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CONTACT: Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

Michael Driscoll Presents Doctoral Research

Ph.D. student addresses the political thought of John Locke

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College doctoral student Michael Driscoll gave a presentation titled “Could They Be Happier: Law, Morality, and Happiness in the Political Thought of John Locke” on Nov. 10. Driscoll gave the presentation after he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation before a panel of Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship faculty members, including his dissertation director, Thomas G. West.

“Mike’s dissertation challenges those who see Locke exclusively through the lens of natural rights, consent, self-ownership, institutional arrangements, and the like,” said West. “He shows that Locke’s political teaching is in fact erected on a deeper consideration of the role of reason and law in pursuing the happiness we all desire.”

Driscoll’s presentation explored the connection between the pursuit of happiness, morality, and law in the thought of John Locke. “Locke sees happiness and liberty as inextricably linked,” said Driscoll. “Locke thinks men are truly free only when they are striving to achieve genuine happiness.”

Contrary to many contemporary accounts of Locke’s thought, Driscoll argued that Locke cared very much for the morality of persons bound together by social contract, suggesting that Locke even thought government should encourage morality.

“For Locke, the law serves the purpose of deterrence and punishment to those who would violate another’s rights, but it is also a teacher that helps to instruct the members of society in the natural law,” Driscoll said. “The law sets up moral boundary lines that keep men on the high road and prevents them from doing harm to themselves and others in their fits of passion. As a result, the law allows for happiness by preventing men from licentious activity, and thereby preserves their freedom.”

Driscoll entered the Graduate School of Statesmanship in 2017 after receiving his undergraduate degree from Ave Maria University in Florida. Upon successfully defending his dissertation, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics. Driscoll will receive his degree at Hillsdale College’s 171st Commencement Ceremony in May 2023.

The event took place in Hillsdale's Heritage Room and was followed by a brief reception.

For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College Graduate School of Statesmanship

The Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship was founded in 2010 “to educate students in the language of American constitutionalism and to place its graduates in positions of public service in politics, in journalism, in the Academy, and elsewhere.” Its courses of study, which culminate in either a Master of Arts or a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics, are centered around the core texts from the Western and American traditions of political thought — what Thomas Jefferson called the “elementary books of public right.” All admitted students received a full-tuition scholarship and admitted Ph.D. students receive an additional living stipend. For more information, gradschool.hillsdale.edu.

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 6.3 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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