

THE GADFLY

St. John's College
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Common Ground

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THE GADFLY STAFF

COVER	Abigail Poppleton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	Luke Briner
MANAGING EDITOR	El'ad Nichols-Kaufman
STAFF	Meliha Anthony
	Vivian Miyakawa
	Tamar Pinsky
	Louis Rosenberg
	Bennett Scott
LAYOUT	KC Taylor
	Tuyết-Nhi Nghiêm
CONTRIBUTORS	Nicky Jordan
	Ben Maier
	Natalie Goldman
	Audrey Fox

Letter from the Editor

Dear Polity,

We're excited for you to read our third issue of the year!

I want to give a special word of gratitude to our new layout team, Ms. Tuyết-Nhi Nghiêm and Ms. KC Taylor, who begun their work at the *Gadfly* last issue, as well as Ms. Abigail Poppleton, who has and will be continuing to very kindly provide us with her excellent photography. It's because of them that our paper is able to look nearly as good as it does, and they have my and our sincerest thanks.

I also want to personally address the recent demonstration in protest of insufficient tutor compensation organized and executed by tutors Mr. Nicholas Bellinson and Mr. Khafiz Kerimov. Tutors are the guardians and the lifeblood of St. John's, and are accordingly deserving of the highest respect not only from students but from the College itself—and one of the clearest and most important criteria for measuring the degree of that respect must inevitably be the level of material well-being that the College actually affords them with. The *Gadfly*, as an expression of the activity and the will of the student body, is inextricably linked to all conditions surrounding the educational life of that student body, and consequently must be passionately invested in this struggle which is so vital to the essence of that life. It is our very earnest hope that any and all financial ills and wrongs currently suffered by tutors are ameliorated and rectified as swiftly and as completely as possible, and we wholeheartedly support any means by which that may be accomplished. In practice, the *Gadfly* will use its platform to address the situation in three main ways. First, there will have already been coverage of the walk-out itself as well as our Dean's personal reaction to it in the sixth issue of the *Collegian*. Second, within this issue, there is an extended interview by our Managing Editor Mr. El'ad Nichols-Kaufman with Mr. Bellinson and Mr. Kerimov. Third, Mr. Nichols-Kaufman and I will be working together on a significantly larger investigation of financial compensation and insecurity at the College for staff and students as well as for tutors in an upcoming issue. We also encourage our readers to reach out to us with their own respectfully-expressed perspectives on the situation, which we will happily publish in future issues.

Luke Briner,
Editor-in-chief

An Interview With Mr. Bellinson & Mr. Kerimov

By El'ad Nichols-Kaufman



Mr. Kerimov Addressing the Polity During the Walk-Out (Photo by Abigail Poppleton)

On Friday, October 20th, a group of tutors and students walked out of classes ten minutes early to protest tutor pay, in response to a letter calling for action by tutors Nicholas Bellinson and Khafiz Kerimov. We sat down with them to ask about how the protest came about, and what kind of action might be expected moving forward.

Nichols-Kaufman: Could you tell me how this protest came about, and why you decided to have it particularly now?

Bellinson: I think one important thing to say is that we've tried the official channels a number of times. We've talked to the governing bodies of the College, we've shared our concerns, we've said the same things we've said in the letter, we've contextualized them with the data and numbers that have been provided to us, and that is apparently to no avail. We felt that something else was necessary. Why now particularly? Well, with every passing

year, the compensation situation gets worse because of inflation, and things are at a breaking point in some ways. While it's probably true that we could have done this in another month, we wanted to do it as early in the year as possible to give the board and the governance of the College as much time to respond as early in the budgeting season as possible.

Kerimov: Another thing that may have pushed us to do it now, is that as we perceive it, the problem has become visible to students now, which is really disgraceful. In the future, it will only become much more visible. It really felt like we had to act.

B: We had a letter from a recent alum who said that the whole time she was here, she was painfully aware of this problem. I think it's not good for the tutor-student relationship, for students to know this is going on, but at the same time, they do know it's going on, so it seemed to us that pretending it's not going on was not doing anything for anyone.

N-K: What in particular made you choose the walkout as the way to raise this issue?

B: I think we felt that because instruction is being eroded by the problem, it was a form of protest that seemed appropriate to and commensurate with the problem itself. With our letter, we reached a wider audience than we thought, but the actual walkout seemed to us to make a statement about how instruction and potential instruction is lost because of poor compensation.

N-K: At the BVG meeting on Saturday (10/21) they announced they would not be increasing compensation. What are you thinking of doing to move forward now?

B: There are two things to say about that. One is that, in general, we see this as a problem of allocating the resources we already have as a college, and allocating money that's raised in the future, since the only sustainable way to deal with compensation is to fundraise for it. It's not something that will be covered by adjusting tuition or financial aid. We're sure people are worried about that, and we want to make sure that people understand that those are not sustainable routes to raising tutor compensation.

One thing is that modest annual increases to compensation every year would prevent the problem from getting worse, and part of the issue is that the board, in stopping annual increases 15 years ago, they made it so that every year the gap between where we are and where we should be gets larger. It looks like this insurmountable problem that you couldn't possibly throw enough money at, but part of the problem is that they simply do not put any money to it each year. Part of it is setting aside a modest amount every year, but it's also the case that there has been a refusal to fundraise on this particular issue. We think it's clear that students, alumni, and wider members of the St. John's community understand that this is an issue, and they would be responsive to fundraising.

It's true that last year (2022-2023) the College increased pay slightly. That increase is quickly being swallowed by inflation, but it's now being used to justify the refusal to increase pay further. This is exactly why we need a commitment to annual increases corresponding to inflation.

K: Let me add that we have encouraged at multiple faculty meetings the governance of the College to

fundraise to improve tutor compensation, but no such attempts have been made. This is really a problem of priority. The governance of the College, the board, has been taking tutors for granted for fifteen years now. We want a change in priority in how we are allocating the money we have already gathered, think of the freeing minds campaign, but also a change in priority in what we fundraise for. We are moving towards fundraising as the chief source of funding for the college, but the priorities of the governance just don't reflect the reality of what it means for this college to be run. It's so manifest that tutor compensation is not a priority.

B: One more thing to say is that we're often told that there's no money for things. I'm sure you've heard this in other contexts as well, it's not just tutor compensation. But, while it is the case that although there is separate fundraising for capital expenditures, it's also the case that capital expenditures like that do restrict endowment funds, and that's where money for other things on campus come from.

The other thing is although we're always told that there isn't money for tutor compensation, recently the board found money for a possible readjustment of compensation that would be disastrous, which we will probably reject. But it is certainly true that money can be found when there is a will, and the will simply hasn't been there.

N-K: I've heard two arguments made before at board meetings. One is that it's harder to fundraise for pay, and the other is that it is not sustainable to pay people out of fundraising money.

B: Just to clarify what we were saying, fundraising goes into the endowment for the most part. The endowment yields a certain amount of interest every year, which then can be drawn to pay the expenses of the College. That money can be allocated in different ways. There's some question as to whether a separate fund would be the right way, we're not sure about that. It is the case that when you fundraise you tell people, 'this is why you should give money. These are our priorities,' and then you allocate the fund accordingly. It's not so much about fundraising into a particular pool, as it is allocating the funds appropriately.

K: One of the reasons why we did what we did Friday is that we want to bring attention of the wider polity to the issue of tutor compensation. It doesn't

seem to us a ridiculous idea to fundraise for tutor compensation. At the end of the day, the College is about the students and the tutors. How can buildings, moving a coffee shop from one building to another, be a priority compared with making the job of a tutor sustainable? Let's just say I'm not convinced that it's not possible to fundraise specifically for raising tutor compensation. They need to try it.

B: By the way, there are people who work in the fundraising office who want to try it, it's not that the opposition to this is universal. It's kind of an accepted principle of fundraising that you don't fundraise for this, but I don't think that it takes into account that St. John's is different. Our relationship to our students and alumni community is different, the modes of instruction are different, and I don't see why we shouldn't be more creative about our modes of fundraising.

N-K: My last question is, given that this is going to remain an issue, what would you like to see happen moving forward?

B: I think we want to say first that we're really blown away by the student support we've received. We've received many offers from students: 'what can I do,

how can I help?' I just want to say that it's probably the case that in order to determine what the next steps are, we need to wait to get a response from the governance of the college. We haven't received an official response yet, and I'm not sure one is forthcoming. If one is not forthcoming, we'll make our next move (the board has not changed its position as a result of the walkout).

K: We have to wait for the governance to articulate their position, to respond to what happened, and hopefully they do.

We're really impressed by the kind of support we saw on Friday. I don't think this could happen at other schools, and it really shows that when the essence of this College is under threat, students show up to protect it. It's really beautiful.

B: Just as a footnote to that: we'd much rather that students not have to worry about this. We are totally sympathetic to the desire not to burden students with this. But the reason we did what we did in the way that we did is that we believe that now students are burdened with this. Treating students as adults, and as members of the Polity, which is a political community, it's only fair to at least make clear how important the stakes are.



A Polity United: Students Sing "Sicut Cervus" During the Walk-Out (Photo by Abigail Poppleton)

A Brief Note from Your Layout Editor

This issue of the *Gadfly* was originally set to be published on November 2, 2023. The submission deadline for articles was on October 23, 2023. Layout was completed and the final copy sent in for review on November 1, 2023 for the planned publication date of November 2, 2023. The printing of the issue has been delayed due to the desire of the administration of the college to add in the following piece (beginning on the facing page), in response to the interview with Mr. Bellinson and Mr. Kerimov that they saw while reviewing the final copy. Administration insisted on the response being in *this* issue of the *Gadfly* as an immediate reaction to the interview, in order to correct allegedly inaccurate statements made in the interview. This letter was finally sent in to *Gadfly* editors on the morning of November 8, 2023. I have completed the layout with adjustments for this piece — which, I must note as a layout editor, are not as simple as just copy-pasting text in and was indeed a significant inconvenience — as soon as possible as to not delay printing of this issue any further, but I believe it is important for transparency's sake that the polity know the circumstances surrounding the addition of this piece and the delay of the issue's publication.

You may read more about this situation in the *Collegian*, where our managing editor, El'ad Nichols-Kaufman, has provided some additional commentary.

Tuyết-Nhi Nghiêm
Layout editor

Letter from the President: A Response to the Tutor Compensation Walk-Out

By Nora Demleitner

Over the past several weeks, the issue of tutor and staff compensation has become a focus of broader conversation on campus. Although this issue is complex, I am committed to sharing information with the express aim of educating the community about the multitude of factors that influence budgetary decisions, including those around compensation. It is my hope that through both the statement shared by the dean in the Collegian last week, and through this longer and more detailed letter, that the community will start to understand the complexities of this issue more fully.

First and foremost, I wholeheartedly agree that our employees deserve to be compensated at higher levels. They are the lifeblood of this institution, and we could not deliver the education we deliver without them. We are committed to exploring fundraising and other strategies that will help address this issue and will continue to work with our donors and employees as we move forward. At the same time, the issue is a complicated one that I hope to clarify more fully here.

St. John's provides an exceptional education that is also exceptionally expensive: small classes that allow students to get individualized attention and feedback, seminars with two tutors who are all tenure-track or tenured faculty (no adjuncts or graduate assistants), and all in a residential setting on a historic college campus, which requires high levels of maintenance. These realities create many challenges when thinking about how to allocate funds.

It is important for our community, and especially our students, to understand how we operate when thinking about the economic choices we make—whether addressing the cost of higher education by cutting tuition by one-third as we did a few years ago, expanding financial aid support for students, addressing the deferred maintenance on our buildings by committing to residence hall improvements and other renovations, and addressing the very real challenge of compensating our tutors

and staff at the levels we to which we aspire.

Like household budgets, operating budgets consist of revenue and expenses. On the expense side, the St. John's Program is very costly. A St. John's education costs approximately \$65,000 per student annually, even though we receive far less on average from students who attend. Why is it so expensive? Our education is highly individualized. It requires two full-time, tenure-tracked faculty members in three years of seminar; none of our classes besides freshman music are more than 21 students. There are no lecture classes of 50 or 500 (that happens only for Friday night lecture). Because our faculty members are all full-time, they receive full benefits, including excellent medical insurance, generous retirement benefits, and a host of other incidental benefits. And up to a certain level of seniority, every faculty member receives annual step increases, which is the college's language for an annual raise. The college also offers other multiple opportunities, such as summer teaching to augment salaries, and works closely with the tutor compensation committee to address salary issues and discuss, as we currently do, at least some limited proposals to mitigate the most serious impact of our salary structure.

In addition to the high cost of our educational model, our student services are robust. Over the last several years, we have increased student services across multiple areas: mental health and wellness resources, career development services, graduate school preparation, and more. In total, our annual operating expenditure for both campuses exceed \$53 million.

On the revenue side, St. John's draws revenue from two sources: student-derived revenue, which includes tuition and fees plus housing and dining; and donor-derived revenue, which includes the annual fund, dedicated gifts, government and institutional grants, and the endowment draw. On the student-derived revenue front, the college annually receives approximately \$14 million less from students today,



Students Walking Out In Support Of Their Tutors (Photo by Abigail Poppleton)

inflation-adjusted, than we did in 2008. This is a challenging trend seen across higher education. On the donor front, the college's annual fund provides approximately \$3 million annually for operating expenses including salaries and benefits; donor gifts and grants are often restricted to specified uses; and our approximately \$240 million endowment has strict legal requirements around its use: the college may use 5 percent of the endowment annually—which is called the endowment draw—to help fund that year's operating expenses including salaries and benefits.* Balancing the distribution of funds to meet multiple competing needs while honoring donor intent and legal restrictions is never a simple task.

Unlike most colleges, our educational model makes alternative revenue streams challenging to access. We do not have major sporting events, profitable vocational certificate programs, or large money-making online programs. We also choose not to operate at the scale that large institutions do because we believe that real community on a small campus matters, but this means that our per student costs are very high. We don't want to compromise the things we hold most dear: our tight-knit

community, small classes, and a full-time, tenured faculty.

Although we have just completed the successful \$325 million *Freeing Minds* capital campaign, it is important to note that more than \$135 million of the funds raised are bequests and planned gifts, which will not become available to the college for years and even decades. Of the \$190 million received to date, \$80 million went into the endowment. Another \$68 million went toward academic and operational support, which also supports college salaries and benefits. In addition, as part of the campaign, a specific gift of over \$330,000 was spent on faculty support for freshman advising and direct stipends. And another \$41 million was given by donors specifically to support construction projects, and that especially means, in Annapolis, our residence halls.** Anyone living in our residence halls knows that renovating them is not a luxury but an overdue necessity—and some of our donors want to put their resources there.

Fundraising specifically for salaries can be challenging, but is not impossible. It requires a donor who has the will to support us and the capacity to do

so. Because salaries are not one-time costs, we need to fundraise for them in a way that provides consistent, ongoing, annual support. The most effective way to do this is by establishing tutor-related endowments, from which the college could reap 5 percent annually without the underlying principal dropping. We do have some endowments that are uniquely focused on tutor support, but a step forward would be to fundraise specifically for faculty salaries; this may require us to find new and creative avenues, such as endowing the deanship or the associate dean position, endowing rotating faculty positions, or endowing specific functions the college values, such as archons. Those opportunities may resonate with donors who could help us create long-term, year-over-year funds for the ongoing and always rising costs of salaries. Should we be successful at finding interested donors, the solution would not arrive overnight as endowments take some time to build but would allow our small but outstanding fundraising team to make specific requests for donor support of salaries.

Last year, we were happy to be able to raise tutor and staff salaries (separately from tutors' annual step increases) but were not in a position to do so again this year. The board and college leadership are committed to raising salaries going forward but we have to do so in a way that is fiscally responsible by not adding further uncovered expenses. In the meantime, the board is considering proposals to increase junior tutor salaries, which many consider the most immediate shortcoming.

These challenges are not new to us. The Program was founded in 1937 as the college was on the precipice of collapse. At that time and throughout the Program's multiple decades, St. John's has required many periods of sacrifice across our full community. This sacrifice has always been shared across our faculty, staff, and even our students. On the student side, we put Johnnies through a rigorous curriculum and ask them to forgo some of the luxuries that large universities offer. On the staff side, most work very long hours, have no guaranteed step increases, and deserve higher pay. And on the tutor side, as we all know, they pour their very hearts and souls into their work and are paid less than they deserve. It is a demanding Program for all of us, and we are in this together because we love St. John's. The college won't lessen the demands of the curriculum nor add luxuries to our campuses, but it is committed to bettering the workload and

compensation situation for tutors and staff.

Sincerely,

Nora Demleitner

President

**With an endowment of roughly \$240 million, we draw approximately \$10 million annually to spend on college expenses, which covers about 20% of our annual \$53 million operating budget.*

*** An additional \$41 million in funds from the campaign were given by donors for construction projects that support students through campus improvements, such as Santa Fe's solar array and the renovation of Campbell Hall in Annapolis. The college has also been able to benefit from special funding from the state of Maryland and foundations for some building projects, such as Mellon Hall. These are funds that are not available for other uses, but that provide an important opportunity to improve our students' living and learning environment, while also offering additional budget relief. In addition, after a 2020 facilities assessment of both campuses was completed—in which we learned that the cost of deferred maintenance on both campuses was estimated to exceed \$80 million—a generous donor awarded the college a matching grant of \$25 million dollars over 10 years to address these projects, so long as the college can match the amount two-to-one annually. This means we are responsible for finding \$5 million dollars in cash gifts annually through 2032 in order to get our campuses in healthy shape. This is no small task but one that we are committed to and will complete.*

Kunai, a History—a Made-up Name, But Here to Stay

By Tamar Pinsky



Pictured: Aerial View of a Kunai game. Photography by KC Taylor.

Kunai as we know it today is a place where women and non-cisgendered students come together to play sports, whether it be practicing, scrimmaging, or competing in tournaments. Not quite the same as either intramurals or pick-up, rather, Kunai is a program all its own; however, it did not start out this way.

What is now Kunai was once the women's complementary program to an all-men intramural program. The two operated similarly, having five

teams for men and four for women, and a draft that took place sophomore year—this construction was thanks to the athletic director at the time, Bryce Jacobsen. The women's league had some difficulty getting enough people out to play, but this was not unusual at the time—the 1970s. Title IX, the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex-based discrimination in schools, had just been passed, and so support for women in sports had just started to increase.

But then Jacobsen retired from the athletic director

position, and the athletic program experienced a transitional two-year blip, in which three different people ran it together. The next person to take over was Leo Pickens, a St. John's alumnus and previous commercial banker.

During Pickens' first year in 1988, the women's league still had small games on the regular, but Pickens realized that the structure of two parallel leagues was outdated, bringing the women down. He abolished the format of intramural games, and had the women start playing club sports—against schools such as Washington College, Gallaudet University, and the Naval Academy. The women's program, now focusing strongly on soccer, resembled the crew program, with practices three times a week and games three times a semester.

It was at this time—the mid-90s—that they started calling themselves Kunai Kthonyai, meaning “the female dogs from the underworld,” because they practiced on the lower field. Participation grew, and excitement hit the roof—big crowds came to watch the 24 women play against non-Johnnies.

These intercollegiate games started to get a little too rough. The other schools' teams played differently, and students were getting seriously injured. As referee of the games, Pickens felt that he lost control. Pickens decided that this level of intensity was more harmful than helpful for the students, and besides—the amount of effort needed to facilitate the games was not worth it, and playing other schools was not in the spirit intended—and so he brought Kunai back from intercollegiate play.

Now he had to decide what to have Kunai members do instead of playing other schools. He decided to form an “advisory council” of the most enthusiastic players from the women's league—about fifteen people. These fifteen in turn recruited more, for now they would just be playing amongst themselves. However, Kunai had moved on from being an intramural substitute.

The Kunai council created the idea of a “craft” instead of a “draft” for arranging the players into teams. Rather than have each captain choose who they like for their own team, they all worked together to create teams with optimum fairness. Their goal: maximum participation and fun competition.

The identity of Kunai cemented. Weeks of clinic work followed by weeks of soccer and basketball games turned the teams of women into one proud united group.

Then Pickens retired, and under the new athletic director Mike McQuarrie, Kunai did not have as much support as in the past. McQuarrie held a spot for Kunai and gave them equipment, but his main focus was making intramurals co-ed. Many people wondered about the purpose of Kunai – they did not realize that Kunai was not akin to pick-up, nor a sort of preparation for intramurals, but some unnamed third thing.

In 2016, Chris Krueger took over as athletic director, and helped revive Kunai. He brought back the advisory council, the structure of captains and teams, and had them start playing netball. He tried to get rid of the “pick-up” label they had acquired, encouraging Kunai members to do league play. It was around this time that the student captains decided to expand Kunai to include non-cisgendered individuals as well.

But yet another obstacle was up ahead: Covid. A lot of the smaller clubs had been struck hard by the pandemic—fencing, crew. There was at least one year when Kunai did not manage to have any practices, and only a tiny season.

Kunai has essentially had to build from the ground up since then, under the athletic coordinator Rachel Fleming who started at St. John's in 2022.

With all the changes Kunai has had over the years, there is no sign of it stopping anytime soon. Already in the two years since Covid, Kunai has taken on several additions—a reintroduction of netball, a reintroduction of crafted teams, and this year, for the first time, flag rugby.

And Kunai may keep on changing in the future, to keep up with its evolving purpose and participants. But it is clear that along the journey that Kunai has had—from being a women's league alongside the men's, to playing intercollegiate games, to becoming a program all its own, Kunai has held a special place in our athletic program. A place of adaptability, a place of sports for the sake of sports, and a place of community.



Carlson, God of Donuts and Thai Food

By Bennett Scott, with Audrey Fox



What happened in 2002? Audrey Fox, food reviewer of *The Gadfly*, was born (boring, predictable). But what really happened? The Global Thai Program was launched, expanding Thai food from 5,500 restaurants to 10,000 in less than a decade (see the Wikipedia article about it IDK¹). And what is better than Thai food? Donuts. But putting them together reminds me of my uncle's first three marriages: bound to be a bad combination. So how, then, does this place which once sent my nerves tingling out of fear become my favorite restaurant? Let me tell you about my most recent trip to Carlson's Thai *and Donuts* (!?).

Ms. Audrey Fox is a woman. At first, we did not get along; she knew what she was talking about, undercutting any mansplaining I might have done (**Audrey note: I disagree**). However, on the drive over, we learned that we aren't so different: we have the same messed up speech pattern (mayor pronounced like mare, nuclear pronounced like George Bush), we have the same birthday (March 9th), and were dreadfully afraid of the dark as children (she feared being stabbed, I feared the Green Goblin). Our main bond: Minecraft. If we had met in the 7th grade, we would have stabbed each other with digital sticks. So that's cool (**Audrey Note: I unfortunately do not agree that this is cool**).

Upon arriving, you're immediately hit with one of my favorite parts of the Carlson's experience: extreme dis-ease. The parking lot is oddly slanted, the building next door is an abandoned gas station with a boat out back, and the restaurant itself is just a house that's been gutted. They've tried to make the inside less unsettling: the lighting is gentle, coming from nice decorative lamps, and there's plenty of art (all of the Thai royal family). This is one of the worst changes Carlson's has undergone; last year, when they were only doing takeout, the lighting was pure white, the tables were covered in disposable utensils, and not a soul was sitting at them. As a man who doesn't let himself feel any real emotions and so must rely on incredibly strange stimuli to have anything like actual feeling, this liminal experience scratched a deep itch and I miss it. Don't worry, though, some remnants of the uncanny remain: the refrigerators full of half and half (tasty with your fried rice), the panicked and continual stream of phone calls, the

signs posted everywhere warning against buying alcohol without a real ID ('DON'T EVEN TRY,' but y'all don't even sell alcohol?), all combine to remind you that this place is certainly not home.

We ate in a booth (**Audrey Note: We ought to have sat at the table with the two chairs facing the wall**). Before our food arrived, what had seemed to be our saving grace turned out to be our worst nightmare: Minecraft was back. And this time it came with something even more horrifying than my own childhood: a real living present-tense child. She was two booths over from us and listening to Kids-Youtube Minecraft on full blast (I can't even attempt to recreate what they were saying it makes my brain melt so bad). My secondhand embarrassment, if you can believe I have such a thing, was through the roof. How could I explain the intricacies of how a block game has become a cultural institution and how videos on the internet have become explicitly designed to be crack-for-children to the old couple sitting next to us? How could I make them understand that that little girl didn't want to ruin their cute evening together (they just learned what Thai tea is!), that she was just a victim of late stage entertainment capitalism? I stuck to eating (**Audrey Note: Very cool Bennett**).

It was during the first course that Audrey went on the first of many monologues: "You see I remember the day I learned I was gonna die: I was sitting on a trampoline with my mom and said, 'It sucks that you're gonna have to grow old and die one day while I'm gonna be young forever.' Then she promptly informed me I was gonna die too. That was the first time I faced my mortality." She proceeded to torment me about the worst moments of my life and dunk on the entire concept of dog movies (**Audrey Note: I don't think this should be a controversial opinion. In fact, I think Mr. Scott is using this and previous comments on my behavior to paint me as a cold, unfeeling woman. I like dogs, I just find dog movies to be using our love of animals as an emotional crutch to avoid any real substance**).

Honestly, I don't know how to review actual food. Go read Audrey's article if you want opinions. I, truly, just love Carlson's. The fried rice. The curry. The stir fry. It's flavorful, it's fresh, it's **fucking** delicious. Sure, I'm weak to mushrooms and sometimes they randomly show up, but as Audrey

loves to remind me: I'm 22 years old and I can suck it up. Will I, upon every return trip, recall a certain food editor making fun of the time I had to recite a ten minute 'humorous' speech in front of my entire government class and got not a single laugh (**Audrey note: I don't remember that at all, but Bennett definitely does**)? Yes. But, by god, it's good enough to endure even that.

You really should go.

Endnotes:

1. I actually fear plagiarism so here's the real citation: "Culinary Diplomacy." *Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation*, 20 Sept. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culinary_diplomacy#Thailand.



Illustrated: Audrey Fox and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott and Bennett Scott Outside Carlson's



Ungo By Nicky Jordan

Over the last couple of years, one subject and one technology have been the cause of much clamor, that subject being what might be popularly referred to as AI.

Whether or not this so-called AI technology is truly Artificially Intelligent is a question with many dimensions. Questions such as: What is intelligence? How would we identify Intelligence? What are the ethical implications of such a theoretical intelligence? and others of that sort are just some of a seemingly infinite fractal spiral of problems that seem to rise with the birth of anything somewhat new.

In this essay, my aim is not to answer any of these broad questions; I rather want to buttress some grounding aspects of the question of intelligence and problematize the idea that any kind of large language model has any actual understanding of words in and of itself. With the hope that this investigation will somehow provide some insight into this ever looming issue, one that bears not only on our lives but on the nature of life itself.

Of course, the dangers of AI as it exists now are not yet at least the dangers of the formation of some super spirit or superintelligence of the Skynet variety—that's probably at least a few years down the line, though we can of course debate whether it's possible at all.

My concern here is not so much with AI but rather with the possible ramifications of so-called AI for our understanding of ourselves and for our understanding of language.

The thought experiment I present here will look rather familiar to some of you, and it should be—the first part of it is stolen from John Searle.

Part I: A Chinese Room

“Imagine a native speaker of English, me for example, who understands no Chinese. Imagine that I am locked in a room with boxes of Chinese symbols (the database) together with a book of instructions in English for manipulating the symbols (the program). Imagine that people outside the room send in small batches of Chinese symbols (questions) and these form the input. [What] I know is that I am receiving sets of symbols which to me are meaningless. Imagine that I follow the program which instructs me how to manipulate the symbols. Imagine that the programmers who design the program are so good at writing the program, and I get so good at manipulating the Chinese symbols, that I am able to give correct answers to the questions (the output). The program makes it possible for me, in the room, to pass the Turing Test for understanding Chinese, but all the same I do not understand a single word of Chinese. The point of the argument is that if I do not understand Chinese on the basis of implementing the appropriate program for understanding Chinese, then neither does any other digital computer solely on that basis because the computer, qua computer, has nothing that I do not have.”¹

This is the Chinese room argument, often considered one of the most important arguments regarding AI. The argument essentially seeks to show that something is missing as regards so called AI, that being *semantic cognition*. By this I mean that mental process by which a signified is understood as corresponding determinately to a signifier; i.e., by which a tree is understood to be a tree.

One important feature of this kind of cognition that I would like to highlight especially is the ability to name. In naming, we are, in stark contrast to the sort of arbitrary input-output manipulation featured in the passage above, capable of actively generating symbols that have a real signified-object, and therefore that have a determinate, substantial meaning to us. An intelligence with real semantic cognition, then, will have an entirely different, and we might suppose far more intentional and conscious, process of thinking than an

¹ Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs,” 1980.

artificially-programmed intelligence which does not. In naming we not only construct meaningful sentences or statements but indeed furnish the very meanings of words. But perhaps this is to get ahead of ourselves.

Part II: Ungo

1. Let me now present a further, extrapolative thought experiment whose possibility and implications are unclear and which I hope will provide insight into the precise nature of semantic cognition that I've indicated above.

Imagine two Chinese rooms, with each room in this case being two different *programs*. Each sharing a set of randomly generated symbols, each with a set of syntactic rules like Searle's, the symbols are generated split up into categories, randomized into sets, further categorized, etc. These categories are subsequently assigned syntactical rules of interaction with all other sets. These two programs are also to be slightly randomized as well as equipped with neural networks to train and evolve on the data involved for each stabilizing and changing the symbol sets. These two will then be put in "dialogue."

I propose that the system I have described here would by all appearances simulate effectively the interactions of the two speakers of a language, such that if carved in stone the symbols would be interpreted as linguistic by some unfortunate archeologist of the future who has no idea the kind of prank that has been pulled. I will refer to this "language" as Ungo and its "speakers" as Ungo Boxes. The arrangements of symbols produced by this dynamic system would have consistent structure, consistent symbols grouped in consistent orders, and even sequences or embedded parts of this "dialogue" that involve the consistent inconsistencies so common to language. I operate under the assumption that this latter part is achievable by means of the aforementioned neural network. I would add here that if those readers who are more knowledgeable on the subject have found this description fundamentally flawed, I would welcome them with open arms to correct me.

My central question, then, is this: does this language (this zombie language if you will), and thereby also the dialogue produced on its basis, have any actual *semantic content*? Again, on the assumption that 1) this dynamic symbolic system I have described is possible and 2) that my descriptions of the outcomes of that dynamic system are theoretically plausible, we have here with what I have called 'Ungo' a system of signs that to anyone who didn't know it's origin would appear to be a language.

2. To illustrate this point, I would like to provide a story, one whose basic narrative will be familiar to most historians and archaeologists.

In some distant other time, perhaps long ago or long after the time I am writing, an archeologist digs through the ruins of an ancient civilization, digs through the ruins of what is thought by common hypothesis to have been a great temple, one made of fine strange materials and standing high, well preserved, and ornate amidst a vast expanse of sunken, water-logged ruins. Stumbling about in the dark recesses of this great and mysterious structure, our archeologist comes across a room that strikes her as strange. She slowly, carefully makes her way into this room in order to investigate further—and then, in a single, startling moment, the wall that she has kept her hand against for stability suddenly opens as though a secret door, revealing an even stranger octagonal room with high ceilings. Squinting in the darkness, she discovers a great black obelisk with incomprehensible symbols staggered across it as far as she can see everywhere and in all directions. A later investigation finds that the walls around the monolith are also transcribed upon but with letters and numbers that are much more familiar.

This is naturally hailed as the discovery of the century, and the young archeologist becomes famous. But as the years drag on, all attempts to decode, decipher or make intelligible the monument transcripts utterly fail. The writings on the wall provide no resources for deciphering it; and, once translated, only provide what seem to be interpretive methods for the monument itself, some of which contradict each other and some of



which simply prescribe probabilities of sequences. Speculation abounds; some even suggest an extraterrestrial origin.

One thing is abundantly clear to all, however: the makers of the monument room didn't seem to know any more about this language than the researchers did.

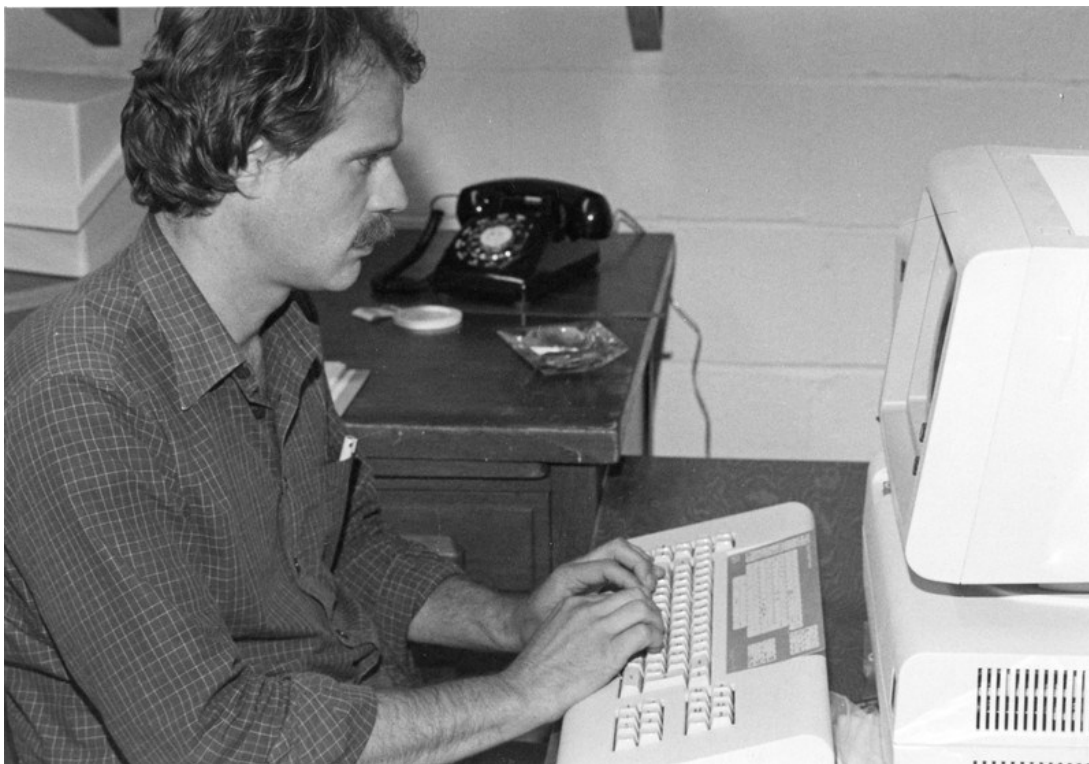
Paper after paper is published on the monument transcript, arguing over its linguistic content, its origin, and its purpose. One paper of particular interest takes the interpretive paradigms transcribed on the wall as evidence that, much like many ancient civilizations, this monument represented a type of divination, a stone transcription of an oracle bone or augury. This theory is, however, ultimately rejected: the syntactical character of the writing was far too obvious for it to have been any kind of random augury.

Throughout all this, the archaeologist who discovered the monument finds herself in a constant frustration and anxiety that she cannot explain what she has become so well known for finding.

3. What I propose as the main features that differentiate an empty zombie language from the sort of language of actual speakers, then, is that the latter is necessarily embodied *in a world*, and moreover that it refers *to* that world. When I speak of “eating that banana over there,” I am not merely playing out a structurally necessary series of signs; rather, I am weaving together those signs with the conscious intent of representing some reality, or at least the *notion* of some reality. Conversely, in the case of zombie language like Ungo, the signs cannot *mean* anything because they are only for themselves: x only means x, y only means y—or, really, not even that, for any actual enunciation of y is always already a case of y standing for something other than its pure existence as a symbol or sign. At most it stands for its syntactical role.

It is just this kind of reference that is impossible in any meaningful sense for the Ungo Boxes. The system involved are completely incapable of making any meaningfully-embodied reference to a *world*, because the only world that this mechanical system has is its own symbolic plumbing system, one necessarily contained entirely within itself and with no external reference or meaning for the whole manifold of its vocabulary.

I'll leave off my inquiry at this important point. The legitimacy of my ultimate claim is questionable, of course, and the work has only just been outlined here; I hope in any case, however, that my basic enunciation of it serves as an effective means of stimulating dialogue concerning this highly important topic at the College.



John M. Christensen, Director of Admissions, Seated at Desk Typing on a Computer Keyboard



An Attempted System of Operational Proofs for Four Transfinite Equations

By Luke Briner

DEFINITIONS.

1. A *set* is “any collection into a whole...of definite and separate objects...of our intuition or our thought” (p. 231).¹
2. A *cardinal number* is a number which signifies the discrete quantity of members within a given set.
3. *Transfinitude* is that which is not bound by finitude.
4. S is the transfinite set of all natural numbers.
5. \aleph_0 is the cardinal number signifying S .
6. n is any definite, finite (natural) number.
7. *Counting* is the simple operation of “the successive creation of the infinite series of positive integers in which each individual is defined by the one immediately preceding” (p. 210).
8. *Addition* is the compounded operation of counting.
9. *Multiplication* is the compounded operation of addition.

AXIOMS.

1. Two numbers are equal when one cannot be shown to be greater or less than the other.
2. The sum of two numbers in an additional operation will be greater than or equal to each of those numbers individually; i.e., $(n_1 + n_2) \geq n_1$ or n_2 .
3. A transfinite number is immeasurably greater than any finite number.
4. Any number, finite or transfinite, cannot signify two discrete quantities at once; i.e., if n is determined to represent a discrete quantity of two, it cannot at the same time represent a discrete quantity of three, and likewise \aleph_0 , being the representative of the transfinite set S comprehending all natural numbers, can neither simultaneously represent any of those natural numbers themselves or any transfinite set definitely greater than S itself.

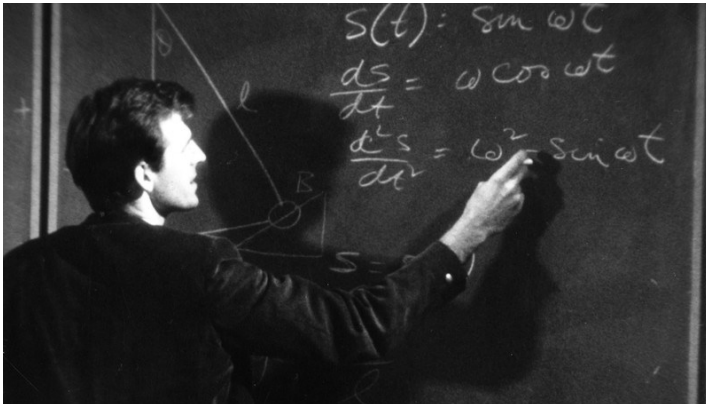
PROPOSITION 1.

The sum of a finite number and a transfinite number is always exactly equal to that transfinite number.

Let the operation $n + \aleph_0$ be given. Hence it is for us to prove that the sum of that operation will necessarily be exactly \aleph_0 . Now since the sum of any additional operation will always be greater than or equal to each of its constituent numbers (Ax. 2), the sum of $n + \aleph_0$ will necessarily either be equal to or greater than \aleph_0 ; for a sum less than either of the constituent numbers of the operation is impossible. I say, then, that $n + \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$. For to assume that the sum would be greater than \aleph_0 by the addition of n would be to assume that \aleph_0 is in a less-than-immeasurable ratio to n , such that its magnitude could actually be added to by its combination with it. But this would imply that \aleph_0 is not in fact a transfinite number, since all transfinite numbers are immeasurably greater than any finite number (Ax. 3), and, this being the case, its magnitude could not be increased by the addition of a finite number. But this is absurd, since \aleph_0 is a transfinite number (Defs. 4-5). Since, then, $n + \aleph_0$ cannot be either less than or greater than \aleph_0 , their sum must be exactly equal to \aleph_0 (Ax. 1).

Q.E.D.

¹ All citations are to the Junior Mathematics Manual as produced for the academic year of 2022-2023.



Student at Blackboard during Mathematics Tutorial

PROPOSITION 2.

The sum of a transfinite number with itself is always exactly equal to that same transfinite number.

Let the operation $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0$ be given. Hence it is for us to prove that the sum of that operation will necessarily be exactly \aleph_0 . Now since the sum of any additional operation will always be greater than or equal to each of its constituent numbers (Ax. 2), the sum of $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0$ will be either greater than or equal to \aleph_0 . Moreover, it is given that \aleph_0 signifies the transfinite set S (Defs. 4-5), and that any transfinite number is immeasurably greater than any finite number (Ax. 3). I say, then, that $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$. For to assume that the sum of $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0$ is greater than \aleph_0 would necessarily be to assume that the sum \aleph_0 (designated hereafter by $s\aleph_0$) is greater than the addend \aleph_0 (designated hereafter by $a\aleph_0$), and thereby that $a\aleph_0$ is actually less than $s\aleph_0$, since only then could $s\aleph_0$ be conceived as actually greater than it. But $s\aleph_0$ and $a\aleph_0$, despite performing different functions operationally, are constituted by the very same number \aleph_0 which itself signifies the very same transfinite set. Thus to say that $s\aleph_0 > a\aleph_0$ is effectively to say that $\aleph_0 > \aleph_0$, i.e., that each of the individual \aleph_0 s presented to us in the operation $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0$, before being summed, are definitely less in themselves than the sum \aleph_0 on the other side of the supposed equation. But this would imply that \aleph_0 simultaneously signifies two different discrete quantities; and this is absurd (Ax. 4). Since, then, $s\aleph_0$ cannot be greater than $a\aleph_0$, it must be equal to it (Ax. 1); i.e., $\aleph_0 = \aleph_0$.

Q.E.D.

PROPOSITION 3.

The product of a finite number and any transfinite number is always exactly equal to that transfinite number.

Let the operation $n \cdot \aleph_0$ be given. Hence it is for us to prove that the product of that operation will necessarily be exactly \aleph_0 . Now multiplication is simply the compounded operation of addition (Def. 9), i.e., is simply a given multitude of additional operations; thus what holds fundamentally for addition will also hold fundamentally for multiplication. I say, then, that $n \cdot \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$; for since we have proven that $n + \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$ (Prop. 1), the same must hold for the subsequent multiplicative operation.

Q.E.D.

Corollary.

From this it necessarily follows that $1/n \cdot \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$. For although fractions are produced by the more complex, indirect operation of division (p. 210) rather than addition or multiplication, the fractional number is nevertheless a finite number signifying a discrete quantity, and hence is not conceptually distinct from n in itself in any way, and will in any case result in a finite number when the divisitive operation is actually performed on $1/n$ itself; i.e., $1/n = n/n$, etc. Since, therefore, we have proven that $n \cdot \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$, the product of $1/n \cdot \aleph_0$ must be the same.

Q.E.D.

PROPOSITION 4.

The product of a transfinite number with itself is always exactly equal to that same transfinite number.

Let the operation $\aleph_0 \cdot \aleph_0$ be given. Hence it is for us to prove that the product of that operation will necessarily be exactly \aleph_0 . Now multiplication is simply the compounded operation of addition (Def. 9), i.e., is simply a given multitude of additional operations; thus what holds fundamentally for addition will also hold fundamentally for multiplication. I say, then, that $\aleph_0 \cdot \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$; for since we have proven that $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$ (Prop. 2), the same must hold for the subsequent multiplicative operation.

Q.E.D



Noodles: “A Cannibalistic Chef’s Dilemma”

By Tamar Pinsky

Don't Meet Your Wife at St. John's College

By Dr. Benjamin Raymor Maier, Ph.D.

During this past alumni weekend, I was horrified to see the College giving out a button that said “I met my wife at St. John’s College.” At first, I couldn’t articulate the dread that this harmless little button caused me. Some dark evil seeped through its inanity and kitschness. As an expert in romance, I felt compelled to publish a public health announcement to anyone remotely concerned for their future: **Don’t meet your wife at St. John’s College.**

Within the confines of the College, we are in a kind of intellectual Disneyland. We are constantly exposed to the same mentors, friends, and colleagues who share our own interests. There are even little rituals, traditions, and ways of life that mold our minds over the course of four years. If libraries could be homesteads or pastoral villages they would be our College. An unfortunate consequence of all this sentimental exposure is that Johnnies tend to develop deep romantic feelings for each other.

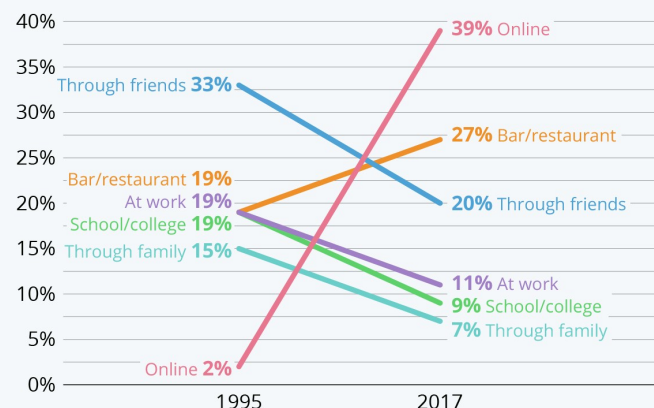
Most critics would immediately attack my diagnosis: “Of course this happens. Most people fall in love at college”, “Isn’t it such a cute way to meet your future spouse?”, or “Stop judging the way people fall in love”. Before I proceed let me clarify, I am **not** advocating abstinence at the College. If the Spirit compels you to a series of twisted and sexy Johnnie encounters (if such a thing exists), then by all means go ahead. However, the idea of “marrying a Johnnie” indicates a deep sickness within one’s heart: a total enrapturement with a functional co-worker because they “get you” or have given you “so many great memories”.

It is truly the romance of our grandparents and generations past. Much like our classical curriculum, the Johnnie romance harkens back to an older time where desperation and necessity compelled us to the nearest objects of desire. For Euclid that was shapes, but for the Johnnie it’s someone you’ve had a seminar and two tutorials with.

“Marrying a Johnnie” rejects the modern and scientific prescriptions of dating and openly stands against the norms of our world. As Figure 1 shows, there has been a total collapse of romantic partnerships among co-workers and college students.

How Couples Met

Share of heterosexual U.S. couples who met in the following ways



Survey of 5,421 adults. Other options: In church, in the neighborhood
Source: How Couples Meet and Stay Together surveys by Stanford University



statista

Figure 1

Once again, the critics will claim that this shows how diseased our modern condition and heart has become: “What about the intimate connections gained through in-person community?” I will say that I am deeply sympathetic to the claims of the pastoral integralist who scorns the current state of affairs. We have lost many great things with the decline of the tight-knit community. However, I believe that the injection of modernity into romance has been a triumph for the erotic soul. Online dating and meeting at bars leverages romantic volume at an unprecedented rate: one can probably find three more potential spouses in a dedicated week of “dating-around” than their village-stuck grandmother could do in a lifetime.

There are no serious advantages to marrying a Johnnie and I am not convinced by the arguments of my opponents. The common polemic waged against me is that “There is no one else I would rather talk to than a Johnnie”. The claim testifies against itself and shines a light on the deep egotism of the Johnnie soul: a belief that “being good at talking” makes someone attractive. The absurdity of this claim grows when these kinds of Johnnies get married. The yoke of marriage inverts all traditional so-called romantic wisdom and “cures” like communication and affection become poisons to the union. As any graduate student would know, being “good-at-talking” does not pay the mortgage or buy the pleasures of life. To love a beautiful soul is to live a

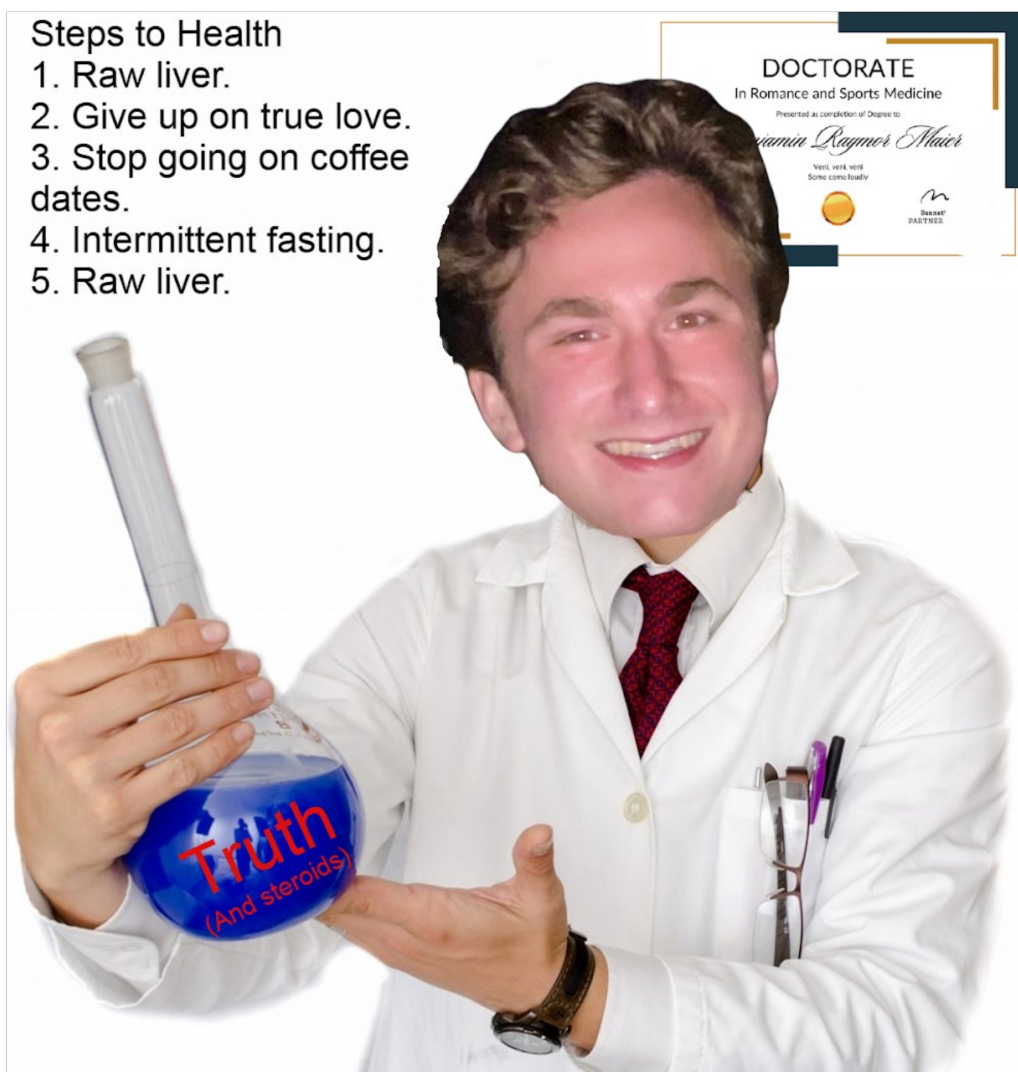
life of poverty. For the record, I do not want to hear of successful Johnnie marriages. Survivorship bias is already enough of a poison to the discourse as it is.

Now if you must entertain marriage with one of your classmates, please consider this helpful example to guide your decision making. Consider the first-class Midshipman who is ready to graduate. He has been trapped for four years in an open-air prison with severe restrictions on his freedom. His prospects for future partners are grim and he is deeply afraid of being alone. Consequently, he immediately marries his classmate or hometown girlfriend in order to bring her along on his six years of drudgery. Most would think that this is the worst kind of marriage but I say the opposite. Before this couple inevitably divorces, they will freely enjoy Uncle Sam's numerous benefits for young married couples in the Armed Forces: mobility, adventure, financial

security, healthcare, etc. In fact, the quickness of their marriage is a boon to the couple. Neither partner will have enough assets to make the divorce messy and they will still be young enough to try again if they so choose. The Johnnie marriage promises quite the opposite: longevity with little material gain.

But as St. Paul says, it is better to marry than to burn. If you, Johnnie man or woman, have a heart of twists and turns and feel compelled to marry-up then please do the following: Next time you steal your Johnnie partner's phone, don't check through their text messages, look at their bank account instead. Trust me, I'm a doctor.

Yours Truly
Ben Maier,
Ph.D. in Romance and Sports Medicine



Pictured: The Love Doctor, photo by himself, artistry by BS

Should Men Have Friends?

By B.S.



Images by B.S., Pexels, PNG Tree, and Raw Pixel

Dear men,

As an elite entrepreneur, the first and only certified Omega Male, and wildly successful podcast host (The Bro Scogan Experientia), people frequently bring me their most important questions: “How can I get in shape?” Work hard, hit the gym, stay consistent. “What are the things I need to do to be a real man?” Anyone can be a real man. Just be kind, protective, loyal, and run at least two marathons every week. “How can I do all that while maintaining a family life?” Get rid of the family. But there’s one really difficult question I’d like to address here, in my Omega-Sigma-Alpha-TRT-Man-Letter of the week: Should men have friends?

To some of the lesser thinkers of this generation, the answer seems obvious: “Of course. All the finest men have had friends and confidants: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon. They all had close advisors who must certainly qualify as friends. Having friends not only helps you achieve your highest goals, they can also help you in your worst times. Nobody deserves to be alone.” Oh really? If that’s true, then explain this: why is it a *lone* wolf, not a ‘goes to trivia every Thursday and goes drinking every Friday with a reliable group of friends’ wolf? If those friends were so important to the great people, name three. Name three friends. Of all time. If men are supposed to have friends, why do I have absolutely none and am forced to stare at the empty ceiling every night as it slowly blurs with tears?

Huh? Exactly: because men *aren't supposed to have friends*. We're supposed to have rivals.

To a real man, everyone is a rival. Your rivalry with your roommate pushes you to wake up earlier, shower colder, grunt louder during every slight physical activity. Your rivalry with your gym partner forces you to work even harder at the church of iron because you know he's getting stronger in his own time, yeah, he's been eating right, he's been lifting, he's been doing cold plunges, you can tell, in the hard... smooth... beautiful... the perfect muscles he's got going on for this summer. And you won't stand for it. Your rivalry with your classmates and coworkers makes you speak faster, longer, interrupting more just to let them know: I'm the smartest, the greatest, you're not correct and you're gonna be aware that you're not correct as soon as I start clearing my throat and making faces in the middle of your point. To a true omega male, it's all about the grind to being #1, no matter how much you have to push others out of the way. That's why omega is the first letter of the Greek alphabet.

Here's my daily routine so you get an idea of how a real man outruns his rivals and his impending sense of doom: I wake up at 4:30 a.m. and I'm already at the gym. I'm on a bench, mid-rep, ready to start pumping iron from second numero uno. After I hit the gym, I hit the showers. I hit my workplace. I hit a brick wall at the age of 35 and have no idea what the meaning of life is. So what do I do? Read the stoics. You know Marcus Auerelias? Second only to me. After a good reading session (just as I am entering my first meeting of the day), I get a good scream in. Scientists have proven that screaming raises testosterone, makes you more of a savage, and induces fear into all those 'civilized' types at HR. That's efficiency. Once my meetings are done, I start another business. One every day. How can you be a true entrepreneur if you stop entrepeneuing to actually commit to a project? You can't. This is about business. And you know what every business needs? A website. This week's sponsor Circle Location provides the ideal platform for [redacted]. Now that I've created a new and revolutionary product, sold it to the highest bidder, and made my ad plug, it's time to hit the gym again. It's delt, forearms, and neck day. I'm grinding. I've forsaken the touch of all women. I'm hard as hell. I'm a certified omega male on BStheBigMan.com. Get your certificate for only \$2,599.99. And that's how I absolutely crush my workouts every damn time. Then I eat dinner:

Chicken. Broccoli. Rice. But mostly meat. It's as important to eat as much meat as you can: it leaves less for the rivals and leaves less potential animal rivals all at once. That's efficiency. At this point, most people would go home, go to bed, see their wife, their kids. I haven't seen my kids in three months. They were taken from me in the divorce. I was promised every other weekend, but my week never ends. And you know what I say? Everyone can have kids, but not everyone is built for *the grind*. I'm out here till midnight. Till 1 a.m. Till 2 a.m. You ever heard of time zones? Someone else is always up, on their shit. I can't let them have that. I'm always in competition mode. Every damn day. Grind. Sleep while you blink. *That's efficiency*. It's 4:30 a.m. Let's do it again.

And don't forget to watch the latest episode of The Bro Scogan Experience with our good friend, the Love Doctor, Ben Maier:



—B.S.

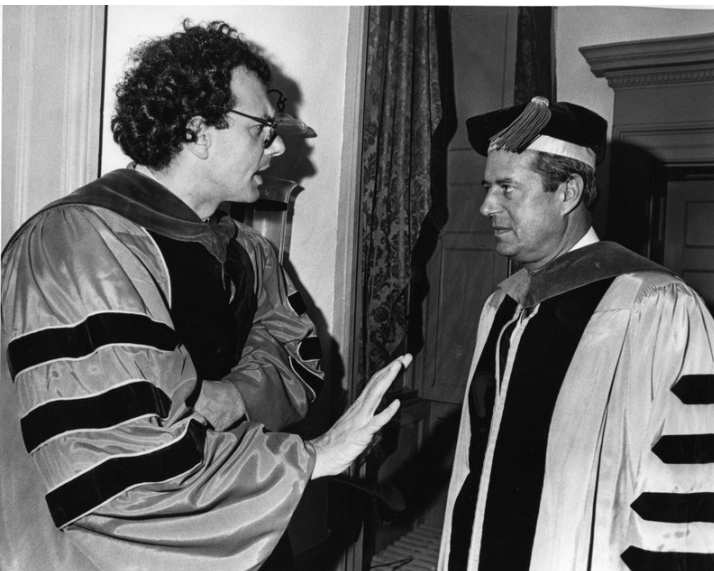
Notes on Dialogue Gossip

By Vivian Miyakawa

St. John's College, a school that prides itself in great discussions about great books, excels in all sorts of dialogue. However, there is one integral art that continues to slide under the radar: gossip. This underrated rhetoric is objectively the best way to relay crucial information about friends and enemies alike. Unfortunately for would-be messengers of the gospel, a small group of people on a small campus can lead to some unseemly situations. Here are my top three tips on how to improve your gossip game and avoid certain embarrassment.

1. Location matters- The first and perhaps the most important tip is that in a small college, space is everything. Rumors fly faster than the winged boots of Hermes, and everything, from the maniacal to the mundane, is news. Now, as most have probably realized by now, the walls of your dorm rooms are not soundproof, so by gossiping in your dorm you've already established that you'd appreciate an audience. Tragically, your daily roommate ranting session is only heard by everyone else in your hall. To avoid this hapless mistake, try gossiping in the fishbowl instead! This way your rumors will reach a larger audience, and the echoey spaces of Mellon Hall add to the grandeur of your news.

Two Faculty Members in Academic Robes Talking in McDowell Hall, Fall 1980



Male Students in Conversation in the Coffee Shop

2. Know your audience- Obviously, gossip is meant to be spread, but it's an anonymous art. One needs their information circulating exactly where they want it: everywhere. That is, everywhere except for the ears of the unfortunate member of the Polity who's found themselves on the receiving end of the rumor. With this in mind, be sure not to gossip around those untrustworthy Johnnies who will betray your noble goal and tell their friend about your campus-wide whispers. Luckily, all Johnnies are inherently trustworthy, having read Plato's *Republic* and ascribed to the Socratic ideals of justice.

3. Embrace it- Honestly, it's time to face the music. It's St. John's College. Everyone knows everyone. You're not going to be able to gossip without a little bit of risk, and maybe that's why it's just so addicting! What's the fun of spreading rumors without constantly glancing around, avoiding the subject of ridicule. Life is more interesting with a bit of paranoia, and nobody will ever notice your discreet head nods as you giggle and look over your shoulder. Besides, only the squirrels are really watching!

SJC Mystery #3: Could Have Gone Better

By Bennett Scott



Photo from the Library of Congress

This time, I'm going to ask you to watch the video first. It'll be easier that way.

The rain hasn't stopped since I got here. It's cold and heavy. I can hear it all the time. Normally I can't hear the rain here. Somehow, it reminds me of home, out in the desert where the rain is rare and always loud. Hopefully it'll end soon.

I think I'm stuck here. I tried putting my arm back in the mailbox; nothing changed. I tried variations: the other arm, the symbol drawn backwards, the other boxes; nothing changed. There might be some other secret hidden in that basement, but every time I go back... I can't make myself stay down there longer than a minute. It feels like I'm choking on mud.

I've been trying to find out where I am between the mad panics. Almost everything is the same as Annapolis (though I'm suddenly paranoid that I'm missing obvious details: were the streetlamps always that color? Was the bay always so cold? I don't know). There are just no people. I'd be fine if the world were entirely empty (that's probably a lie), but it can't be: I've been here long enough that the power should have gone out, but it still works; I swear I hear traffic in the distance; and things move. When I'm not looking, things move. The cars on the street change places. Lights in far away buildings turn on and off. I went to bed last night and the chairs in my apartment moved. All the changes make sense too. It's not some random haunting where the tables are being flipped and glasses shattered. I know the way my roommates leave plates out, the exact messes and the chairs set up for a party. I just can't see them. It's as if everyone is living their normal lives, but I just can't see them. Maybe it would be better to say: I'm not allowed to see them.

And for all the information I can glean from random object movement, none of it seems communicative. I find no notes, no panicked tearing apart of my room in search of signs as to where I've gone, nothing. I can't find anything on the internet since the time I disappeared. So let's revise our hypothesis: maybe it's not that the people are still there and I'm not allowed to see them, but that the world keeps on functioning without them. There's only one way to tell the difference: science. So if you're reading this, somewhere out there in the real world, I want to try an experiment: put a note in the mailbox with the symbol drawn on it. If you've got any ideas how the hell to get me out of here that would be great. But, honestly, I could use any form of human interaction right now. So a note hello is appreciated too. Consider me your interdimensional pen pal.

One last thing: something is wrong with the clocks. My computer has been stuck at the same time ever since I got here (it's not even roughly close: it's saying the date is in 2016?). I can't find my watch either. The clouds make it difficult to even tell where the sun is. Should have paid more attention in Ptolemy. I'm not even sure if I've been here for two days or three. I go to bed and wake up and it doesn't seem to be the right time of day at all. It's almost always dusk or night. So if you could include the date on your letters that'd be nice too.

What the hell have I gotten into.

art i guess

By Natalie Goldman

A crack through which
All the universe becomes clear,
Painted shadows dancing,
Arrested to the wall,
Presents itself before me
As the paradigm of humanity.

I can't help but wonder
What all the toil and struggle
Was really for,
If not for this.
Not a person, really,
But an idea
Is crucified on that wall.

When I tilt my chin up
To peer into heaven,
I don't see anything at all.
I only hear
The most cacophonous of silences.

Translation of Baudelaire's “Élévation”

By Luke Briner

The alexandrine verse of the original has been converted into iambic hexameter, and the ABBA rhyme scheme of each stanza has been preserved.

Above the languid pond, above the vale-etched plains,
Above the mountains, forests, seas, and whirling clouds,
Beyond the Sun, beyond the fine-aetheric shrouds,
Beyond the confines of the Spheres' celestial trains,

Move you, my Soul, with consummate celerity,
And, like a swimmer who swoons underneath each wave,
Upon the Vastitude you joyfully engrave
With an unspeakable and virile ecstasy.

Make quick your exodus from these miasmic banes;
Go sanctify yourself amid the air divine,
And there do you imbibe, as an ambrosial wine,
The halcyon fire that flows throughout the lucent planes.

Behind the greatness of our troubles and our *spleen*
That burden with their weight a pale life ever-bent,
Beatified be they who by a swift Ascent
Soar to those golden fields supernal and serene;

They whose own contemplations, like the songbird's wings,
Take free and cheerful flight unto the morning skies,
—Who hovers over life, and effortless descries
The language of the flowers and of silent things!



Photo by Abigail Poppleton

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For more information, contact us via email at lbriner@sjc.edu.

**60 COLLEGE AVENUE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

