

CIVILIZATIONAL PROSPECTS: ENGAGING WICKED PROBLEMS



Friday, November 17
Chancellor's Suite, University Center

**Sponsored by the Center for Vocation & Servant Leadership
and the Center for Catholic Studies.**

Funded by an Academies Seed Grant from The Office of the Provost.

Conference schedule at-a-glance

8.30 - 9.00	Breakfast & Registration
9.00 - 9.15	Introduction (Anthony Haynor) & Opening Prayer (Fr. Colin Kay)
9.15 - 10.15	Panel: Navigating Leadership, Disruption, and Innovation when Engaging Wicked Problems.
10.15 -11.15	Keynote Speaker Patrick Byrne, PhD, Boston College. Climate Change: Wicked Problem, Complex Solutions
11.15 -11.45	Climate Change, Zoonotic Disease, and Antimicrobial Resistance.
11.45 - 12.15	The Apocalyptic Metaphysics of Paul Kingsnorth.
12.15 -1.00	Lunch and roundtable discussion
1.00 -1.45	A Conversation on White Nationalism and the Alt-Right
1.45 - 2.30	Economic Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Grand Challenges for Social Work
2.30 - 3.30	Ethics in the Era of Artificial Intelligence—Personal, Professional and Societal
3.30 - 4.00	A Possible Future for Civilizational Critical Theories.
4.00 - 4.30	Conference wrap-up and future directions.

Keynote Speaker

Patrick H. Byrne is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Former Director of the Lonergan Institute at Boston College. His research/publication interests include the relationships between science, evolution and religion; ethics; the thought of Bernard Lonergan, Albert Einstein, and Aristotle. His book publications include *Toward Environmental Wholeness* (forthcoming March 2024), *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan's Foundations for Ethics* (2016) and *Analysis and Science in Aristotle* (1997). He is also editor of *The Dialogue Between Science and Religion: What We Have Learned from Each Other?* and "Bernard Lonergan," *Oxford Bibliographies* (2019).

CIVILIZATIONAL PROSPECTS: ENGAGING “WICKED PROBLEMS”

Presentation Abstracts

9.15 – 10.15 PANEL DISCUSSION: Navigating Leadership, Disruption, and Innovation when Engaging Wicked Problems

PANEL MODERATOR: Julia Boivin, Buccino Leadership Institute, Class of 2024

PANEL MEMBERS: Andrew F. Simon, PhD, PsyD, Professor, Psychology; Ruchin Kansal, MBA, M. Arch., Professor of Practice, Stillman School of Business/CEPS; Professor John H. Shannon, MBA, JD, Legal Studies, Stillman School of Business

In a rapidly evolving world, navigating through complex, large-scale challenges or "wicked problems" has become an imperative rather than an option. Disruptions have historically acted as catalysts for societal evolution and progress. The panel will discuss the critical role of effective leadership amidst large-scale, disruptive changes exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), synthetic biology, and other innovations.

Our discussion will urge recognition, preparation, and active participation to harness DIL when engaging with wicked problems. The choice, it suggests, lies with all of us — to actively engage with emerging disruptive forces, participate through visionary leadership and be encouraged by innovation, or be passively swept away into an uncertain future.

We must cultivate a clear understanding of the dynamics of DIL. There is a compelling case for proactive engagement, fostering a culture of innovation, and visionary leadership as the linchpin to navigating the complex challenges and promising opportunities on the civilizational horizon.

10.15 – 11.15 Climate Change: Wicked Problem, Complex Solutions.

Guest Speaker Patrick H. Bryne PhD, – Prof. Emeritus, Boston College.

Climate change and its human causation is an intrinsically complex problem. It took hundreds of scientists and computer software designers over a century to successfully understand and connect the numerous factors that are involved in climate change. It took comparable efforts to understand the complex consequences of global warming — what scientists call complex dynamic systems. As climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe puts it, “There is no silver bullet solution; there has to be silver buckshots of solutions.” And they need to be coordinated. In this presentation, I will survey the complexities of climate change, and argue that Bernard Lonergan’s method of functional specialties provides an important method for coordinating human responses to this complex problem.”

11.15 – 11.45 “Climate Change, Zoonotic Disease, and Antimicrobial Resistance: Addressing Wicked Global Health Problems with the One Health approach.”

Michael Taylor, PhD (Department of Political Science).

The World Health Organization has identified emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance as two of the greatest global public health threats we will face in the next decade. Both threats are multisectoral (local, regional, global effects), involve cross-species interactions, and are driven and exacerbated by effects of climate change. Climate change, emerging infectious disease, and antimicrobial resistance represent intertwined threats that are representative of a “wicked problem that is complex and multi-dimensional and is resistant to one-dimensional policy actions. The One Health approach acknowledges the interdependency of human, animal, and environmental communities and seeks holistic solutions. It brings together multiple sectors and stakeholders engaged in human, terrestrial and aquatic animal and plant health, food and feed production, and the environment to communicate and work together in the design and implementation of research, education, and public policies to attain better public health outcomes.

11.45 – 12.15. The Apocalyptic Metaphysics of Paul Kingsnorth

Anthony Sciglitano, PhD. (Department of Religious Studies).

This presentation explores the metaphysics implied in the trilogy of novels, *The Wake*, *Beast*, and *Alexandria*, by Paul Kingsnorth. All three novels suggest a conception of transcendence embedded in connection with nature, body, community, and autonomy while surrounded by an apocalyptic horizon—historical (the Wake), personal (Beast), and cosmic (Alexandria)--that brings to his metaphysics an urgency of choice between two alternative visions—Enlightenment and Romantic—that seems unsurmountable and nearly paralyzing.

1.00 – 1.45 A Conversation on White Nationalism and the Alt-Right

Leslie Bunnage, PhD. and Mark Horowitz PhD. (Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice).

The rise of ethnonationalist movements in the West poses significant dangers for the prospects of flourishing multicultural societies. Drs. Bunnage and Horowitz will report on their investigations of such movements in the United States. They will discuss how oft-cited references to the groups’ “extremism” and “hate” can obscure variation in the gendered and sexist practices of the groups, as well as the emotive dynamics and discursive practices deployed to morally legitimize participation in the movement.

1.45 – 2.30 Economic Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Grand Challenges for Social Work

Anthony Nicotera PhD. and Jared Israel Best, PhD (Department of Social Work)

In 2016, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), social work's largest professional association, proposed 12 "Grand Challenges" for social workers. In 2020, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW) added a 13th Challenge. These Grand Challenges reflect responses to "wicked problems" that plague humanity on a global level. Among these 13 challenges is the call to reduce extreme economic inequality. Similarly, Catholic Social Thought (CST) recognizes the need to work for greater economic justice. Drs. Anthony Nicotera and Jared Israel Best will introduce the intersection of social work and CST perspectives on economic justice and discuss economic inequality as a "wicked problem."

2.30 – 3.30 Ethics in the Era of Artificial Intelligence—Personal, Professional and Societal

Rev. Joseph R. Laracy STD, (Department of Systematic Theology; Department of Mathematics & Computer Science) Thomas J. Marlowe PhD. (Professor Emeritus, Department of Mathematics & Computer Science), co-authored with Cyril S. Ku (Professor, Department of Computer Science, William Paterson University), Vassilka P. Kirova (Senior Manager, Nokia Bell Labs)

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be used predictively, analyzing artifacts, data sets, interactions, and transactions to extract and use patterns, and increasingly, generatively, to create artifacts and interact with users, most often through interactive Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT. LLMs such as ChatGPT continue to expand their areas of application, seeing use across disciplines. Their use raises serious ethical challenges, but also may have corresponding benefits.

After setting out the general problem, and looking at proposed standards and solutions, as well as the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching (which has analogues in other religious traditions), we focus on health and medicine, on the one hand, and on embedded systems and software engineering, on the other, for three reasons. First, because they provide specific grounds to the analysis; second, because of the ubiquitous reach of the applications, some of which will involve further interaction with these models or other AI tools or components; and third, because they offer extreme examples for issues of safety, security, privacy, and bias. We also look briefly at some partial solutions, such as prompt engineering and disciplined approaches to validation and verification.

3.30 – 4.00 A Possible Future for Civilizational Critical Theories.

Youssef Yacoubi, PhD (Department of Languages, Literature & Culture/Honors Program).

Max Horkheimer explained that the objective of critical theory(ies) in the book *Traditional and Critical Theory* is twofold: It must explain the evolution of society, and situate it critically within historical contexts, and it should offer a coherent and holistic critique by incorporating insights from all social sciences. A dynamic, self- reflexive critical theory is explanatory, practical, and normative. Critical theories must make full sense of wicked social, political, psychological, environmental problems that exist, and must dare to offer practical solutions to them. However, the golden age of critical theory’s capacity to produce these norms is long past. The path breaking early writings of Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Jurgen Habermas and Edward Said, have been circumvented by new fresh ideas and by the events of history themselves. What kind of post-theory is likely to replace high theory?

In this presentation I argue that the golden age of high critical theory in its capacity to deal with entrenched “wicked problems” has been challenged by a new era of uneven globalization, terrorism, and by the irrepressible modes of “unhappiness” of the modern man. Post-modernism, for example, has lost its perspicacity to generate original, meaningful, norms of cosmopolitanism, world peace and brotherhood among men. I argue that a fresh critical theory for the future yet to come must engage more conscientiously with those primordial and raw topics of love, evil, death, morality, religion, and revolution that have been repressed or under read. A more holistic and humane way of interpreting the world, and the human condition is to return to core common-sense metaphysical (always physical) questions that enhance common civilization.

Special thanks to the many people who assisted in the planning and execution of this conference, especially Francia Peterson, Linda Garofalo, Danute Norse, Matthew Higgins, Tiffany Burns, and Angella Gladden.

Conference Organizers: Lisa Rose-Wiles, PhD (University Libraries), Anthony Haynor, PhD (Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice) and Youssef Yacoubi (Department of Languages, Literature & Culture/Honors Program)

