



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 18, 2024

CONTACT:

Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

Hillsdale College Ph.D. Candidate Dennis Clark Presents Doctoral Research

Clark presented research from his dissertation “Corruption and Corruptors: Niccolò Machiavelli and the Problem of Political Patronage.”

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College doctoral candidate Dennis Clark gave a research presentation on his dissertation titled “Corruption and Corruptors: Niccolò Machiavelli and the Problem of Political Patronage” on Nov. 25. Machiavelli was a political philosopher who lived in Florence during the Italian Renaissance and is best known for his work “The Prince.” Clark gave his presentation after successfully defending his dissertation before a faculty panel.

According to Clark, Machiavelli saw political corruption as a consequence of political patronage — the exchange of private favors for private loyalty.

“Within Machiavelli’s scheme, within his thinking, corruption is a product of patronage,” Clark said. “Through this patronage, the patron (the person providing the private favor, the private benefit) transforms his clients (the recipients of that favor and the ones providing the private loyalty) into his partisans (those who are loyal to his person).”

According to Clark, Machiavelli viewed this system as a threat to a republican government and even blamed it for the fall of the Roman republic. On the other hand, Clark argued, he thought it could be useful in a polity ruled by a prince.

“Within Machiavelli’s schema, patronage — this exchange of private benefits for private loyalty — is what he calls corruption,” Clark said. “It produces these partisans, and it shifts the loyalty of the people within a republic away from the polity, or generally from the constitution, and towards these private individuals, who can use these partisans to make themselves into princes,

which for the same reason is why a prince might want to use corruption, might want to use partisanship, might want to use patronage to secure his reign.”

The presentation took place in Lane Hall and was followed by a brief reception. Professor of History Paul Rahe served as Clark’s dissertation chair and provided introductory remarks.

“He has done remarkable work here,” Rahe said. “The dissertation that he’s going to give a talk from in a few moments — really good piece of work, and I think it’s publishable as a book.”

Clark received his Bachelor of Arts from Ashland University in 2018 and his Master of Arts from Hillsdale’s Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship in 2020. Having successfully defended his dissertation, he will earn a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics in December 2024 and receive his diploma at Hillsdale College’s Commencement Ceremony in May 2025.

For a headshot of Clark, click [here](#). For Clark’s student profile, click [here](#). To view the poster for the event, click [here](#).

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, visit 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 6.6 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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