



20TH ANNUAL

SENIOR THESIS SYMPOSIA

THE BROTHER DAVID S. BAGINSKI FSC
SCHOLARS PROGRAM
2024



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Song of *Ourselves*: Redefining the Corruption of the American Dream with Walt Whitman's Communitarian Ideals

Charlie Colantonio — English Literature

Changes in the opportunities and the end goal of the American Dream have led to its corruption. This thesis investigates the evolution of the American Dream through a developmental and comparative literary lens using works from across eras. The corruption of the Dream can be seen in the move away from an interdependent and communitarian society, envisioned through the work of Walt Whitman. The problems that have arisen from the movement away from Whitman's idealized community are seen through the exclusionary conflicts portrayed in the works of James Welch, addressing the disenfranchisement and displacement of Native Americans. Continuing into the Harlem era, themes of exclusion and oppression become apparent particularly in Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem" and Ann Petry's *The Street*. This exclusion through racism is further denounced in the works of figures of the Civil Rights Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. These authors show the inaccessibility of the American Dream across demographics. In the post WWII era, Sloan Wilson showed the loss of individuality in the pursuit of a common Dream in her novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Additionally, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald showed the lack of fulfillment that comes with the accepted Dream and the harms that come along with striving to achieve it. Conversely, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* showed that an active rejection of the common Dream still results in an undesirable outcome. The discussed literature shows the faults of the American Dream, serving as a call to action for us to move towards a more communitarian society.

Reader: Justin Morgan, English

SOCIAL SCIENCES

The People of *Garry's Mod*: A Sociological Analyses of Online Video Game Communities and Their Effect Upon People

Luka DePasquale — Game Studies

Video games have changed society. As these games have had their humble beginnings, being just a simple form of entertainment, they now hold the power to affect the actions of the players who interacts with them. This thesis will explore how "video game sociality" combined with "The Proteus Effect" can be used to view a game as unique as *Garry's Mod* to understand how people interact within the virtual social world and how it can change the way they socialize. "Video game sociality" will be used to decode the various aspects of these online virtual realms, while "The Proteus Effect" will explore how their personality illuminate the changes in the person playing . These ideas include the prospect of anonymity, server moderation, and Game to Player interaction. These aspects are created by the means of communication through in such games, like text chat and voice chat. These online games lead to both positive social benefits but also harmful and concerning issues how this can be harmful to the player. Using these concepts, *Garry's Mod* will be used to understand how video games can create their own societies, knit social bases and social parlors. The decisions that people make affect their social skills and motivations in the real world. Games like *Garry's Mod* will end up changing one's skills of socialization, making their real-life actions represent what they have done in game. If more sociologists were to analyze these games, then maybe able to understand how people may socialize online and in the future.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English

Car Addiction, Dependence, and Withdrawal in Pittsburgh

Miles Hartlage — Urban Planning

Could you go a day without using a car? This paper aims to find the best ways to reduce dependence on cars for transportation in the Pittsburgh area. Car dependence is harmful to the environment, requires sprawling cities and suburbs, makes the streets more dangerous for everyone, and creates societal disconnection. This paper discusses the pros and cons of multiple possible solutions such as increased density, public transit, traffic calming, electric & autonomous vehicles, cycling, and walkability. Based on that research, this paper presents a series of recommendations, namely: removing exclusionary zoning laws and minimum parking requirements, increasing the frequency and reliability of public transit, and creating a complete network of safe and accessible bike and pedestrian infrastructure. These policies would be the most effective at reducing car dependence in Pittsburgh, creating a safer, more sustainable, and more connected city.

Reader: Fr. Mark Darcy, Religion

Prosthesis Eisegesis: Three Proposals to Promote Prosthetic Accessibility Globally

Michael Hollihan — Bioengineering/Bioethics

My thesis approaches the biggest problem facing the prosthetic industry today, being the lack of prosthetic accessibility throughout the developing world. The prosthetic industry is an ever-growing industry as innovation runs rampant throughout, however, an aspect that often falls to the wayside is the availability of prosthetics. I set out to both identify the causes for this accessibility problem as well as offer proposals to make prosthetics more accessible. The first problem identified was that the way technology was being utilized in prosthetics would inflate cost for the manufacturer and consumer. To amend this issue, I propose manufacturers take advantage of 3D modeling and printing, which would allow for increased production as well as decrease in cost for both consumer and manufacturer. The second issue is that the prosthetic industry is isolated from a large population of patients. I propose the industry spread their realm of influence directly or through third parties into the developing world. The third issue is that the media barely discusses the issue of prosthetic accessibility. Without the necessary discourse brought alongside media presence no progress towards amending this issue is achieved. By implementing this discourse within mass media, the media can hold the industry accountable to their mission statements and make change. With these three proposals, we can see a world where every amputee around the world no longer suffers and has access to prosthetics

Reader: Jacob Good, Science



HUMANITIES

The Best Defense Is a Good Offense: Using the History of Deterrence to Strengthen Its Future in The U.S.

Jalen Hollins— **xxxx**

The act of deterring an adversary became well-known during the impending danger of a nuclear war during The Cold War. Since then, deterrence has not only become more integral within U.S. military strategy but has also expanded to areas aside from the nuclear aspect. My thesis examines specifically cyber, nuclear, and Intrawar deterrence's viability for the U.S. This process is done using multiple case studies for each individual theory of deterrence. For cyber deterrence, the 2007 Estonia and 2008 Georgia cyber attacks were used for a practical display of its strengths and weaknesses. Nuclear deterrence is reinforced through an analysis of specific events that almost pushed the Cold War into direct U.S. and USSR conflict. Lastly, the studies of the war on terror, and the Iraq war are analyzed for how the U.S. can learn from their previous mistakes of using Intrawar deterrence. These recommendations for building up the efficiency of deterrence in the future of America are only applicable if deterrence theory can indeed be a useful tool going forward. My thesis concludes with why the U.S. will need to remain using deterrence as a primary strategy in upcoming potential conflicts.

Reader: Mark Salamacha, Engineering & Computer Science

Ancient Aliens: Shaping our Ethical System for Interaction with Sentient Artificial and/or Extraterrestrial Intelligence

Matthew Jordan — **xxxxx**

What would you do if an alien suddenly appeared at your doorstep? Would you resign out of fear? Would you try to make peace with it? Would you take it hostage? To resolve this dilemma, this study investigates two questions: (1) How will humans interact with sentient lifeforms that could arise from artificial (AI) and extraterrestrial intelligence? (2) Based on the answer to the former question, what ethical system should we build to live in relative harmony with these creatures? This study evaluates Hegel's dialectical idealism and Marx's dialectical materialism to evaluate the principal cause that drives humans to alienate each other into disparate groups. These theories were next situated in the context of a society hosting both human and nonhuman persons in hopes that they can share insight into how humans will interact with nonhuman persons. The findings indicate that dialectical idealism and materialism do not account for the differences in morality and intellect that may exist between humans and nonhuman persons, and thus our ethical system cannot employ an anthropocentric approach. It was also determined that, in light of ongoing attempts to message extraterrestrial intelligence and advance AI, the inability to equate interpersonal interaction among humans to that between humans and nonhuman persons does warrant changes to our ethical system that enable humans to accept nonhuman persons into society. This study offers suggestions for how to construct a new ethical model that allows sentient AI and/or intelligent extraterrestrial life to exist in relative harmony alongside humankind, including a Christian ethics approach. These recommendations extend especially to any policymakers, ethicists, or philosophers who may eventually find themselves pressed to integrate nonhuman persons into human society. This study also strives to evoke more discussion on the topic of sentient AI and/or intelligent extraterrestrials so that the public better understands some of the implications of living alongside these creatures.

Reader: Theodore Rectenwald, World Languages

SOCIAL SCIENCES

It's Not Just For Kids: Proposed Improvements for Societal Services and Workplace Accommodations for Autistic Adults

Jack Kaczmariski — [Autism Behavioral Studies](#)

In the year 2000, one out of every 150 people were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. In the current day, that number has jumped to one out of thirty-six. Autism has typically been seen as a condition for children, and many services are exclusive to children as a result. However, accommodations for autistic adults have largely been ignored over time. Both morally and economically, we must make improvements for autistic adults. This thesis seeks to investigate the current state of services and makes recommendations regarding how these services can be improved. In this thesis, I detail two distinct paths for autistic adults: the workforce and higher education. For this study, I conducted both analyses of current legislation and services and interviews with experts in the field of transition-age autistic people. These analyses revealed notable insufficiencies in the current state of services. After synthesizing both the contents of the interviews and the legislation; I proposed several improvements. Regarding the workplace, I propose general sensory accommodations, including toned-down lights, modified uniforms, complementary earplugs, and dedicated sensory spaces. For autistic adults in secondary and post-secondary education, I propose improvements in administrative communication to families, an expansion of academic eligibility, and an expansion of resources. These improvements will help contribute to the wellness of autistic adults and overarching society as a whole.

Reader: Amy Wienand, Family Support Services



SOCIAL SCIENCES

Aftertaste: Deconstructing the Perpetuated Colonial Dynamics of the Coffee

Luke McCartney — xxxx

Coffee fuels the developed world. Following the colonial transplantation of the crop across the globe, coffee became the bedrock of monocultural economies in the Global South. These producer nations were created solely to direct profits back to their colonizers. After the emergence of slave revolts and greater independence movements in Latin America, these countries were granted independence from their colonizers starting in the late 19th century. Although they became sovereign states, these coffee producing countries were impaired by their monocultural export economies, leading to a reliance on consumer nations—their previous colonial rulers—for economic support, perpetuating their previous colonial status. Using Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, this thesis will analyze the neo-colonial dynamics of the coffee industry through the examination of interactions between nodes on the coffee commodity chain. Furthermore, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony will be used to understand the limits of neoliberal market practices in regards to producers gaining economic agency distinct from their consumer counterparts. Considering this, my thesis pushes for increased transparency and education on the consumer’s part. This is a crucial component with which one can gain economic and political leverage in coffee’s global marketplace.

Reader: Brittany Diebold, History

A Holistic Review of Proposed Solutions to the Problem of School Shootings in the United States and the Way Forward

James Sweeney — *Community Violence Intervention*

In the United States, the rates of school shootings continue to increase, and people and legislators are divided on how best to combat this rise. Assessing critical literature, particularly Dr. Peter Langman’s models on the commonalities of shooters and causes of school shootings, mental health problems and demographic similarities are found to be important considerations. These common characteristics and the details of previous shootings establish the “school shooter mythos,” which describes how and why school shootings continue to proliferate. Commonly proposed solutions are examined and are classified in this thesis as *reactive*, *preventative*, or *proactive*. Reactive measures seek to stop a shooter once they have begun attacking, and include the installation of armed officers and other school security measures. Preventative measures seek to stop a shooter before they attack, and are focused on profiling and investigating at-risk students. Proactive solutions that seek to prevent school shooters from developing, such as social-emotional learning programs and community rehabilitation, are demonstrated to be the most effective in reducing the danger of school shootings.

Reader: Amy Wienand, Family Support Services

A Multicultural Decolonization of Museums and Practices of Archaeology

Kolbe Viator — Anthropology/Museum Ethics

Through a multicultural approach, my thesis explores lingering damages that have permeated our societies through both museums and archaeology practices. Through a *de*-colonial lens, I dissect: (1) The Benin Bronzes and their current residence in the British Museum and how interactions with the current people of Nigeria perpetuate colonial narratives and (2) the storing of indigenous remains and culturally significant items. The latter aims to show the value of indigenous voices in exhibitions, which I encourage through a dynamic museum system. Both studies display a diverse population of remaining colonial systems that are not often considered together. This allows for a more united approach in creating solidarity against a common enemy: colonialism. From the analysis of these examples of colonial power in the world today and in observing movements and policy in progressive museums and the shortcomings of other institutions, I have formulated museum reform suggestions that correspond to the two studies. These are meant to inspire a more active discussion in a movement to truly decolonize our educational systems across the globe beginning at the level of an educated and passionate individual.

Reader: Daniel Perett, World Languages



HUMANITIES

Articulating a Virtue Ethics Based Approach to Environmental Issues with the City of Pittsburgh as a Case Study

William White — **xxx**

As the incipient results of climate change intensify, many have begun to lament at the lack of action that these fledgling disasters have spurred. However, as this thesis alleges, the lack of action seen in the developed world to confront climate change is moreso a consequence of how climate action is typically imagined, as a pointless endeavor or an only minor incursion into the status quo, especially by young people who have grown up living with anticipation of doom. Even worse, these insufficient paradigms dispose their proponents to fall into disillusionment and apathy. This thesis argues for the adoption of a novel paradigm to invigorate the current state of climate action. Drawing from the works of Rosalind Hursthouse, Julia Driver, and Nicholas Austin, among others, such a novel paradigm is described in terms of virtue ethics theory, characterized by the adoption of the virtues of ecophronesis and attunement. This framework seeks to prompt multilateral climate action by cultivating a grassroots desire and guiding an accessible course of action to create a sustainable society. Using this approach, practical recommendations are made for the residents of Pittsburgh to live sustainably. Specifically, the way Pittsburghers think about their diet, transportation, personal land management, religion, commerce and public spaces is reassessed.

Reader: Mark Krotek, Science

More Than a Score: How the SAT Has Failed. What Should Replace It and Better a Student's College Application?

Benjamin Wingerter — **Education**

College admissions are becoming important to an increasing number of students wanting to pursue higher education. However, one part of this process has come under scrutiny for its poor representation of students' academic potential, the SAT. This thesis aims to address the criticism of how the SAT is a poor representation of its students. Furthermore, the thesis also explains different methods of analysis of students than the SAT. Beginning with the net negatives behind standardized testing, the thesis aims to address the amount of socioeconomic discrimination that it places on lower-income students, including the amount of preparation they have for the test. With this foundation, the thesis then looks into more recent changes directed at the SAT, mainly the test-optional policies of colleges and the recently released Digital SAT. These changes did not solve the problems of the original SAT but rather added more problems. The thesis finally suggests the removal of the SAT and replacing it with one of a couple of likely solutions. These solutions include a project-based portfolio, the Classical Learning Test, and Game-Based Assessment. If these solutions were implemented in their ideal conditions, students would be able to show their full potential in their college applications more than the SAT has allowed them to.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English

A LEGACY OF IDEAS

The American Dream does not exist for everyone. Rather, it had digressed from its noble premise to promote an exclusive and individualized success attainable only through the destruction of community. —Charlie Colantonio

Gary's Mod manifests a new way to understand societal interactions through the social relationships of its players.
—Luka DePasquale

Overreliance on cars is driving us crazy. —Miles Hartlage

Losing a limb can derail lives. Why does the prosthetic industry decide whose life gets back on track? —Michael Hollihan

Greater losses can be prevented on both sides of a conflict if one can use fear efficiently. —Jalen Hollins

Humans treasure unique morals and ways of thinking, but these qualities warrant a new ethical system prepared for interaction with another intelligent lifeform. —Matthew Jordan

In order to build a better and more equitable society, we must celebrate and embrace our differences rather than attempt to suppress them. —Jack Kaczmariski

Corporations have become the new colonial figures of the coffee industry, only without the need for physical governance. —Luke McCartney

To reach an effective solution to school shootings, we must supplant the destructive culture surrounding their perpetrators with social-emotional intelligence and connected communities. —James Sweeney

Indigenous voice is an integral part of cultural presentation in ethical practices.
—Kolbe Viator

The way we think about climate action charts a path for how we will respond. It would be invigorated by a virtue ethics framework. —Will White

The SAT has failed to accurately reflect student potential. Possible alternatives indicate better ways to show this potential. —Benjamin Wingerter