the Sum of Your Genes: A Communitarian Response to the Neo-Eugenic Threat of CRISPR-Cas9 Biotechnology

Gino A. DiMatteo — Bioethics

The ongoing dialogue between science and philosophy regarding the ethics of CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing technology has cautioned the rise of neo-eugenics in the near future and rattled the codified principle of genetic determinism. My thesis begins by considering the history of eugenics, from its initiation by Francis Galton, to its traction in the United States and influence on formulating Nazi Germany's concept of the Aryan race. These observations of the past help to inform the present-day sentiments surrounding a "fit" and "unfit" dichotomy and display the plausibility of society once again accepting eugenic ideals. Then, by analyzing the complexities and consequences of genetic determinism and modification on self and communal identity as illustrated in the 1997 sci-fi film, *Gattaca*, I perform an inductive study of how CRISPR-Cas9's introduction into the current dynamics of American economics could only further exacerbate the stratification of society. My findings lead to a solution that is grounded in reforming the bonds of community that have been fragmented by postmodernity's conflict of wills. I propose a model where an interdisciplinary genetics committee is brought together around a common language of *giftedness* to adjudicate prospective CRISPR-Cas9 patients as being in one of four categories: critical, non-critical, ease of life, and cosmetic. While the development of this committee aims to reconcile the goals of science and philosophy with a solution that satisfies both, it also prompts a reconsideration of the current paradigm of human nature. Rather than seeing ourselves as nothing more than the sum of our genes and striving for total perfection by any means necessary, humanity needs to revere the natural gifts and talents in every individual and seek to engage more fully in community with one another.

Reader: Mark Krotec, Science



APPLIED SCIENCES

The Math and the Matter: An Ethical Examination of Human Reliance on Algorithms

Christian Farls — Computer Science / Technological Ethics

One of the largest issues surrounding the use of software-based algorithms, specifically those used in decision-making processes, is their ability to become biased. Aside from unconscious flaws, some argue that there are distinct human qualities important to completing tasks—qualities that algorithms cannot replicate. So, the question arises: can we fully rely on algorithms to stand in for humans? This thesis proposes a solution to help both users and developers minimize and expose bias in decision-making processes with which algorithms are involved. Research evaluates the severity of consequences resulting from errors of algorithmic biases as well as various perceptions of algorithms and the discourse surrounding their structure and function. My thesis begins by defining the algorithm and understanding how they are developed. The thesis next differentiates between human and algorithmic biases, discussing how algorithms may develop flaws in an attempt to locate steps in the development process where errors can occur. I then speak to how an algorithm can be considered “biased” and why it is important that we use algorithms to recognize biases. Finally, I introduce the Farls Factor—a protocol stating that the amount of human impact should be proportional to the amount of human involvement when implementing algorithms in decision making processes—to determine the most effective way to minimize bias and arrive at holistic conclusions.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English

Rebuilding the American Diet: An Examination into the USDA's Dietary Recommendations and How to Correct Them

Matt Zagrocki — Nutrition Science

Despite rising obesity rates, cardiovascular disease deaths, and health care costs, the obesity epidemic is often overlooked as one of the worst health crises in American history. Obesity related illnesses are estimated to kill over 600,000 Americans yearly, a figure that has continued to rise over the past forty years. It is believed this is not so much due to malnourishment or a poor diet, as many Americans have access to quality food, but more so an incorrect one. This paper seeks to examine and criticize the recommendations set forth by the United States Department of Agriculture through scientific studies, and through those studies, provide alternate diet recommendations which are healthier for the human body. The paper has been broken down into four chapters to address this issue. The first chapter will introduce the history of the USDA's recommendations and possible issues that were unaccounted for previous to publishing. The second chapter will cover the scientific reasoning and physiology that supports a specific way of eating, specifically a diet that consists of a very low percentage of carbohydrates. Chapter three will address misconceptions surrounding fasting, sodium, and cholesterol, and seek to correct those. Lastly, chapter four will advocate for resolution through a new government agency and revised dietary recommendation. With this new agency and accompanying recommendation, America can hopefully come a step closer to reducing obesity and the detrimental health effects brought along with it.

Reader: Andrew Sweeney, Mathematics

and you were with me all the time...

MORE THAN THE SUM OF YOUR
GENES: A COMMUNITARIAN
RESPONSE TO THE NEO-EUGENIC
THREAT OF CRISPR-CAS9
BIOTECHNOLOGY



the time..." -St. Augustine



A LEGACY OF IDEAS

No amount of enzymatic cut-and-pastes can remove and replace what it truly means to be human.

—Gino A. DiMatteo

The lack of transparency with drone operations has led to a situation where reform is currently not possible.

—John D. Evans

Algorithmic biases can tell us a lot about our own approaches to making decisions—imperfect, yet improvable.

—Christian A. Farls

How can the American education system serve all children while inequality runs rampant?

—Anthony Gatti

Central Catholic has the population, framework, and history to flourish, but as our shared identity fades, we are a brotherhood that is still connected without entirely knowing why.

—William Koloc

Foreign policy must be predicated on friendship.

—Nicholas C. Marshall

Racism cannot be combated on multiple fronts; a single definition that recognizes the complexity of injustice is require.

—Christian J. Moreland

Social media has the power to threaten democracy and divide us further when left unchecked.

—Thomas J. Muha

A LEGACY OF IDEAS

Redlining and gentrification has lead to the tearing apart of primarily low-income minority neighborhoods.

—Kaleo A. Rodriguez

Environmental progress in the automotive industry requires embracing collective responsibility among consumers.

—Henry Shaver

Greed has corrupted European soccer and must be eliminated for the sport to return to its status as “the beautiful game.”

—Oliver P. Sebastian

Doing the right thing IS dismantling the American power structure

—Jude Sweeney

If we as a society care about music—and we should—we have a responsibility to engage with it at the highest level we can and share our observations with others.

—Liam Tinker

Film is a language that can communicate narratives to its audience.

—Riley Walsh

You must eat to live, not live to eat. Don't dig your grave with your own fork.

—Matt Zagrocki

NOTES

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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program is to foster intellectual, cultural and ethical growth essential to leadership in the service of humanity.

Participation in this program provides Scholars with foundations and opportunities in: intellectual curiosity, civic engagement, balance, diversity of perspectives, leadership, creativity, innovation, experiential learning, applied learning, integrity, effective communication, building community.

A deeper goal of the Baginski Program is to motivate Scholars to reach beyond their individual niches and to understand that they can effect justice in society and, in fact, have a responsibility to do so.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program was created in 2002 by Brother Richard Grzeskiewicz in honor of the beloved teacher and Vice Principal for whom the program is named. Embodied by three related concepts — scholarship, citizenship and discipleship, it offers an engaging intellectual forum to highly motivated students. These students become part of a community of peers and faculty advisors and meet regularly through seminars, mentoring, programmatic retreats/trips, and symposia.

Students in the program prepare for advanced studies at the university level through a liberal arts curriculum that is interdisciplinary and multi-faceted. In Junior Humanities Seminar, students will engage in critical inquiry, social justice perspectives and community-focused service projects rooted in the Lasallian tradition. In their Senior year, students will use the skills they have acquired to develop, defend and present an original research thesis.

At its core, the program is designed to encourage students to understand the intrinsic connections between their intellectual development and their responsibilities as global citizens. Many of the enrichment activities offered by the program are fueled by this intent.



WELCOME AND PRAYER

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC

OPENING REMARKS

Patrizia Costa, Ph.D
Director, Scholars Program

PRESENTATIONS

Class of 2021

CLOSING REMARKS

John J. Allen, M.A
Director, Scholars Program

AWARDS

Outstanding Work on the Thesis
Best Thesis
Distinguished Mentor Award

Program

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL
SENIOR SYMPOSIA
MAY 18, 19, 20, 2021

