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Ph.D. Candidates Deliver Dissertations

Casey Wheatland and Sarah Akey present on Machiavelli and Locke respectively

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Two doctoral students from The Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship at Hillsdale College presented their dissertation research in public presentations this month. [Sarah Akey](#) and [Casey Wheatland](#) had successfully defended their dissertations in front of faculty panels, and both were awarded dissertation honors.

Wheatland shared his doctoral research from his dissertation, titled “Arming the Prophet: A Study of the Political Conflict between Niccolò Machiavelli and Girolamo Savonarola;” and Sarah Akey presented hers, titled “Beyond Toleration: John Locke & the Political Implications of Christianity.”

Wheatland analyzed the connection between Florentine prophet Savonarola and Machiavelli, arguing that “Savonarola gave Machiavelli hope in a model for future prophetic politics.”

“I explain what made Savonarola such a peculiar figure in Renaissance politics, what caused him to fail, and why Machiavelli was actually more impressed by him than most readers assume,” Wheatland said. “I also show how Machiavelli corrected Savonarola's errors by ‘arming’ the next prophet with a new political theology.”

Wheatland argued that, unlike Savonarola, who was unarmed due to his religion, Machiavelli discovered how prophets can force belief to solidify their rule.

Akey’s doctoral research focused on Locke’s understanding of Christianity and politics. She addressed Locke’s belief that Christianity held political weight and contributed to public human flourishing, emphasizing his value of toleration.

“A look at Locke on Christianity and politics is ... also an examination of the inescapable human condition in Locke’s work,” Akey said.

Presentations were followed by Q&A with professors, other graduate students, and friends and family in attendance. College community members were able to attend via livestream. Both students will receive their doctoral degrees during Hillsdale College’s Commencement ceremony in May 2022.

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 6.2 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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