



Aquinas Scholars
HONORS PROGRAM

The

SCHOLARS JOURNAL

December 2025

DECEMBER

PROFESSOR SHOUTOUT



The Earth Environment and Society department would like to recognize our professor **David Kelley**. He is retiring this semester and is much appreciated!

MONTHLY RECAP

December was a month of reflection and transition as the semester came to a close. Completing final projects and exams challenged us to synthesize what we learned while also encouraging us to reflect on our goals moving forward. The month provided a valuable balance between academic, focus, and intentional rest as we all prepare for the next semester. Congratulations on completing the first semester, enjoy J-Term plans (whether that be resting, working, taking a class, or even traveling) and we will see you soon!

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TOGETHER WITH THE FAMILY

Maddie Donovan

My Grandma Nan and I celebrated our birthdays! Our birthdays are four days apart. I turned 21 and she turned 78! I'm so grateful that I can still celebrate with her, as she is a cancer survivor. The Nothing Bundt Cake also made the birthday extra sweet!



ROMANTICIZING WINTER AT UST

Emmanuela Onyekwelu

The football field has no doubt undergone the most change. From lush grass to a snow packed field, it has become a place where people go to feel like kids again. Making snow angels, snowball fights, and enjoying snow for more than just its beauty.

Overlooking the pure white while having dinner at the view makes me forget how cold it gets when trying to make it to OWS in the morning. The snow can be so pretty when you're not trudging through with wet UGGs and frozen fingers.



DISPUTED QUESTION AGAINST FATES WORSE THAN DEATH

Leo Hoffman

Objection 1: It would seem that there are fates worse than death, for when people analyze how good an eternal state is, they look to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Now, although there is no pleasure in non-existence, there is also no pain. All pleasures have a threshold of pain that is acceptable to endure for the pleasure. Thus it stands to reason that there is a fate that offers so little pleasure for so much pain, that the pain outweighs the pleasure. This being the case, it would be better to not exist, because the pain would dominate the pleasure making it unenjoyable, and thus non-existence offers no fewer pleasures, and also less pain.

Objection 2: Further, when someone is being kept alive by extraordinary means, it can be considered a mercy to remove those extraordinary means allowing them to die. Thus there are worse states to be in than dead.

On the Contrary: If it can be better to not exist than to be tortured, then God in His mercy should annihilate at least some of the souls in Hell. We know He does not do this, however.

I answer that: This question can be interpreted in two ways, the argument shifts depending on whether death is viewed as mere annihilation, or is viewed as the Christian idea of the soul being separated from the body. Now, it is a simple fact that existence is better than non-existence, and thus it is better to exist than not exist. If someone is tortured and subjected to terrible evils, even if they lose all else, they exist. So, if someone killed the tortured person, they would take away their last remaining good. Therefore, there can not be a fate worse than annihilation because it is always better to have one good than none. If death is viewed in the Christian sense, it becomes more nuanced. If someone would go to Heaven after they die but somehow were kept on Earth and tortured, it would seem to be better for them to die. This would be true if no external factors were acting on him, but in reality, there are always external factors that affect the situation. His suffering could act as a beacon bringing others to Heaven, and if he one day goes to Heaven he will be rewarded for his undue suffering. The only way a fate worse than death would be conceptually possible would be if he was perpetually kept from receiving God's grace and being rewarded for his suffering, either by a greater relationship with God or by meriting more rewards in Heaven.

This is impossible however because it would require him to be fit to go to Heaven (and thus disposed to receive graces from God) and unable to receive graces from God (like the damned) at the same time. If these factors are considered there is no fate worse than death because if the person would go to Hell then they should suffer the less painful reality of the world, but if they would go to Heaven, then they will be rewarded by God as He perfects their suffering. Therefore there are no fates worse than death.

Reply to Objection 1: This objection doesn't fully understand the ontological nature of evil.

The reason you suffer is because you have goods taken away, thus the way to relieve suffering is not to take away more goods. Even if the person was suffering in every way possible, they could still take a modicum of joy in their own existence. This small joy would be removed if they ceased to exist and they would still lack all the things they lacked before.

Further, this objection seems to draw a connection between unconsciousness and non-existence saying, there is no pain in unconsciousness and thus no pain in non-existence.

These two things aren't equivalent, however, because when you are unconscious you still have several goods, primarily existence but others too (like a brain), that you would lack if you didn't exist. Therefore it doesn't follow that unconsciousness and non-existence would be equal.

Reply to Objection 2: This objection only holds up if death is considered as annihilation. If one is going to cease to exist after death, every possible measure should be taken to keep them alive. But if death is not non-existence, then it might simply be a failure on the part of the sufferer to not trust in the merit they will gain or perhaps fear that if they continue living in this state they might turn away from God. This is especially true if the risk of the person falling away is too great relative to the good they could do others. It might even be true that it is simply no longer feasible to keep them alive and they could do more good for the world if put in a state that removes any unnecessary restrictions that were keeping them alive. All this does not mean that extreme suffering is worse than death, and killing someone to end their suffering is wrong, only that sometimes the good gained by removing extraordinary measures, which might have death as a side effect, is better than keeping them in place.

THE ART OF BECOMING

Rhema Acheampong

There is a quiet moment in college life that no one really talks about. It happens in between deadlines, meetings, internships, and the constant rush to “figure it all out.” It’s the moment when you realize that becoming who you are isn’t a single decision, but a collection of small, deliberate choices, some brave, some uncertain, and some that feel impossibly ordinary.

This year, I’ve learned that growth rarely announces itself. It hides in the early mornings when you choose discipline over comfort, in the late nights when you decide to try one more time instead of giving up, and in the reflections you write not because they’re graded, but because they help you understand yourself. Being a scholar isn’t about having every answer, it’s about staying curious enough to keep asking questions. It’s about recognizing that excellence isn’t a destination but a rhythm you build day by day. I’ve seen it in the classmates who lead clubs, the volunteers who show up quietly, and the international students navigating two worlds at once. We are all becoming, even when we don’t notice it.

As we move into a new year, I’m choosing to celebrate the process not just the achievements that make it onto resumes, but the courage it takes to grow in the unseen moments. The beauty of becoming is that it’s never finished. And maybe that’s what makes the journey worth it.

A CLOSE ON ROME

Annie Felton

My time in Rome is coming to an end, and I have had the most amazing experience here! This was a picture of me and all my fellow study abroad friends on our first day of classes. They have become some of my best friends and I am so grateful I met them. My teachers here have been wonderful, and I am so lucky to have the best community of people here around me. I have also learned so much about the culture here as well as other countries and how it differs from home. I love the slower pace of life and how much time they dedicate to community. I cannot recommend study abroad enough to people and am so happy I chose to do it!



COOKIES AND CREATIVITY

Rylie Butler

This semester, I had the privilege of working with Alisa Lamont, who works in Donor Relations at UST, to design and make a set of custom sugar cookies for UST alumnus John Herrick's 93rd birthday!



COSMIC WONDERS

Anonymous



IC 2163 (left) and NGC 2207 (right).

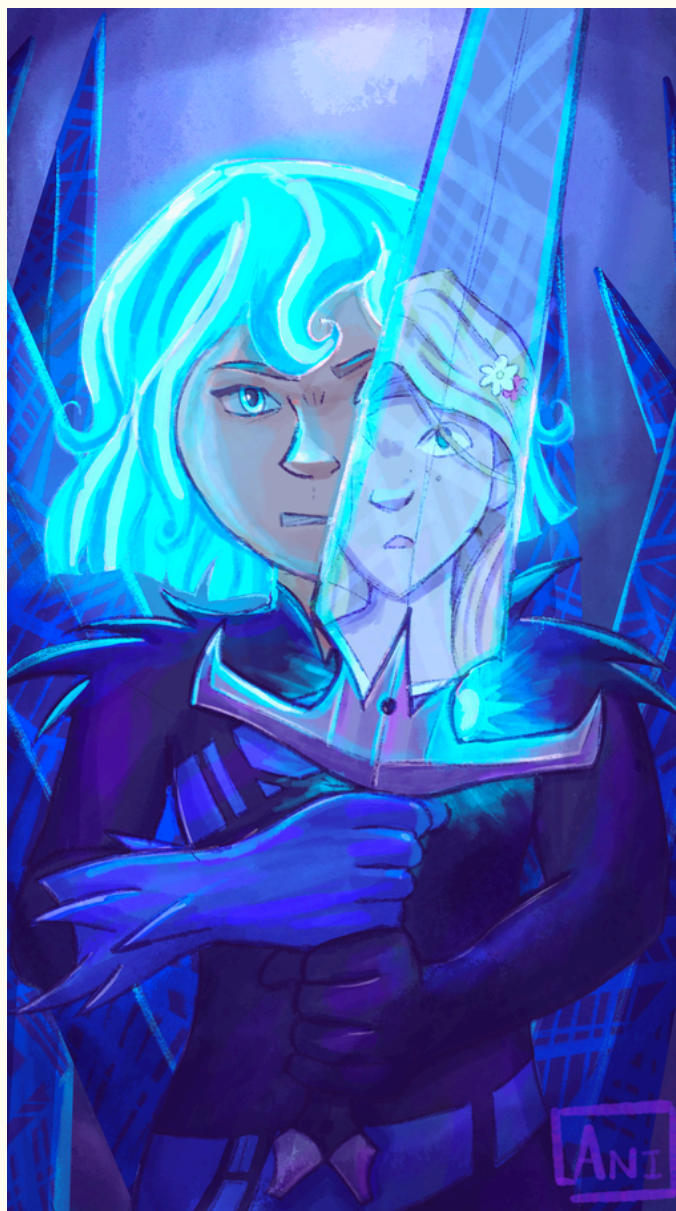
There are no words that fully capture the blooming of something euphoric and curious in my soul when I gaze at galaxies, stars, and black holes. A chill courses through me, like an excitation in a quantum field, when I imagine the vast beauty of the universe.

The glowing hearts of galaxies NGC 2207 and IC 2163 seem to bore into my being, leaving me frozen in awe. Images of cosmic wonders like these feel grounding and healing in a sense. They remind me how small and inconsequential everyday fears and troubles are – how fleeting life is. These celestial bodies were here long before me and will remain long after. There’s a bittersweet ache in knowing I may never truly understand them, but also a deep gratitude that I exist in a time where I can see them.

I’ve always been enamored with chemistry, but recently what’s really set my soul on fire is knowing that the elements of the periodic table were forged in the life and death of stars. These building blocks of our world, of me, of the molecules in the chemical reactions I draw over and over again. It’s from out there, from the hearts of ancient stars, that we came.

A PROCREATE ORIGINAL

Sidney Albright



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