Gabriel Cahn exhumes
John Adams’s Legacy

Michael Deschamps engages
The Abortion Dialogue

Nathan Shulz enumerates
Television’s Transformations

Zach Wehrwein excoriates
The Champions of Technocracy

and

Ardevan Yaghoubi examines
Gun Control’s Genealogy
The Midway Review is a forum for civil debate across the political spectrum and among the humanities and social science disciplines, and for reflection on current events, culture, politics, religion, and philosophy.

We are accepting submissions to be considered for our Autumn 2010 issue. Please consult http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/ for submission guidelines.

Letters to the editor may be addressed to midwayreview@uchicago.edu
We ask that letters for publication be limited to 350 words.

The Midway Review is printed by In-Print Graphics on thrice-recycled paper.

Publication of the Midway Review is made possible by the Student Government Finance Committee, the College of the University of Chicago, and the Collegiate Network.
Otis McDonald Had a Gun
Ardevan Yaghoubi

While Justice Breyer wrote wearily of “the formidable task” that a McDonald ruling could leave in its wake, it might be one worth undertaking if it provides a legal foundation for sensible policymaking.

The Moral Politics of Technocratism
Zach Wehrwein

I share with Ben Field a belief that public intellectuals and technical knowledge are invaluable aspects of the legislative process, yet despite this sympathy, I am skeptical that a social science exists that somehow escapes the grit of moral debate.

The Death of the Episode
Nathan Schulz

DVDs, TiVo, On Demand, and Youtube have revolutionized the way we watch television. The autonomous, three-act (commercials!) half hour or six-act (commercials!) full hour shows have been supplanted by a spectrum of new forms. The older way of making TV, exemplified by, say, Seinfeld or Law and Order is coming under attack from both left and right.

Reframing the Abortion Issue
Michael Deschamps

Regardless of the issues surrounding the start of human life, the liberal will not concede to anything less than abortions on demand, and the conservative will resist the demand to concede their beliefs.

Beyond Founders Chic: The Lost Philosophy of John Adams
Gabriel Cahn

If Hamilton was, as Ron Chernow would have it, “the messenger of the future we all inhabit,” and if “to repudiate his legacy… is to repudiate the modern world,” then Adams was a voice of discontent with much of what would become associated with modernity itself.
In 2008, Otis McDonald filed a lawsuit against the city of Chicago alleging that barring him from registering his .22 caliber Beretta handgun violated his constitutional right to a weapon. Two years later his suit reached the United States Supreme Court, and by this summer McDonald’s name could be etched in history books alongside his peers Roe, Brown, and Miranda. A lifelong University of Chicago employee and resident of the crime-ridden Southside neighborhood of Morgan Park, McDonald’s argument centers on the necessity of a handgun for self-defense against gang violence and home intrusions. With the Supreme Court set to rule on the case this summer, McDonald v. Chicago has placed the notoriously opaque Second Amendment back in the story of America’s future, but much of this attention will likely focus on its immediate political effects. I want to focus on one aspect of the Second Amendment that is likely to be overshadowed: the radically different roles that gun rights have taken throughout American history. Although the factual details of paradigm-shifting cases like Roe v. Wade are often relegated to the footnotes, in the instance of McDonald, it would be prudent to keep his biography at the front of our story. As a 76-year old African-American, McDonald’s personal background gestures towards the profoundly intertwined history of African-Americans and guns in America.

The first date of interest is June 26, 2008. Arguably, McDonald v. Chicago is not even about McDonald’s suit. The decision’s immediate political effect is a test of a previous Supreme Court decision of nearly two years ago, District of Columbia v. Heller. In a 5–4 vote, the Court affirmed that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess firearms and that the...total ban on handguns, as well as its requirement that firearms in the home be kept nonfunctional even when necessary for self-defense, violated that right.” The self-defense line of argumentation was a radical departure from what Justice Stephen Breyer called the “settled understanding” of the Amendment, namely, that the Amendment protected interference into “the preservation of a well-regulated militia” alone. However, the ruling in Heller applied only to areas under federal jurisdiction like Washington, D.C. (the location of Heller’s filing), and the justices did not articulate how the self-defense argument would impact numerous state laws that restrict gun ownership across the country. Justice Breyer wrote that the decision “leaves for future cases the formidable task of defining the scope of permissible regulations.” Thus, McDonald is the first in a potential series of cases that might be needed to determine which state laws are unconstitutional and which are not.

There is a second way in which McDonald is not about Otis McDonald or his fear of home invasion. Confusingly, it is not the Second, but rather the Fourteenth Amendment that will weigh most heavily on the decision, which makes its ratification (July 9, 1868) the next significant date. The Fourteenth Amendment was ratified to ensure the rights of all American citizens, as articulated in the rest of the Constitution. Before the new Amendment, it was argued that even the most fundamental rights like freedom of speech, association, and others, were all limitations on federal power but did not apply to states. Thus, the Supreme Court infamously wrote in United States v. Cruikshank that the First Amendment, for instance, “was not intended to limit the powers of the State governments in respect to their own citi-

Otis McDonald had a Gun
by Ardevan Yaghoubi

Ardevan Yaghoubi is a second-year in the College, majoring in Philosophy.
Otis McDonald had a Gun

zens, but to operate upon the National government alone.” Legislators saw the widespread abuse that then occurred in individual states which denied rights to newly freed slaves and poor whites, and sought to rectify it. Out of this context emerged the Incorporation Doctrine, which applies the Bill of Rights to states. Since 1868, the Supreme Court has incorporated every amendment in the Bill of Rights except for one: the right to bear arms. *McDonald* has the power to change that.

Yet there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that in ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, the United States guaranteed each individual in the country, regardless of state, the right to bear arms for self-defense. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment specifically sought to respond to the persuasive terror and disenfranchisement in the Reconstruction Era South, and thus had self-defense at its core. As Professor William Merkel wrote in the *Stanford Law Review*, “the right the US attorney sought to vindicate through the 14th amendment was indeed the right to armed defense against the [Klu Klux] Klan.” Groups like the Klan prevented African-Americans from exercising basic rights of association and voting, and attempted to reestablish forms of servitude and slavery. An important element of the Klan’s efforts was denying former slaves the right to bear arms since they naturally did not participate in organized state militias. So, in 1866, *Harper’s Weekly* observed: “The militia of [Mississippi] have seized every gun found in the hands of so-called freedmen in this section of the county. They claim that the Statute Laws of Mississippi do not recognize the Negro as having any right to carry arms.” Ironically, for most modern-day proponents of gun control who point to Breyer’s “settled understanding” of the Second Amendment as only applying to *militias*, the Klu Klux Klan was in its own self-conception essentially that. The brutality they unleashed on African-Americans in the years following the Civil War is virtually unimaginable in our century: publics lynching, torture, and castration were all routine. The Klan’s violence did not stop at freed slaves: during the particularly heated Congressional debates over the Civil Rights Act of 1866, “Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts received a box containing the finger of a black man. The accompanying note read: ‘You old son of a bitch, I send you a piece of one of your friends, and if that bill of yours passes I will have a piece of you.’”

Often, in the face of this threat, police were either unable or unwilling to come to the aid of the terrorized black population. In some cases, policeman and Klan member were one in the same. As Massachusetts representative Benjamin Butler wrote in a letter about Kentucky:

> The Klu Klux Klan fired on them through the window, one of the bullets striking a colored woman … and wounding her through the knee badly. The colored men then fired on the Klansmen, and killed their leader or captain right there on the steps of the colored men’s house…. [T]here he remained until morning when he was identified, and proved to be ‘Pat Inman,’ a constable and deputy sheriff.

In contrast to today’s popularly liberal bias towards the restriction of gun rights, it was the most ardent abolitionists who argued in favor of the individual right to self-defense. Republican Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy, for instance, “described as one of the three ‘indispensable safeguards of liberty…under the Constitution’ a man’s ‘right to bear arms for the defense of himself and family and his homestead.’”
Although today these ideological positions have reversed, with most liberal progressives arguing in favor of strict bans and red-state tea-partiers bringing their assault rifles to Presidential rallies, I want to conclude with the suggestion that a reading of the Second Amendment in terms of individual self-defense could open the door to reversing other oppressive social policies. Most immediately, the predicted ruling in favor of the plaintiff in *McDonald* could start the push to end forms of legal discrimination against homosexuals in America. Serendipitously, the well-known Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*, where two gay men in Texas were arrested under that state’s archaic sodomy laws, was in fact set into motion when police were called about a gun violation on the scene. Most prominently, legal scholar Akil Amar has linked “the right to arms to the Nineteenth Amendment’s expansion of suffrage and, implicitly, full political citizenship to advance a powerful argument for equal opportunity for women in the military. He…argues that the Second Amendment should be read to demand gay and lesbian access and equality in the Armed Forces.” Just as Blacks and women were once excluded from military service, homosexuals continue to be denied access to a cornerstone of American political life. Many expect President Barack Obama to repeal the current “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, with *Atlantic Monthly* editor Marc Ambinder writing that its annulling “will be permanent.” Indeed, while Breyer wrote warily of “the formidable task” that a *McDonald* ruling could leave in its wake, it might be one worth undertaking if it provides a legal foundation for sensible policymaking.

Although I now support Otis McDonald’s right to bear arms, my goal has not been to proselytize or justify a dogmatic interpretation of the Second Amendment. It is altogether possible that if the Supreme Court rules against standing restrictions on handguns, gun violence will increase (although to say it is “likely” or “unlikely” cannot go far beyond conjecture). Instead, I believe that sensitivity to the importance of the right to bear arms in the nation’s history should cause us to re-evaluate a standard liberal position too commonly taken for granted.
The Midway Review

B E N F I E L D, in the last issue of this journal, develops a sweeping proposal for retooling Congress. It is no mystery that Congress is in dire need of reform. Much ink has been spilled on abusive earmarking, the corrupting influence of campaign contributions, parliamentary tactics, and downright childish behavior. Field delineates well the consequences of a misinformed political class beholden to particular constituents and interests. Moreover, Field’s discussion of the conflict between the “policy generalist” role of the legislature and the complexities of the modern bureaucratic state is a productive one. In the face of ballooning entitlement programs, there is little hope that politically suicidal spending cuts or higher taxes necessary to alleviate the national debt will be seriously considered. Unfortunately, after this productive analysis, Field’s proposals to amend the situation are sunk by the weight of a problematic positivist epistemology. I share with Field a belief that public intellectuals and technical knowledge are invaluable aspects of the legislative process, yet despite this sympathy, I am skeptical that a social science exists that somehow escapes the grit of moral debate. Therefore, this critique seeks to problematize Field’s conclusion by drawing out the epistemology that structures the whole argument. Further, what I really want to elucidate is the claim that, given enough time and data, a science of society or the polity is possible such that, without using moral claims, the end product is an objective right answer. Field’s argument is principally an institutional-level discussion of governance. He does not delve into the philosophy of social science literature; therefore, I am in a sense pulling his argument into foreign territory. However, Field’s case is built on the premise of a positivist amoral social science. Hence, a convincing critique must get at this epistemological backdrop.

Zach Wehrwein is a third-year in the College, majoring in Sociology.

Field calls for a truly radical shift in our political culture: citizens should embrace a technocratic vision of governance. To this end, he suggests an institutional change to transfer significant legislative authority to the executive branch, where “non-partisan administrators are the most capable to handle it.” Congress thus serves as a tribunal, setting “general priorities” and “overseeing their successful execution,” while retaining power through subpoena and impeachment. Congress does not generate laws proper. Moreover, he calls for the development of “blue-ribbon committees,” conventions of experts to settle debates. These committees must have real power; legislators cannot interfere with the end product without jeopardizing their non-partisan and authoritative nature. There are three parts to his proposal. First, a cultural shift in our perception of the government. The second, fundamentally altering the role of Congress, entails an institutional change. Finally, new institutions are created, committees of experts with legislative power.

To this end, Field sets up a neat dichotomy between a non-political, practical debate centered on the means to an end and a political debate based on moral principles that specify the substantive political end. The former has an objective right answer while the competing views in the latter are sufficiently mutually exclusive such that we must rely on majority rule, as there is “no evidence or argument that can effectively resolve a stalemate.” Field goes on to point out the relatively universal consensus on certain goals: controlling our national debt, the transition of Iraq into a modern liberal democracy, and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. The real debate is thus implementing the empirically correct approach to achieving these ends. Field later extends this claim, arguing that we have reached a post-ideology age, “beyond –isms,” and that the public sphere must now only concern itself with the questions of managing the “secular economy.”
We could pick apart the institutional argument in a number of ways, but many of these criticisms would largely be speculative. There is simply no way to know how effective Congress would be as a citizen's tribunal, or if the consequence of pushing legislative authority to the executive branch would result in a tyrannical regime. An argument developed on these premises is not likely to be convincing. Therefore, I would like to strike at the underlying epistemology, the foundation for the institutional argument.

We can begin with a broad philosophical criticism: intellectuals are disconnected from the reality of everyday life. On the right, figures like Thomas Sowell charge that the intelligentsia anoint themselves above the common man. Their bird’s-eye reflections on the ideal society too often conflict with reality, creating policies that cater only to their narrow, over-educated ideologies. On the left, the ivory tower is accused of ignoring global cultural heterogeneity and therefore criticizing practices like female genital mutilation, which they ultimately know nothing about. The salient critique is that it is wrong to tell people what is good for them, or more fundamentally, it is an open question if it is possible to know what is best for someone else. This surface level epistemological claim makes little headway in a critique of positivism.

For example, Field’s case effectively addresses this point. Experts do differ on matters of principle—the economists of the Heritage Foundation and the Center for American Progress likely disagree on whether to pursue policies that grow the pie or more evenly distribute it. These differences are political in nature and can be resolved through democratic majority processes. Yet, for Field, these ideological differences among technocrats are not absolute as they are reconcilable through further empirical verification. For example, the efficacy of school-voucher programs need only be further tested and examined; once proven or disproven in the *Journal of Political Economy*, technocrats would presumably cohere in their beliefs. In Field’s program, there is therefore little need to worry about the empirically incorrect beliefs of experts, as it is just part and parcel of a linear progression of social scientific knowledge.

For this same reason, an argument premised on a historical comparison is not likely to be satisfactory. For example, few would agree with the Christian Socialist platform, adopted by John Bates Clark, that underpinned the founding of the American Economic Association, which argued that only through the rational management of the economy by “scientific political economists” would human progress be made. The technocratic argument has been mobilized historically for both left and right causes, in each instance purporting to have objectively found the right answers. Yet the good positivist responds that this is merely a bump in an otherwise linear progression towards truth.

To take a step back, perhaps we can endeavor at a different conception of social scientific knowledge: why do intellectuals cohere in their beliefs? The reason for consensus is in fact a different form of ideology—a methodological one. We should therefore differentiate the two forms of ideology: normative and methodological. Let’s consider, for example, the fact that there was little consensus among macroeconomists on the appropriate policy response to the Great Recession. There was a normative ideological split between the types of government intervention—monetarists like Robert Lucas opined that Ben Bernanke was the best stimulus, while Paul Krugman called for a fiscal stimulus that was double the size of the passed bill. This debate points out the limits of a neat dichotomy between principal-based and practical politics. Krugman and Lucas agreed on the same end: stimulating the American economy. Granted, one could make the case that the lack of sufficient data
on the efficacy of fiscal stimulus was a factor in the wider technocrat debate, but more fundamentally, there is also an ontological distinction between the economics practiced by Krugman and Lucas. Within expert epistemologies, agreement is forged partially through consensus on methodology and ontology. In a word, there is a paradigm that structures how research is done. For example, GDP is a widely used measurement of the health of a national economy. Yet, there is nothing natural or transhistorically true about its use—it is an aspect of a methodological ideology which is reproduced simply by the fact that many economists are taught that GDP is a good measurement. It is essentially artificial. This is the crucial argument of this essay: methodologies—and by extension the epistemologies—are in-of-themselves socially constructed. There is no eternally true way to measure or assess social reality. I am deploying a relatively narrow strand of social constructivism in my critique. To be clear, this does not mean that there are not processes or mechanisms independent of theories; I am not making an argument that everything is merely subjective perception. Rather, there is no physics of the social—there are no laws which together constitute a total view of how social life is and has always been organized. It is not possible to step outside of context and passively understand the correct answer. Moreover, I speculate that if bent to the yoke, one would readily concede that some moral principles must be present in a relatively unifying framework used to imagine how social life should be legally regulated. Yet, the technocratic vision is one in which this is not the case. The moral framework drops away rhetorically, replaced by a scientism purporting to objectively adjudicate, in Field’s case, the means to the end.

To drive this point further, let us consider economists’ holiest of holies: free-trade. The dichotomy between objective amoral, practical politics and principled, moral politics rests on the premise that not only is there an objective answer to policy, but also that the implementation escapes moral debate. For if moral principles are involved, we fall back into the “political debate,” in Field’s terminology. Thus, the next question we must ask should be, “Is there such a thing as an amoral means to policy implementation?” A precedent to Field’s proposal is the Trade Promotion Authority through which critical globalization legislation like NAFTA was fast-tracked. However, we should be cautious naming this legislation objectively good. There is a particular utilitarian justification at work: the greatest good for the greatest number. There are winners and losers to globalization; even if one were to compensate the losers through job retraining programs or other social safety nets, there are still dramatic qualitative changes in society. The industrial base of the United States has disappeared as globalization has shifted us into the “post-industrial,” “new economy,” or whatever the new Tom Friedman book calls it. The benefits notwithstanding, policy makers qualitatively changed the American landscape. It is not pertinent to this critique to discuss the totality of the consequences of globalization—this is a critique of how to make an argument. Put another way:
Pareto efficiency—a change that makes everyone economically better off without making any one person worse off—is clearly a useful criteria for evaluating policy theoretically, but it should not be mistaken as the objective criteria. It is by rhetoric alone that scientific technocracy is justified. If one oversteps the moral arguments, it is merely blindsiding the fundamentals of political speech.

Again, the question returns us to methodological claims. To answer the question involves a presupposition of measurement, which itself contains a claim on what is relevant to a person’s life. Laws necessarily affect our lives. Measuring their impact entails a claim on what essential feature of our lives must be measured—is it the change in our pocketbook, the Sunday sermon, or the street protest? Whatever feature one measures makes little difference to my argument: some guiding principle necessarily selects a piece of social life as the aspect to measure—it is not the product of objective perception.

To sum up: there are three critiques I have deployed. One is an epistemological claim on the nature of social scientific discoveries and their essential connection to an imagined worldview of what constitutes social life. Another is a connected argument that moral principles factor into any social imagination. The final claim concerns policy practicality: the means to legal implementation qualitatively and quantitatively adjusts our social lives, and measuring their impact necessarily entails a claim on what relevant piece of social life to examine.

However, none of these arguments deal the final blow. For if one believes that we have reached a post-ideological age, in which universally agreed upon policy goals just have to be objectively implemented, the aforementioned powerful utilitarian argument remains. The end goal, whatever it is, is given transhistorical status, it becomes Truth with a capital “T.” It follows then that the most expedient way to realize this goal is the only option.

The consequence is to accept particular historically contingent institutional arrangements without recognizing the possibilities of a new social imagination. It is to forgo the very possibilities of liberal democracies to realize institutions which better the human condition, however one may define it. It takes the particular realization of a given moral-political goal and then absolutizes that manifestation. Tocqueville puts it beautifully in an anecdote, “I once met an American sailor, and I asked him why his country’s ships are not built to last. Without hesitation he answered that the art of navigation was making such progress that the finest ship would soon be useless if its existence were prolonged for more than a few years. In these words, spoken off the cuff by a coarse fellow in response to a specific question, I recognized the general and systematic idea that guides a great people in everything it does.” Tocqueville recognizes the power of democracy to change, to adapt to new historical challenges—it does not specify a single ship design. It does not posit a utopia at the end of the rainbow, recognizing the constant imperfect human attempts to realize a good society. Moral claims are thus an inseparable aspect of the democratic public sphere.

To wit: to hell with Hegel and to hell with a particular ship. We need not sell ourselves short. In the end, a particular moral claim—a debate on principles—is at the forefront of democratic policy making. To claim a universal is simply to rhetorically justify a particular political ideology.
IN HIS MARCH 21 ARTICLE “THE HBO AUTEUR,” NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE COLUMNIST WYATT MASON CREDITS THE SINGULAR VISION OF DAVID SIMON, COMBINED WITH THE CREATIVE FREEDOM AFFORDED HIM BY HBO FOR THE BRILLIANCE OF SERIES THE WIRE AND, MORE RECENTLY, TREME. AT ONE POINT IN THE ARTICLE, MASON SUMS UPS A PERENNIAL THEME OF THE SHOW:

Because so many of the show’s story lines dramatized the futility of any of these characters’ attempts to break through social and economic ceilings, the image of contemporary urban America that the show offered was one in which character wasn’t fate so much as fait accompli: in the land of the free market, Simon was arguing, free will wasn’t going to get you very far.

Given the above, I find it ironic that Mason did not consider some of the more systemic reasons for the show’s success. Instead, he chooses to focus on the character of Simon, who the title of Mason’s article would imply is a new Goddard.

Those critics who do not list The Wire as the greatest show ever made will almost invariably list The Sopranos in its stead, with the more recent Mad Men not too far behind either. Neither show owes much to Simon’s creative faculties, yet all three shows are distinct products of their era. I would argue that it is what they have in common rather than the comparable talents of disjoint geniuses that account for much of critics’ love of these shows. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that any of those shows would have had the same measure of critical or commercial success had they debuted twenty years ago. Indeed, I’d argue David Lynch’s Twin Peaks, or the even older I Claudius are every bit the creative masterpieces as the shows listed above, for many of the same reasons, and yet neither enjoys anything near the same degree of critical support as these dramas. The reason is as cold as it is simple: technology. DVDs, Tivo, On Demand, and Youtube have revolutionized the way we watch television. The autonomous, three-act (commercials!) half hour or six-act (commercials!) full hour shows have been supplanted by a spectrum of new forms. At one extreme are critical favorites Mad Men, The Wire, and The Sopranos. At the other end are Family Guy, South Park, and, at the very extreme, Robot Chicken. The older way of making TV, exemplified by, say, Seinfeld or Law and Order is coming under attack from both left and right. Despite a separation of many years, Seinfeld and Law and Order bear closer resemblance to The Twilight Zone or I Love Lucy than the newer breeds of shows. The episode, as a basic unit of making TV, may be dying. The Wire depends on continuity and a series-spanning plot arc to such a heavy degree that it’s nearly impossible to be satisfied with a single episode or season. Fortunately, with the advent of DVDs and On Demand, it is possible to watch the show as intended. Prime time viewers who were baffled by Twin Peaks had no such luxury. It’s notable that David Lynch made a point of not including chapters on the first DVD pressing of the show, so that each episode would have to be watched in its entirety rather than modularly. The Wire depends on this very dynamic which Lynch saw need to induce. The creative latitude afforded by HBO’s executives, and indeed, David Simon’s own brilliance pales in comparison to the possibilities of our new media. The same same story goes for The Sopranos.

Comparatively, Mad Men is a bit of a Frankenstein case, as it is broadcast with commercial interruption, making it clear how unsuitable such a show is to prime time television. Commercials appear seemingly at random, rather than providing respite between acts. This often comes across as

Nathan Schulz is a third-year in the College, majoring in Mathematics and History.
shoddy editing, but the show’s rabid fans scarcely mind. Additionally, individual episodes of that show are even less autonomous than those of The Wire. Often a whole episode has finished before one realizes that nothing has transpired, meaning that watching multiple episodes in a row is almost a must. In spite of what would appear to be crippling weaknesses in the show’s form, it is highly lauded critically. I say it’s extremely overrated. While the novelty of this new “long format” of television has taken critics and viewers alike by storm, and rendered the episode too short a unit to carry a successful television drama, for comedies, the episode is actually proving too long.

Family Guy was pulled off the air, but unfortunately was given a new lease on life following tremendous DVD sales. Here, a different dynamic is at work. For Family Guy, there is certainly no series-spanning plot arc. Actually, a full episode is nothing more than the sum of its gags. Numerous times I’ve been over to a friend’s to watch a Family Guy DVD, and they almost invariably will fast-forward to the more relevant (read: funny) parts of the episode. In the two-part South Park episode “Cartoon Wars,” Eric Cartman points out that the jokes in the show are interchangeable, a fact even admitted by Family Guy’s creator. In fact, the second run Family Guy revels in this fact more than the original run, but who can blame them? They’re catering to the audience that bought the DVDs. What I can tell you is that I remember a joke about Benjamin Disraeli, but haven’t the faintest clue which episode it came from. Such a problem I’d never have with Seinfeld, but one I find myself repeatedly encountering in the present era of Youtube.

The folk at South Park, for their part, are making a valiant effort to confuse the issue as much as possible. A look at any of the last five seasons reveals a number of timeless stand-alone episodes, topical pieces that are already dated, as well as episodes that cater to a Youtube mentality. It’s hard to enjoy much of the humor of “Canada on Strike” which centers around the long resolved WGA strike, but the short scene involving Butters singing “What, What, In The Butt” is still a treasure. Youtube itself plays prominently into the episode’s plot, so it’s good to see that Trey Parker and
Matt Stone at least understand its influence, even if their own writing has generally gotten lazier.

The thirteenth season episode “Pee” was by most accounts a subpar episode, but I’d be amiss if I didn’t admit to watching Cartman sing the song “Too Many Minorities” as featured on the episode multiple times on southparkstudios.com as well as on Youtube—yet not quite as many times as I’ve listened to Dr. Rockszoo of Metalocalypse sing “I’m Just a Rock n’ Roll Clown” on that incredible website. Can’t say I’ve watched the episode of the song’s origin “Cleanzo,” which is notably only fifteen minutes long, more than twice. In a slightly earlier era of making TV, clip shows were much maligned, but a critical blind eye is being turned to this new way of doing TV. That’s not to say that there’s nothing to be appreciated in the freshness of the Youtube format—I hold the Derrick Comedy troupe in highest esteem. Still, it seems redundant that TV shows should appeal to a format that is far more successful on its own.

_Curb Your Enthusiasm_ is an interesting case study, an HBO comedy program from the mind of _Seinfeld_ co-creator Larry David. The type of humor in the show strongly resembles _Seinfeld_. However, the HBO format allows for season-spanning plot arcs as well as a lackadaisical improvisatory approach to each individual episode. This obviously has advantages and disadvantages. I personally like the show a great deal, but it lacks the sinewy tautness, and manic energy of its forefather. The comparison makes it clear just how much punch a seemingly dying form of TV craftsmanship can pack.

Such a way of making a television series often takes a heavy toll on the principal screenwriter. Rod Serling was so prolific a writer that it comes as no surprise that he died early of a heart attack. Larry David ran out of gas halfway through Seinfeld’s seventh season and other writers had to step into his shoes, leading to fundamental changes in the pacing and style of the writing in the last season and a half. With about sixty episodes under his belt, John Swartzwelder has written more for _The Simpsons_ than anybody else; he seems to have retired, and many complain of a decline in quality over the last ten years. Both Swartzwelder and Serling were notorious for coffee and cigarette consumption on an elephantine scale. It’s hard work to churn out good episodes for ten years in a row. It’s probably harder than to extend one story indefinitely, which is what low production value soap operas have done for decades, probably harder than to come up with dozens of gags and non-sequiturs.

Clearly, there are new possibilities to be embraced in the “long form” of making television, and David Simon is obviously a good example of a man who has exploited the possibilities of such a format. That said, the episode is capable of doing great things. There is absolutely no continuity within _The Twilight Zone_, but this offered the genius of Rod Serling latitude to create a large and diverse canon of incredible work. From the Cold War paranoia of “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street” to the maudlin schmaltz of “Kick the Can,” _The Twilight Zone_ touched upon just about everything while maintaining the signature of its creator. Larry David got more mileage out of the autonomous, three-act (commercials!) half hour episode than generations of “auteurs” who preceded and succeeded him, irrespective of format.
Refocusing the Abortion Issue
by Michael Deschamps

There is little doubt that abortion is a widespread phenomenon, but attitudes toward abortion have been changing. In the years following the historic Roe v. Wade decision, over 80% of Americans approved of abortion in cases of rape, serious birth defects and health issues, and over 40% approved of abortion under most circumstances. The political debate has grown over the past twenty years as new methods are tested and employed that are medical alternatives to surgical abortions. A clinical study by Clark, Ellertson, and Winikoff on the use Mifepristone-Misoprostol demonstrated that the medical abortion choice was a political support consideration that increased with education level. Another claim states that women who disapprove of abortion tend to have achieved lower educational levels. Sociodemographically, there are numerous claims and accusations being made on both sides of the issue. Some state that the increase in abortion rates should be viewed as positive, demonstrating that teenagers now have a choice whether to marry or not marry. They go on to make the claim that abortion is a necessary good and that the rise in abortion rates indirectly indicates that women have gained power. What makes this social problem so important is its volatility, the propensity for fierce emotion, and the extent to which either side will go to enforce their views. But even more important is the value that policy-makers can glean from effectively dissecting this issue and incorporating what they learn into other complex, socially-driven policy initiatives. Just stating the opinions of the contributors on this issue does not validate or invalidate what they are stating. Is the right to abort really a power issue?

Abortion was not condemned in the classical period. The ancient Greeks actually advocated abortion to regulate population and stabilize economic conditions. Much like today, clinical urgency and socio-political origin were the two predominant criteria employed in the abortion decision. Possibly the earliest recorded account of abortion use as a population control measure was a recommendation by Aristotle to ensure the ideal size of a city, specifically in cases where couples already had “sufficient” children. Historically, three areas of constraint—legal, religious, and medical—were always present, but in differing capacities. English law allowed a woman to have an abortion from 1307 to 1803, as long as the first movements of the fetus had not yet occurred (generally around 16 to 18 weeks); an abortion performed after the fetus started to move was considered a criminal offense, though only a misdemeanor. However, beginning in 1803 with the reign of George III, the Lord Ellenborough's Act made abortion before fetal movements could be detected a felony, and any abortions after fetal movements could be detected a murder, punish-

Michael Deschamps is a graduate student in the School of Social Service Administration.
able by death. During the remainder of the 19th and 20th centuries, abortion was heavily restricted in most Western countries. The legislative trends that began in the 1920s were felt worldwide and resulted in numerous challenges to restrictive abortion laws, which opened a divisive dialogue between opponents and proponents. Since the 1960’s there has been a tremendous movement toward lessening the restrictions placed on induced abortions worldwide, specifically in the United States with the Roe v. Wade decision. Perpetual legislative manipulation wrought by the dynamic political processes associated with many newer abortion laws has contributed to a growing divide among supporters and non-supporters. The social revolution that has occurred over the past fifty years for abortion legislation has been enormous.

The Political Arena

In addressing any social policy issues as hotly debated as abortion, the policymaker must first examine the merits of the debate. Does it really exist, and if it does, at what level. Effective social policy, when honestly assessing social consequence, must find common ground. Perhaps policymakers, when addressing social policy that drives social consequences, must be more scientific in their approaches to problem resolution than political. The culture war debate still has life, and it tends to distort the American common ground that would appear to be much more common than either extreme could imagine. If the red state, blue state reality holds up, how would it affect policy development?

Morris Fiorina, a democratic theory specialist at Stanford University, found that the actual consideration of abortion as murder has swung both ways over the past fifteen years. In 1995, 40% polled regarded abortion as murder as opposed to 51% who did not. There was a shift in 1998 where the positions actually changed, where 48% percent of persons polled believed that abortion was an act of murder, whereas 45% did not feel that way. In 2003 the percentages were identical. On the surface this might support the “divided America” rhetoric and the red state, blue state mentality. Again, this poll finds opposing opinions about only one aspect of the abortion issue, if one considers abortion murder. Fiorina points out that not everyone who thinks abortion is murder thinks it should be illegal, and there are those who feel it is not murder but still feel it abortion should be illegal. The complexities behind this issue play out in numerous and complex personal positions—fact-based or not—that may influence the decision maker and drive premature policy decisions. A roundtable discussion on the science of survey development itself would reveal the difficulties in really understanding the opinions behind most, if not all, opinion polls. So where is the value? Perhaps it lies in the fact that the mere complexity of such social policy initiatives should scream out for more simplicity.

Fiorina found that if the identical survey question is used over time, public opinion is remarkably stable. The General Social Survey, regard-
The Midway Review

ing a question about abortion, has included the identical item in its survey for thirty years:

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a woman to obtain a legal abortion:

- If the woman’s health is seriously endangered.
- She became pregnant as a result of rape.
- There is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby.
- The family has low income and cannot afford any more children.
- She is not married and does not want to marry the man.
- She is married and does not want any more children.

One would assume that the extreme positions would either support abortion regardless of reason, or oppose abortion regardless of reason, and the results support this assumption. A fundamental finding in the case of this survey question is that it is devoid of the emotionally charged rhetoric common to the abortion debate and that its focus is purely on the substance of personal beliefs. Fiorina found that on average, the general public would support legal abortion in about four of the six circumstances. However, there is a solid and overwhelming majority that would support abortion in the first three circumstances (tragic circumstances), and likewise, a small majority that would support abortion in the last three circumstances. There is evidence to support the claim that opinions about abortion do vary across the country geographically, but there is also evidence that supports the claim that the differences are much less than common rhetoric. The lesson is to take the middle ground and to focus on aspects of the policy-issue that both sides can wrap their consciences around. In the case of abortion, as with so many other complex, social policy debates, an initial goal might be to define the real problem and to navigate away from the politically motivated derangement. Accurate problem identification, coupled with honest dissemination throughout the political arena could move mountains.

The Public Arena

According to Henry David, director of the Transitional Family Research Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, the multicultural expansion of the pro-abortion movement can likely be attributed to one of the following four interrelated causes; first, the general recognition of the threat to public health of legally restricted abortion; second, the support for a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy under safe conditions and at an early stage of gestation; third, the liberalization of legislation concerning the availability of modern contraceptives; finally, the provision of equal access to all methods of fertility regulation for woman of all strata of society. These considerations were benchmark defenses for loosening many of the previously restrictive abortion laws. However, these very defenses are also the foundation for much opposition. Though it is probably a safe assumption to say that abortion, at least in some sense, is here to stay, the bridge between opposing sides of the issues has yet to be built.

Regardless of stance, both sides have to acknowledge certain facts. In the United States, an estimated 44.6 million abortions were performed between 1973 and 2005. In other words, slightly more than one in five pregnancies resulted in abortion. And though the abortion rate in the United States has seen a decline since 1992, the latest numbers still reflect an annual rate of 1.2 million abortions. One of the most common medical procedures undergone by women in the United States is abortion. The maternal death rate from induced abortions has declined from 4.1 per 100,000 to less than one percent per hundred thousand over the past 35 years but still remains disproportionately high for women receiving abortions after eight weeks of gestation.

One might assume that the rise of medical abortions using Mifepristone may have lead to a decrease in abortion related deaths. However, research by D. A. Grimes shows that the mortality rates from medical abortions are statistically equal to the mortality rates of induced and spontaneous abortions; therefore the reduction in the
mortality rate cannot be directly attributed to a reduction in surgical abortions. Furthermore, even with the addition of the medical abortion regime, abortion is still considered to be one of the safest procedures in contemporary medical practice in the United States.

There are three significant facts surrounding the abortion issue: First, that in the United States alone there have been an estimated 46 million abortions since the passing of Roe v. Wade, or more than 15 percent of our current population; second, there is a universal effort to stem the flow of unwanted pregnancies, and therefore abortions; and third, that abortion is a world-wide issue. But how can policymakers respond to the complex issues of women’s reproductive rights, the rights of the unborn, and the population question? What needs to be done in the case of the abortion issue is to begin to reframe it into a more accurate picture. Policymakers must shift lenses, share lenses and find a unified rallying point.

**The Personal Arena**

Policymakers cannot devalue individual beliefs, moral values, or religion simply because they may not agree. Doing so would only ignore the history of policy development and general ethical considerations toward the individual. However, in the effort to heal and to promote societal wellness, empowerment, and equality, we have a responsibility to find the common ground that will allow the productive discussion of volatile issues like abortion, capital punishment, and assisted suicide. Policymakers have a professional and moral obligation to move in the direction of fundamental efficiency and tangible, measurable gains. They must look for the truth and embrace initiatives that are not self-centered or biased by their personal realities.

Extremists on both sides of this issue want to persuade, but their motives must be addressed. Simply making the claim that women have the right to terminate a pregnancy because their body is their own does not negate the viability of the argument that if life begins at any point prior to the abortion, the rights of the fetus are equal. Likewise, simply disbelieving, discounting, or ignoring the possibility of motives embracing population control, eugenics, and welfare costs, does not negate their influence in policy and legislation. Dismissing the Christian worldview without dismissing the Muslim, Jewish, Hindi, or other worldviews embracing fetal life preservation is dishonest and duplicitous. Exercising the right to abort based on individual rights of ownership and privacy may not extend equal rights to the father who shares ownership of the fetus. Extremists work to convince others that a specific condition or problem exists, that a particular solution is necessary, and that a certain policy should be adopted that utilizes a proposed solution to correct the problem. However, if the problem is inaccurately identified, the proposed solution and policies are useless. Any attempt to remove oneself from the role of subject or observer, and to pretend that unilateral perceptions of the solution or problem are more valid than the facts, does nothing but reinforce the gap between social problems and social reform. The pro-life Evangelical Christian is never going to accept the worldview of the agnostic pro-choice feminist, and vice versa. And why should they? Both realities and worldviews are just as valid in their own ecological sphere. Attempting to change mindsets for the sole purpose of propagating a particular worldview is not social reform; it is an attempt to get everyone to agree with our own reality to the exclusion of their own. Policymakers must move toward fact-based, effective determinants that promise efficiency, balance, and sustainable impact.

**Defining the Real Problem**

Looking at abortion and defining it honestly would be to conclude that in the vast majority of instances it is simply an advanced method of terminating unwanted pregnancies. There are those who hear the arguments to privacy and sovereignty but would conclude that those rights are no different than those exercised by an obese person (who cannot control their physical urges) who is entitled to surgical or medical relief from
their unwanted pounds. Granted, in both situations there are potential medical and psychological causes that drive the necessity for specific interventions, but causality must be examined honestly. In the abortion debate some see women calling out for the right to abort as simply waving the white flag of surrender to personal pre-sex responsibility and defensible decision-making.

Looking at the abortion issue from the moral perspective of most conservative groups, they do not simply see the lives of nearly 45 million babies destroyed on a yearly basis. They see it as more than 5,000 lives a day, or at the very least potential lives. Regardless of the issues surrounding the start of human life, the liberal will not concede to anything less than abortions on demand, and the conservative will resist the demand to concede their beliefs.

Restructuring a social problem to make it more palatable to opposing sides is a challenging venture, but in the course of productive social-policy development, social consequences must be as well considered and must be mapped out as the economic long-term returns on capital investments. Policy advocacy without consideration of the social, and perhaps global impact of choosing sides, could be catastrophic.
Since the early 1990s, the American Founders have been subject to increasingly popular biographies by historians including David McCullough, Joseph Ellis, Richard Brookhiser, Ron Chernow, and John Ferling. Their books have attempted not only to re-animate and re-situate the Founders, but also to defend traditional political biography from its detractors within the academy. The culmination of this popularizing trend in American biography is the 2008 HBO miniseries based on McCullough’s *John Adams*. Watching Paul Giamatti, Stephen Dillane, and Laura Linney portray the founding generation was a heartwarming moment for any scholar still concerned with the death of conventional historical biography.

However, what has been called our nation’s “founders chic,” our desire to familiarize and domesticate the Founders, has prevented us from grappling with some of the most original, foreign, and strange ideas present in their thought. Revisionist historians have justly attacked “founder worship” for dwelling on individuals at the expense of broader economic, social, or political trends. David Waldstreicher has noted that, particularly in the writings of David McCullough, “Character and culture, rather than politics or context in any other sense, become destiny.” Moreover, political biographies focused on America’s ruling class of “Dead White Men” tend to obscure intriguing narratives from the lives of those less privileged, particularly women, slaves, and the rural poor. These standard revisionist critiques have merit, but they miss something else: our national obsession with the Founders’ character leads us to ignore their most interesting beliefs in an attempt to make them more in tune with our modern prejudices.

At its best, this strand of the Founders’ history has revealed the complexity and nuance of the interrelated lives of the Founders. Joseph Ellis’ *Founding Brothers* has drawn our attention to their humanity and their foibles as well as their strengths. By examining relationships within the often-fractious founding generation, he has helped dispel simplistic myths about their nobility and foresight. Furthermore, a focus on the Founders’ lives can fulfill the simple historical goal, articulated by Herodotus, that “great and wonderful deeds… not go unsung.”

However, if we are to expand the purpose of history beyond these basic missions, “founders chic,” at least in its most basic form, becomes a flawed tool for making use of history. At their worst, these historical tracts have made our nation’s first political leaders more akin to modern political personalities, fueled by feuds, resentments, and touchy pride. These historians have attempted to place the Founders within our own political horizons, and have even made them pawns in the American culture wars. More importantly, the study of personality alone often leads us to make Plutarchian judgments and to treat history as a competition between various personality traits. We are invited to view the Founders through the lens of our own personal preferences and politics.

Gabriel Cahn is a fourth-year in the College, majoring in History.
as an object of loyalty or admiration. While we might be able to apply their lessons about character to the present day, it does not provide nearly as complex and interesting a narrative as more political and intellectual approaches. In other words, a simplistic focus on character rather than on ideas or policies allows us to craft history into a morality play in which personal virtues and vices are our only objects, rather than painting a broader picture that can have wide-ranging lessons for our own age. Our intense gaze on the Founders’ greatness runs a risk, as H.W. Brands notes in the *Atlantic Monthly*, “in making giants of the Founders, we make pygmies of ourselves; in making saints of them, we make sinners of ourselves.” A history more focused on the ideas of the founders could allow for a dialogue between our generation and theirs without diminishing our own accomplishments.

If we were to turn away momentarily from the characters of the Founders we may find, to our surprise, that their political ideas may have something to offer us despite vast changes in our circumstances. These quintessential Americans do not speak with a purely modern voice but depend on a pre-modern philosophy that draws from Christian, medieval, and ancient sources. The political ideals of the Founders, despite their seeming irrelevance to contemporary problems, may by their very radical nature help us to reorder our political and social priorities. John Adams, one of the most familiar of the Founding Fathers, thanks to David McCullough, Joseph Ellis, Paul Giamatti, and HBO. Adams is also a useful place to begin looking for old thoughts on present discontents. As Joseph Ellis points out in *Passionate Sage*, his intellectual biography of Adams, there is no “Adamsian” or “Adamite” tradition in American thought, as there is a “Jeffersonian or “Hamiltonian” tradition. Yet, Adams’s principles and policies speak more strongly to our problems than traditional bromides about “Jeffersonian democracy” or “Hamiltonian centralization.” Adams’s ideas are not the only place to find unfamiliar ideas in the Founders’ thinking. One could turn to Lorraine Pangle’s discussion of Franklin’s thought on wealth and unicameralism in the *Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin*, or Hannah Arendt’s discussion of Thomas Jefferson’s proposed ward system in *On Revolution*. These works surely do just as much to challenge our assumptions about the familiarity with the Founders’ ideals. However, sketching out some of the vitality and originality in Adams’s thought will help demonstrate the value of focusing on ideas rather than dwelling on temperament.

Adams’s ideas are not concentrated in an easily digestible pamphlet or tome. Instead, they are scattered throughout his tracts *A Defence of the Constitution*, *Thoughts on Government*, *Discourse on Davila*, and numerous letters and pamphlets. Adams was not a prose stylist of the level of
Jefferson or Franklin, nor does his writing reach the level Hamilton and Madison's the *Federalist Papers*. Many of his chosen topics, which include a detailed excursus on French political history since the Middle Ages in *Davila* and a detailed rebuttal of the English pamphleteer Marchamont Nedham in his *Defence of the Constitution*, are almost hopelessly obscure. But despite Adams's lawyerly, pedantic tone, it is possible to draw out some coherent and relevant thoughts from his voluminous writings.

If Hamilton was, as Ron Chernow would have it, “the messenger of the future we all inhabit,” and if “to repudiate his legacy…is to repudiate the modern world,” then Adams was a voice of discontent with much of what would become associated with modernity itself. Adams, unlike Jefferson and (at times) Franklin, did not idealize an agrarian alternative to modernity. Instead, he questioned many of the economic and social principles defended by Hamilton and other New England Federalists. Adams's ideas on banking are irreducible to the positions called Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian. Jefferson believed, famously, that “banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies,” and his Jacksonian successors eventually succeeded in closing the first national bank. Hamilton and his merchant allies claimed that banks were “nurseries of national wealth” and wanted to expand private banking and create a national bank. Adams at many points echoed Jefferson's vituperative rhetoric against bankers writing that, “Banks have done more injury to the religion, morality, tranquility, prosperity, and even wealth of the nation, than they can have done or ever will do good.” Yet in a letter to his friend Benjamin Rush he claimed, “An attempt to annihilate or prevent them would as romantic an adventure as any in Don Quixote or in Oberon.” Instead, he argued that a single national bank with a branch in every state “should have been a fundamental Article in the Constitution,” and should have remained the sole financial institution of the country. This is one of the first arguments for financial nationalization in our history. In our own discourse about the size and shape of our financial industry, we would do well to return to these fundamental debates about the purpose of banking itself. While many of Adams's and Jefferson's critiques of banking do not hold up to a modern understanding of capitalism and regulation, their caution should give us pause. Adams's belief in the efficacy of government control to tame the financial system gives insight into the proper ends of a successful regulatory scheme for our banking system.

In matters of foreign relations, Adams once again took a unique path in the debates that stirred his era. Many of the immediate post-revolutionary foreign policy debates were related to the worldwide struggle between England and France in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. As both
countries fought for what believed to be their very national survival, they invaded neutral kingdoms like Denmark and imprisoned American sailors as both sides grappled for military advantage. While Hamilton was sympathetic to the British cause and Jefferson was initially sympathetic to the French, Adams hewed most closely to Washington’s advice in his Farewell Address to “avoid entangling alliances” and to maintain primarily commercial relations with European nations. While the Federalists, attempted to shame Adams with emotional appeals that the “honor of the country is prostrated in the dust” during the “Quasi-War” with France, Adams ignored them and continued to advocate diplomacy and peace with France. The success of Adams’s policy preserved America’s strength and avoided an unnecessary war at a critical time for the republic’s growth. Adams was so proud of this accomplishment that he even suggested that his tombstone should read: “Here lies John Adams, who took upon himself the responsibility of peace with France in the year 1800.” Despite his commitment to diplomacy, Adams was no pure dove: he approved of expanding the Navy, and of maintain America’s ability to defend herself. During the War of 1812, he strongly disapproved of the Hartford Convention, in which many powerful New Englanders of the Federalist Party voiced both their defeatism and their secessionist impulses.

While these conflicts may seem foreign to our modern concerns, as there are no direct analogies to America’s Middle Eastern adventures, some of Adams’s priorities can and should be brought into line with our own. For instance, our longstanding tradition of interventionism can trace its origins to Hamilton’s ambitious plans considered as early as 1798, to use a newly formed standing army and navy to “detach South America from Spain” and to pursue American expansion by military, even imperial means. While Hamilton’s plotting might be an essential part of the American tradition of expansion and interventionism, it is not the only tradition. Adams consistently opposed American militancy and prevented, for a time, America becoming an interventionist Latin American power.

Adams’s sincere understanding of the cruelty of warfare and his beliefs about human liberty clash with the optimism, still prevalent in some parts of the American political spectrum, that American power can easily create liberty anywhere that tyranny exists. In response to neoconservative pleas to extend American freedoms abroad, Adams might reply as he did in a letter to his cousin Samuel Adams, who had waxed poetic about the love of liberty “interwoven in the soul of man,” replied:

So it is according to La Fontaine, in that of a wolf... and I doubt whether it is much more rational, generous, or social, in one than in the other, until in man it is enlightened by experience, reflection, education, and civil and political institutions, which are few at first produced, and constantly supported and improved by a few... We must not then depend alone upon the love of liberty in the soul of man for its preservation.

Indeed, as Russell Kirk points out, Adams was much less likely to make political arguments from premises of human liberty. Instead, Russell Kirk argues, “Adams preferred the concept of virtue to the concept of freedom. But he did not think the first excluded the second.”
If our politics are still an attempt to manifest what Herbert Croly called “the promise of American life” we should return to authors who attempted to define that promise. Perhaps we are finally ready to resurrect an “Adamite” tradition that has lain dormant for so many years, only briefly resurfacing in the pessimistic writings of John’s great-grandchildren Henry and Brooks Adams. We live in an age in which China and India are on the rise, and our share of world economic and political clout rapidly dwindles; our alliance systems like NATO lack purpose and vigor, and our banking system has brought our economy to a screeching halt. In this age, our politics can benefit from “a voice counseling caution, social responsibility, and reconciliation to eventual decline” as Ellis describes the grand themes of Adams’s thought.

This project may appear quixotic: an attempt to replace sunny Reaganite optimism, which has been an important part of American discourse for both the left and right, with New England puritan-pessimism. However, Americans who are tired of endless war and domestic insecurity might see their roots in some of the casual political, social, and ethical assumptions that underly modern American democracy, many of which are implicit in both the Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian strands of American thought. They can look to Adams for a different value system, neither dependent on abstract ideals of liberty nor focused purely on material ends. Instead, Adams was realistic about the possibilities of power, and he emphasized our commitment to virtue as the only way to maintain our liberty and prosperity.

Even if this attempt appears unlikely to succeed as a political project, it shows the limits of the approaches taken by recent biographers of Adams and the other Founders. When Adams is reduced to the truculent, honest, patriotic, incisive, and slightly vain character displayed in McCullough’s writing, he is being reduced to a collection of character traits we can only hope to admire or condemn. By decontextualizing his thoughts and actions and not even attempting to follow Adams’s arguments to their logical ends, we weaken the utility of history. If just scratching the surface of Adams’s political works gives voice to our fears, and speaks so loudly to many of our contemporary concerns, a more sweeping re-examination of the Founders thought might do more than produce yet another biography and might instead spark a new debate: one that would increase both our understanding of their place in history and our own ability to shape our own future.
**Sources**

**Beyond Founders Chic: The Lost Philosophy of John Adams**

**Reframing the Abortion Issue**


**Otis McDonald Had a Gun**


The Midway Review is now accepting article submissions and staff applications. Please visit our website, [http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu](http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu), for more details. Article submissions for the Autumn issue of the Midway Review are due Wednesday, October 20th by midnight. Staff applications are due Wednesday, October 13th by midnight.