

BLUE JAY FAMILIES

What Is the Common Good?

Hopkins Faculty address this year's Common Question



COMMON
QUESTION



Gilman Hall at JHU |



Intellectual Inquiry

Where do good questions come from?
Where and how do we look for answers?
And then what?



JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY

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Where do good questions come from?

Curiosity

- Uncertainty & frustration
- Urgency
- Empathy

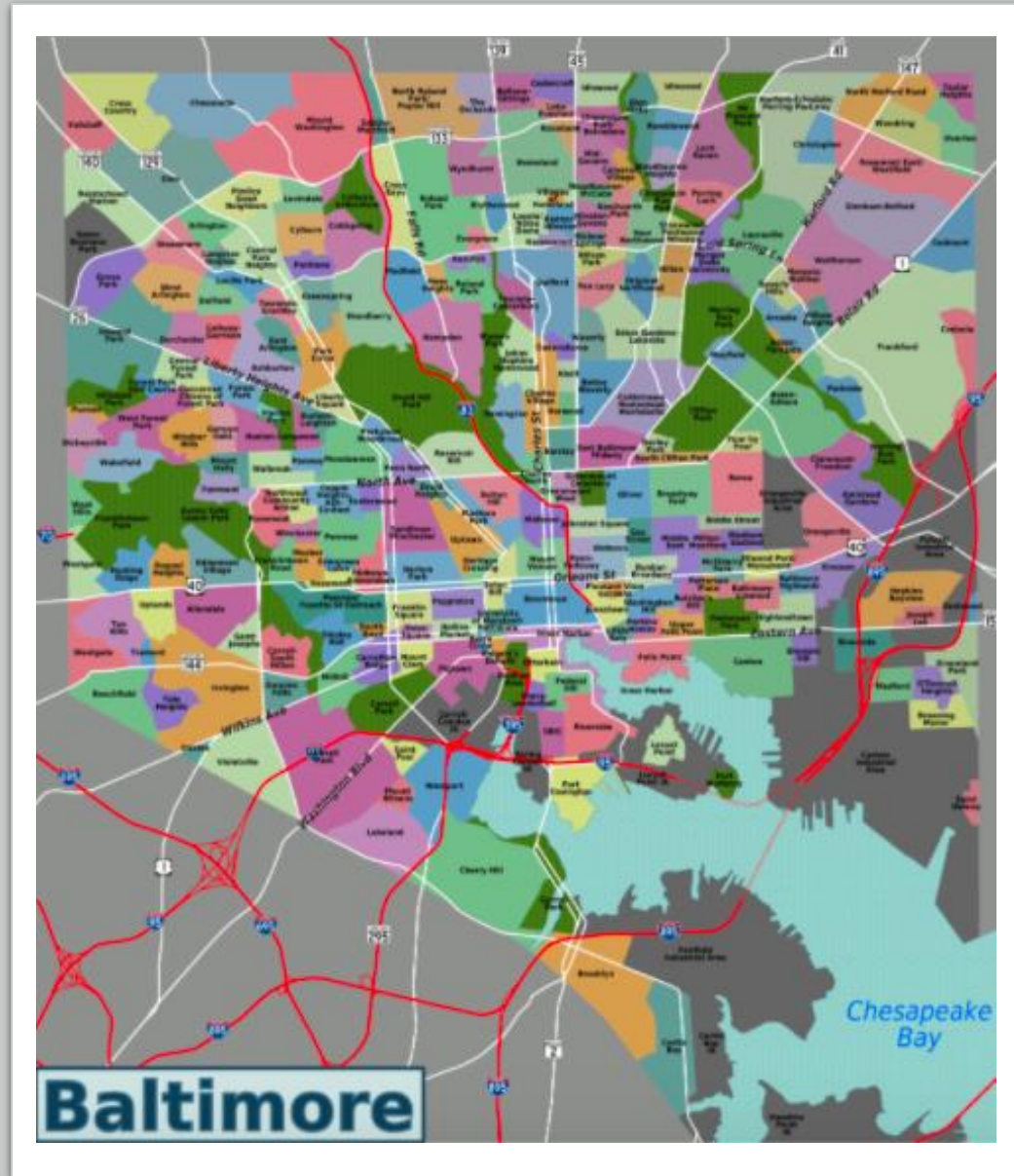


Intellectual Inquiry

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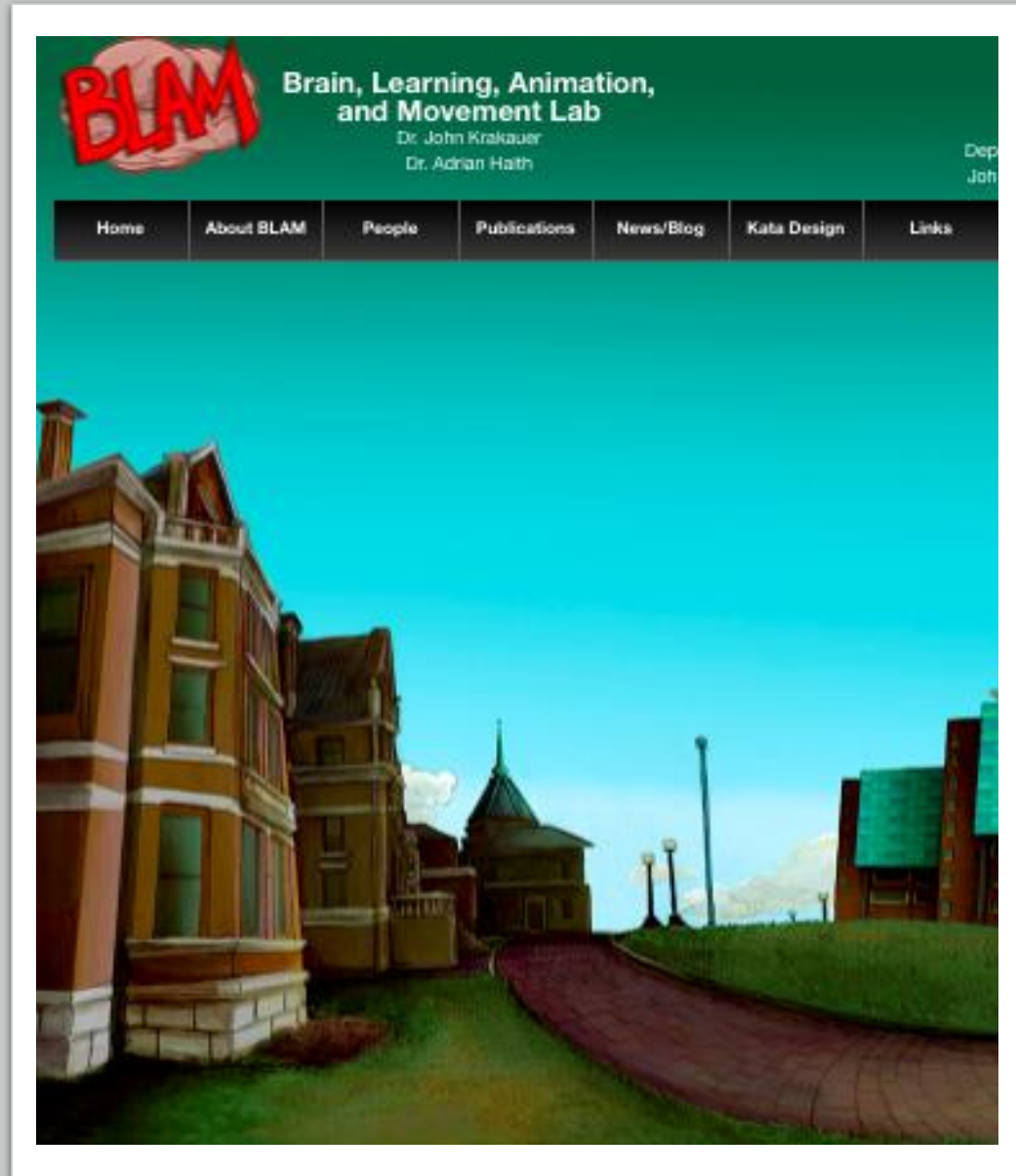


- John Krakauer, Professor of Neurology and Neuroscience
- Vesla Weaver, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology

Where do good questions come from?

Curiosity—aka uncertainty, urgency, empathy

In their essay “Neuroscience Needs Behavior: Correcting a Reductionist Bias,” John W. Krakauer and his colleagues try to answer this question: what is the best research approach to understanding brain and behavior? (488).



Neuroscience Needs Behavior: Correcting a Reductionist Bias

John W. Krakauer,^{1,*} Asif A. Ghazanfar,² Alex Gomez-Marin,³ Malcolm A. MacIver,⁴ and David Poeppel^{5,6}

¹Departments of Neurology, and Neuroscience, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21287, USA

²Princeton Neuroscience Institute, Departments of Psychology and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08540 USA

³Instituto de Neurociencias, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas & Universidad Miguel Hernández, Sant Joan d'Alacant, 03550 Alicante, Spain

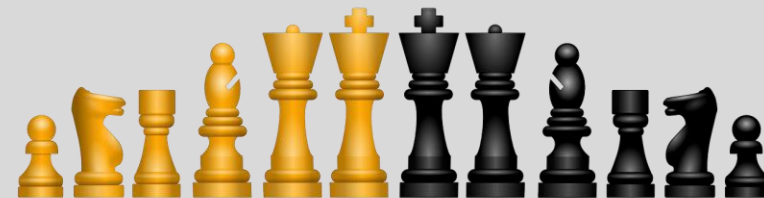
⁴Neuroscience and Behavior, Department of Neurobiology, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Northwestern University,

Where and
how do we
find the
answers?

Existing scholarship: New technology makes it easier for scientists to discover information about neurons, so many neuroscientists follow a “reductionist program,” meaning they explain brain activity and behavior by studying only neurons (480). Yet Krakauer argues that this method is insufficient to understand the brain’s role in behavior; it describes the neuron activity without understanding how it connects to the behavior. Krakauer insists that the best approach is to study behavior *before* looking at neurons, and to incorporate different scientific disciplines.

Where and how do we find the answers?

He uses neuroscientist David Marr's analogy of a bird to illustrate his thesis: one cannot determine how a bird flies by looking at one feather, but instead the whole system needs to be studied, including the bird, the wings flapping, and the feathers. This emphasizes that scientists need to look at the whole system: the brain, neurons, and most importantly behavior. Krakauer reminds us of Marr's chess analogy to underscore that neurons do not equal behavior: "Understanding the game does not depend on knowing anything about the material out of which the board or chess pieces are made" (483).



And then what?

Thus, Krakauer urges scientists to take a thorough, "pluralistic," and multidisciplinary approach to understand the relationship between the brain and behavior, so they can improve the integrity of the field.





- John Krakauer, Professor of Neurology and Neuroscience
- Vesla Weaver, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology

COMMON QUESTION

HOME

EXPLORE

ABOUT CQ

CQ AROUND TOWN

INTELLIGENCE



COMMON QUESTION

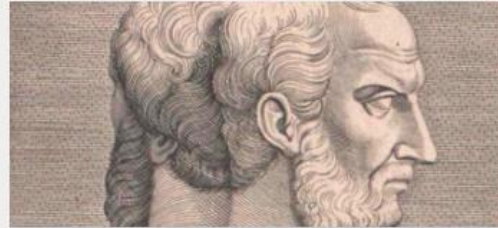
Start Here



Vesla Weaver, “The State from Below: Urban Citizenship in Policed Communities” (2019)

“Citizenship in poor communities is greater than the sum of exclusions.... Instead, it is a broad difference in the way *the government—from police to schools to the welfare system—orients itself towards its residents.*”

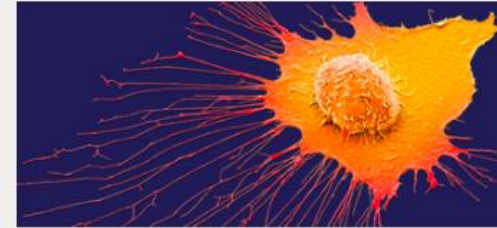
[Watch video...](#) 



Danielle Allen, “Aims of Education” address (2001)


“Friendship is crucial to encountering what is novel, alien, and unsettling, and such is the business of learning.”

[Read here...](#) 



Mark Phillips et al, “Genomics: data sharing needs an international code of conduct” (2020)

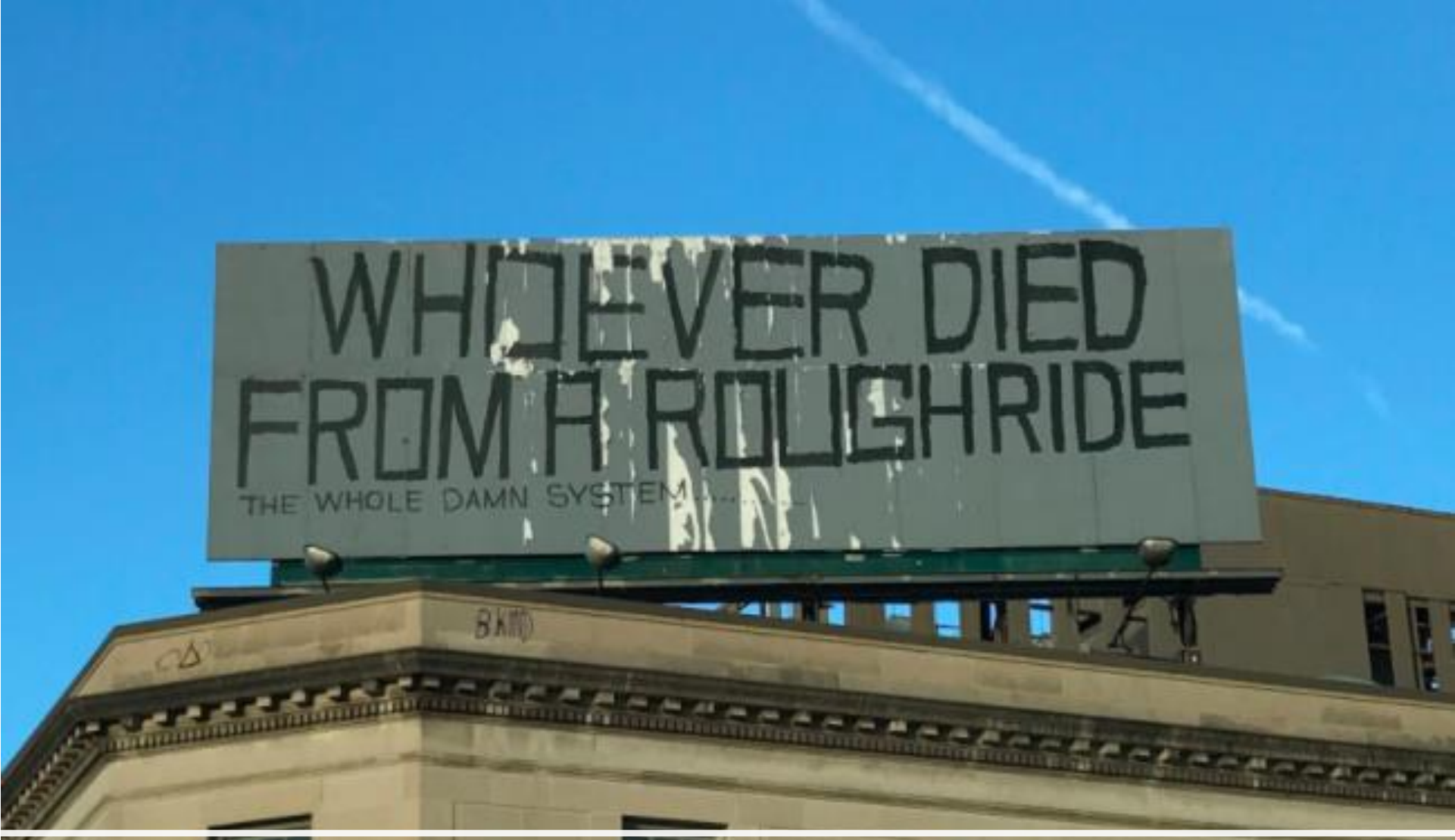
“Further regulatory uncertainty risks...undermining people’s faith in scientific collaboration for the public good.”

[Read here...](#) 

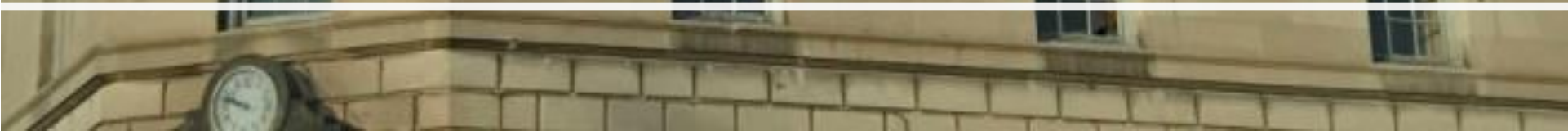


Vesla Weaver, “The State from Below: Urban Citizenship in Policed Communities” (2019)

“Citizenship in poor communities is greater than the sum of exclusions.... Instead, it is a broad difference in the way the *government*—*from police to schools to the welfare system*—*orients itself towards its residents.*”



Where do good questions come from?
Curiosity—aka uncertainty, urgency, empathy





Where and how do we look for answers?



Where and how do we look for answers? – Defining terms

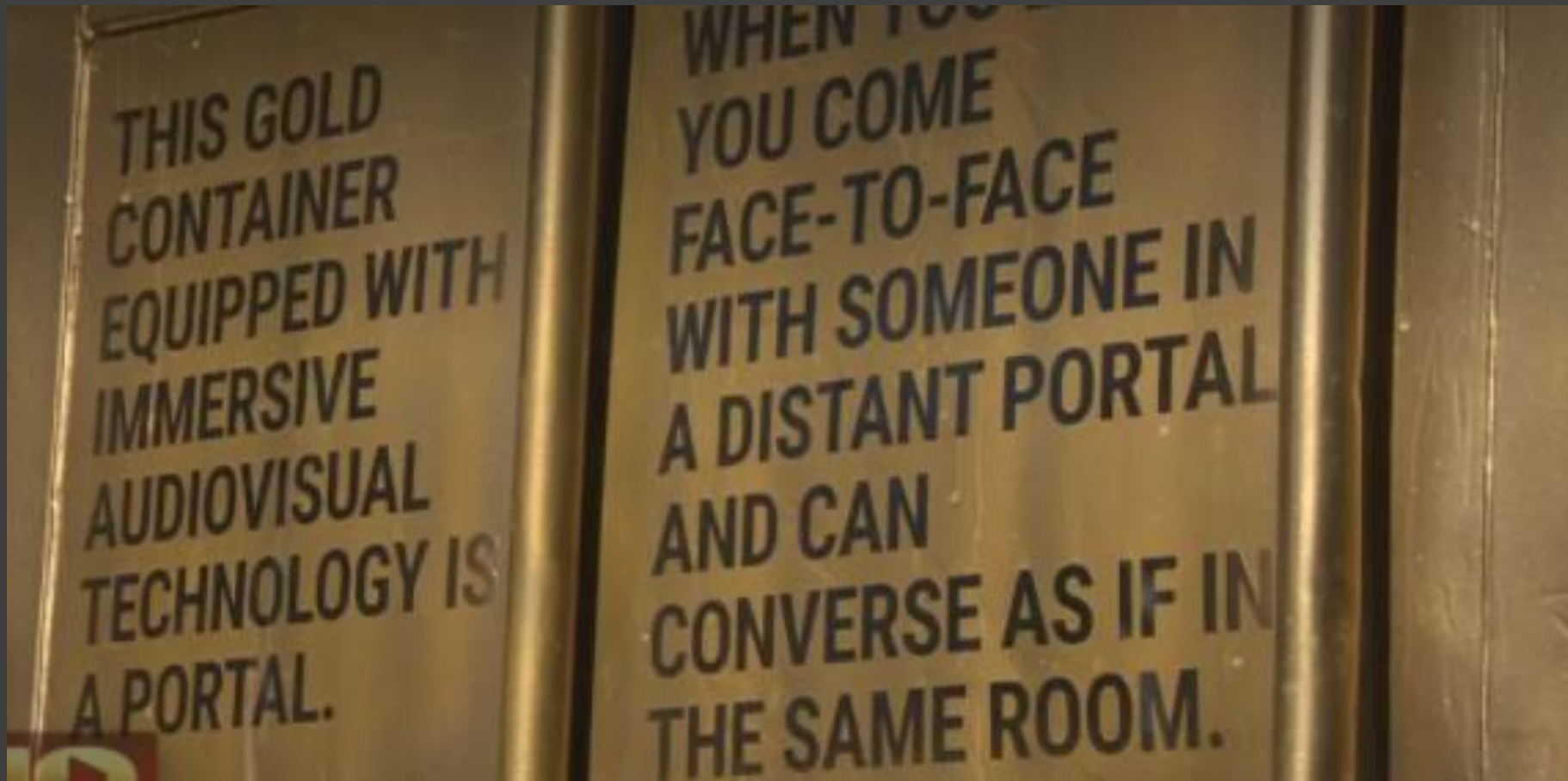


Where and how do we look for answers? – Defining terms





“A systematic study of how Americans in different communities experience government activity across a multiplicity of sites (schools, social welfare agencies, police and probation agencies, civil ordinances, the housing authority, and child protective services) and how those experiences influence political dispositions.”



Methodology



And then what?

“Our study of conversations about policing among black residents of highly policed neighborhoods challenges this prevailing account [that race-class subjugated citizens have too *little* knowledge].”

THIS CONTAINER
EQUIPPED WITH
IMMERSIVE
AUDIOVISUAL
TECHNOLOGY IS
A PORTAL.

FACE-TO-FACE
WITH SOMEONE IN
A DISTANT PORTAL
AND CAN
CONVERSE AS IF IN
THE SAME ROOM.

We find:

that people possess dual, contradictory knowledge about how the state should operate based on written law and how it actually operates as a lived experience;

that their knowledge is attained through involuntary encounters with the state rather than through civics education;

that this knowledge, rather than functioning to improve preferences to be communicated to an elected official, serves to help individuals distance themselves from the antidemocratic face of the state.





Intellectual Inquiry

Where do good questions come from?
Where and how do we look for answers?
And then what?

What is the Common Good?

a First Year Seminar
based on the
Common Question



Dr. Aliza Hapgood Watters
Expository Writing Program
Director of First Year Seminars

COMMON QUESTION

- Undergraduate learning
- Intellectual community
- Faculty teaching & research

2020-2021

What is the common good?

Eula Biss, "On Immunity"



"Herd immunity...is implausible only if we think of our bodies as inherently disconnected from other bodies. Which, of course, we do."

2020-2021

What is the common good?

Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter"



"Tonight, with no lights, they would have to eat together."

2020-2021

What is the common good?

Thomas Cole, "The Oxbow"



"View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm"

2020-2021

What is the common good?

Alex MacGillis, "The Third Rail"



"The Baltimore riot of April 27, 2015, started with a shutdown of public transportation."

2020-2021

What is the common good?

Jill LePore, “The Atomic Origins of Climate Science”



“Weapons and the weather are twisted together, a wire across time, the long fuse to an ongoing debate about the credibility of science, the fate of the Earth, and the nature of uncertainty.”

Indiv. and group needs come together w/ solidarity

CCP, problematic? Comparison Western TV anchor makes to Holocaust (or lack thereof) education solidarity/understanding

- Photo Essays on Criminal Justice by Pete Brooks
- Truth + Reconciliation Commission of Canada
- Sentimental Medicine by Eula Bliss

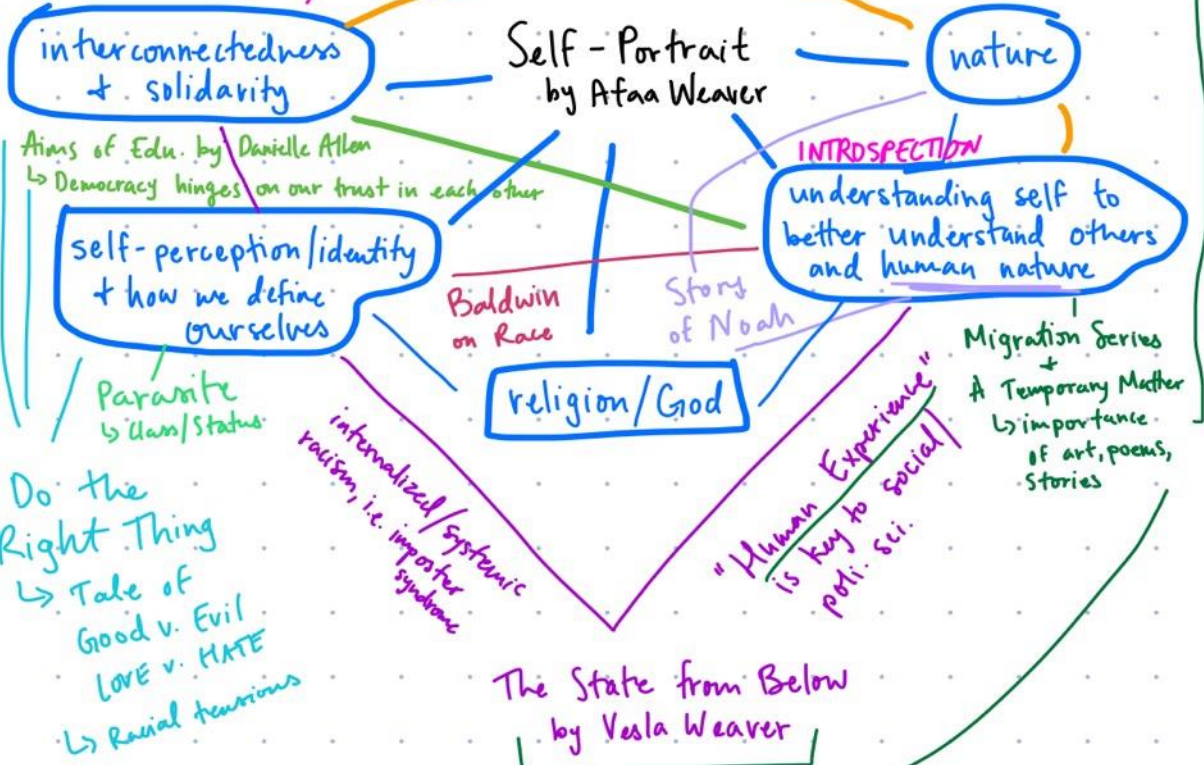
our (humanity's) place in the universe

"We are no cleaner at birth and our environment at large we are, in other words, continuous with everything here on earth. Including and especially - each other"

Michael Sandel
↳ perfect meritocracy corrodes solidarity

Dead Stars by Ada Limón
↳ capitalist society made us lose touch w/ nature

Sea Around Us by Rachel Carson



The State from Below by Vesla Weaver

NATURE & THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

**“For you are dust,
and to dust you
shall return.”**

Genesis 3:19

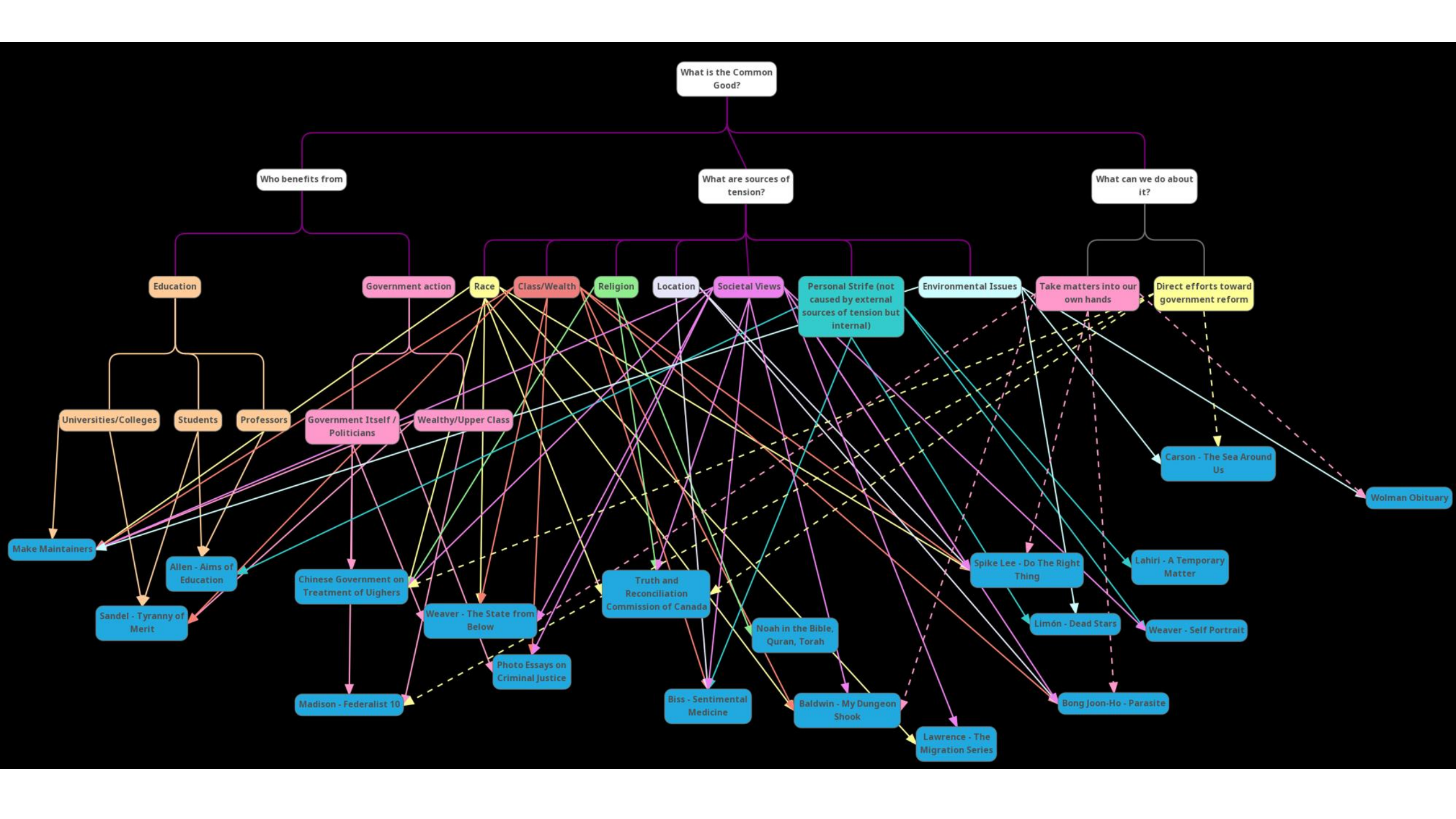
“[I] gather myself from the particles
of this excitement another structure,
one closely resembling the beginning.”

-Self-Portrait by Affa Weaver

Nicole Rivas

What is the Common Good

John D'cruz





What is the Common Good?

Ryan Lessing



COMMON QUESTION

In 2020–21, CQ asks you: What is the common good?

How do we define what is good for society as a whole? What happens when collective benefit runs counter to individual benefit? How are questions and assumptions about the common good built into academic inquiry, as well as our daily lives?

The sources below consider these questions from creative, scientific, and humanistic perspectives. We invite you to start with these core sources, wander on the ["Explore" page](#), and join the conversation.

Start Here

