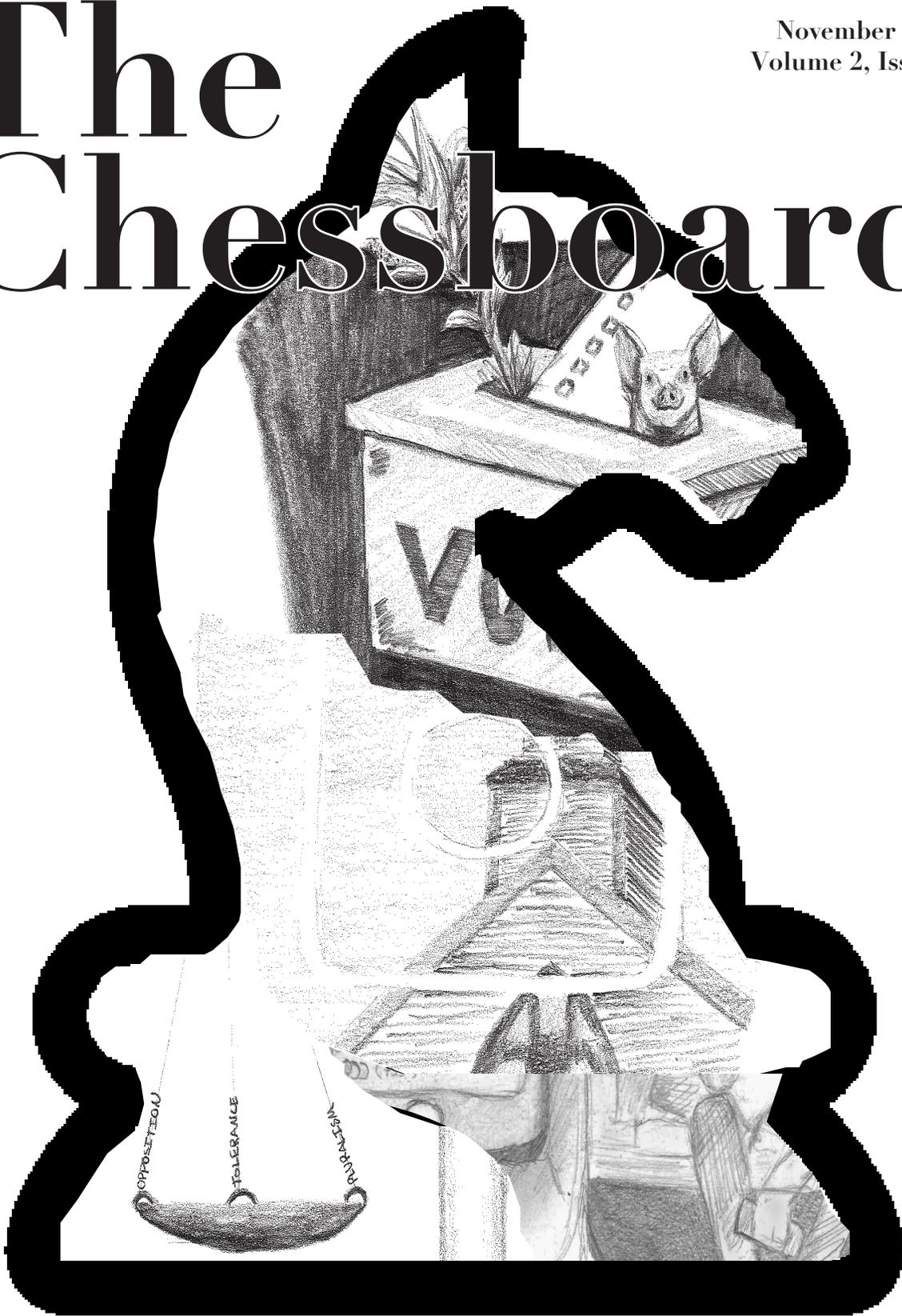


The Chessboard

November 2019
Volume 2, Issue 1



“Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward. They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Editors' Corner

Mission Statement

The Chessboard is a student-run publication that seeks to stoke campus-wide discussions about a host of social, cultural, and political issues. This goal is best embodied in the quote from German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that has inspired our name: "Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward; they may be beaten, but they may start a winning game." We ask students to use this publication to move their unique ideas forward so they may be contemplated, discussed, and challenged in daily conversations. This "winning game" of considering ideas is a pillar of the liberal arts and critical thinking, and it is a value that we at *The Chessboard* hope to further at Luther College.

Editors' Note

As our Mission Statement notes, our goal is to allow students to voice their opinions through *The Chessboard* so that they may be discussed and challenged. This means that *The Chessboard* contains a wide variety of opinions that are informed by a wide variety of perspectives. Therefore, the views expressed by Chess Piece authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the Center for Ethics and Public Engagement.

Call for Contributors and Responses

The Chessboard is always looking for new writers and new artists. If you are interested in writing a Chess Piece or drawing a sketch, please contact us at: chessboard@luther.edu. We also welcome written responses to previous Chess Pieces or pieces written in this issue. Feel free to e-mail us if this interests you.

Chess Pieces

It's the farm economy, stupid!	2
Maxwell Eness	
Freedom March and The #Changed Movement	4
Levi Bird	
Can't We "Gram" Our Cake and Eat It, Too?	6
Gillian Klein	
"You're Not As Tolerant as You Think You Are"	9
Robert Muller	

Editors

Kelao Charmaine Neumbo '22
Editor-in-Chief
Shannon Baker '20
Managing Editor

Artists

Tomáš Dandáš '20
Kaitlynn Rivers '21

Writers

Levi Bird '21
Maxwell Eness '20
Robert Muller '20
Gillian Klein '20

Cover Art

Tomáš Dandáš '20
Kaitlynn Rivers '21

It's the farm economy, stupid!

Prioritizing agriculture in politics

By Maxwell Enness (2020)

Art by Kaitlynn Rivers (2021)

Battle is in the air. Iowans thirst for blood, and we will have it: it is primary season. Some commentators have dubbed Iowa a kingmaker when it comes to presidential politics. The reality is that we are more a slayer of wannabes. People who

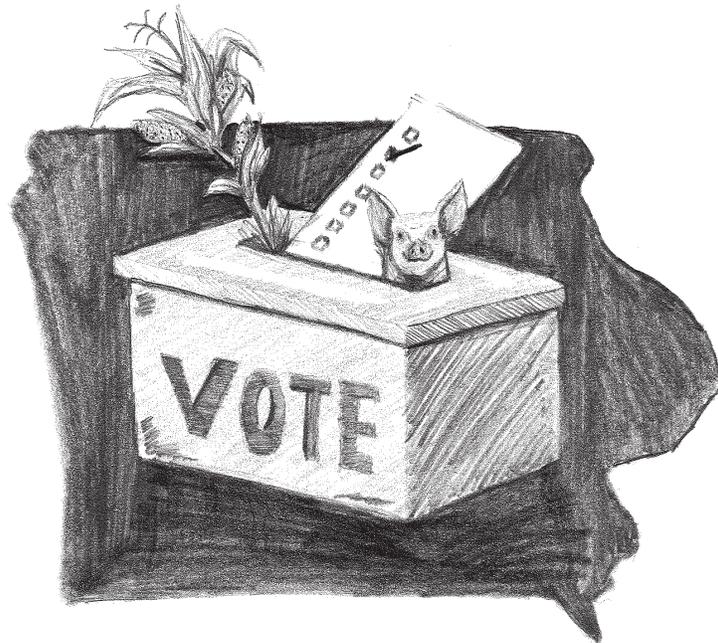
become president, as a general rule, don't win Iowa. We picked Ted Cruz in '16, and there were more uncommitted voters than supporters of Jimmy Carter's successful 1976 campaign. However, while we rarely pick the winner, we are a greedy child in a candy shop when it comes to picking losers: one is never enough. Joe Biden tapped out after a poor showing in '08, and even Howard Dean, who had placed 3rd out of a large field, let loose a strange celebratory scream at a post-caucus party in West Des Moines that effectively ended his campaign in the state that was supposed to give him the momentum needed for the nomination. So, I would like to offer a little bit of advice to a field filled with bright-eyed presidential hopefuls: don't win Iowa, but don't lose it either. How then, does a contender with limited time make a splash by placing just behind the two front runners? The answer is a staple of the Iowa lexical diet: agriculture.

Agriculture is one of the least politicized issues in the United States. One night per year, at the State of the Union Address, every backup-to-the-president is gathered into one place. Vice-President, Speaker of the House, Secretary of State... the list goes on. However, gathering literally everyone in line to become president could spell massive trouble, should disaster strike the Capitol. Often the man who hides inside a bunker in case Washington D.C. is wiped off the map by a nuclear attack is the current Secretary of Agriculture. This demonstrates the bifaceted

position of agriculture in U.S. politics: both not important enough to be invited to the State of the Union, but also non-partisan enough that it wouldn't constitute a constitutional crisis if our top ag (agriculture) boss became the first president without a Congress.

The fact that agriculture is a non-issue is harmful in a myriad of ways. In 2016, author Micheal Pollan published a piece detailing the Obama administration's

failure to effectively address America's overproduction of corn and soy.¹ Even with a stated intent to introduce a policy that would encourage a more diverse American food portfolio (only '90s kids will remember Michelle Obama's organic vegetable garden and souped-up school lunches), agriculture policy remained relatively unchanged. A lack of political will allowed agriculture to overproduce unhealthy options through the Obama administration, and on into the Trump presidency.



1. Michael Pollan, "Big Food Strikes Back: Why Did the Obamas Fail to Take on Corporate Agriculture," The New York Times Magazine, Oct. 9, 2016, <https://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/big-food-strikes-back-why-did-the-obamas-fail-to-take-on-corporate-agriculture/>.

The Farm Bill is a recurring omnibus bill that directs most of the U.S.'s farm policy. The bulk of the funds appropriated by this bill is SNAP, also known as the food stamp program. This is not a criticism of the program; instead, it is further illustration that our agriculture policy is not directed at producing a healthy and competitive sector, but rather bandaging up a frail market.

Why does it matter that agriculture has not gotten the same loving attention that healthcare, immigration and gun control have? As comedian Daniel Sloss put it, "All Americans are fat? Not true. It's just that when you are, it's f***ing impressive."² America is fighting for the top spot as the most obese nation in the world, and we are doing a good job of it. The CDC puts our obesity rate at 40%.³ This raises obese individuals' healthcare costs by \$1,429 per annum,⁴ a more than 10% increase in our already high healthcare costs.⁵ That isn't the only health issue that is given a leg up by our broken ag system. Many neurodegenerative diseases can be combated with a healthier diet, and a cornerstone for good mental health in many cultures is nourishing food. This isn't even getting into the environmental impacts of our ag industry: nitrates, a critical component of fertilizer, may be causing up to 300 cases of cancer each year in Iowa alone.⁶ The bottom line is that our current policy makes unhealthy food cheap with our tax dollars, leaving healthy options out in the rain. Our current policy puts Pringles over peaches, and inertia over evidence.

Not only are our current ag priorities bad for health, they're bad for the Iowa economy. It is not simply enough to try and regulate sources of sugar, as New York City has attempted in recent years to do. To

do so is to approach our system as one that has good incentives, rewards innovation, and is, in general, operational. This approach is bad because it does not assess the fundamental failures of our ag system.

Subsidizing row crops makes it harder for Iowans to join in on business. The artificial dominance of soybeans and corn, crops that need a lot of acreage to produce the same amount of calories as a vegetable patch, paired with the fact that subsidies help out the wealthiest farmers (15% of farmers get 85% percent of subsidies)⁷ means that land is too expensive for an average joe to buy. Land being too expensive means fewer ag-entrepreneurs are implementing ideas that could maximize the efficiency of our land.

A lack of political will allowed agriculture to overproduce unhealthy options

Competition between farmers is grinding to a halt, as consolidation is fanned by our indolent ag policy.

Our subsidies are sitting on innovation's chest with a pillow over her mouth. This not only hurts American consumers' abilities to access the food that they want, but also hurts the country's ability to be competitive on the global markets.

We need a Congress, and a president, who will prioritize examining and restructuring farm subsidies in a way that promotes competition and innovation. I will go out on a limb and say that people want healthy food, but the invisible hand is currently guiding people gently towards a smorgasbord of concoctions of corn and soy. Not to brag, but Iowans are going to know more than your average voter about ag. So, a little secret for all the presidential wannabes trying to avoid Iowa's kiss of death: read up on your agricultural policy, and come up with a proposal that is both bold and evidence-based. You might even make it to New Hampshire.

2. Team Coco, "Daniel Sloss Stand-Up 2/5/14," filmed Feb. 2014, YouTube video, 5:33, posted Feb. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdO7hMp6SBY>.

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Overweight and Obesity," CDC, Aug., 13, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>.

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Obesity Rises Among Adults," CDC, Aug. 3, 2010, <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/adultobesity/index.html>.

5. Rabah Kamal and Cynthia Cox, "How Has U.S. Spending on Healthcare Changed Over Time?" Kaiser Family Foundation, Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/u-s-spending-healthcare-changed-time/>.

6. Alexis Temkin and Sydney Evans, "Nitrate in U.S. tap Water May Cause More than 12,500 Cancers a Year," Environmental Working Group, June 11, 2019, <https://www.ewg.org/research/nitrate-us-tap-water-may-cause-more-12500-cancers-year>.

7. Vincent H. Smith, et al., "Agricultural Policy in Disarray: Reforming the Farm Bill--An Overview," American Enterprise Institute, Oct. 2017, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Agricultural-Policy-in-Disarray.pdf>.

Freedom March and The #Changed Movement

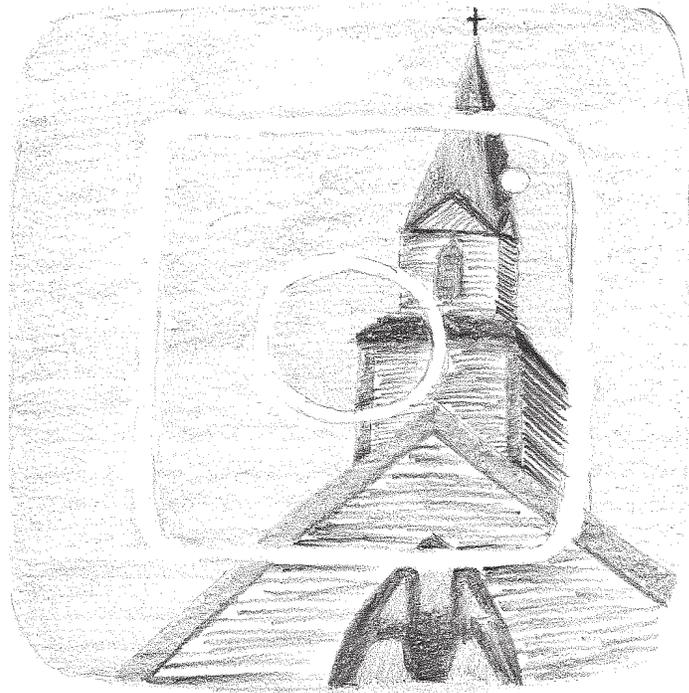
The new conversion therapy

Levi Bird (2021)

Art by Kaitlynn Rivers (2021)

Let me be honest: I have a tough time calling myself a Christia today. Six years ago I would have been the type of guy who said that religion and faith were most central to my identity. However, those years were filled with homophobia that I learned from Christian resources, and something I internalized myself. So, with six years of rejecting who I was, coming to Luther turned my entire being upside down and I had a tough time accepting being gay. I had to begin deconstructing my own identity in terms of sexuality and faith and since then, it's been hard to reconstruct that religious part of my life with this new acceptance of who I am. Additionally, it was only recently that I stopped blaming myself for the pain that I went through and accepted the fact that the Church had hurt me. So, you can imagine the twisted feeling in my stomach when I saw an Instagram post come up in my feed talking about the #ChangedMovement.

Now, #ChangedMovement sounds pretty positive, right? The name holds undertones of the acknowledgement of life for LGBTQ people not unlike other social and human rights movements in the United States within recent years. Or, at least, that's what you think it's about until you see the #OnceGay. On the main page of the website Changed, they propose the question "Can a person leave homosexuality behind?" with the rest of the pages on the website offering the answer of "Yes, with God's help."¹ If you hop on their website, you can read the stories of people who were "#OnceGay" and gave "their sexuality to Jesus."² Changed provides resources for people seeking to do the same things and re-establish their faith with God. On their mission page, they even refer to gender identity as "gender confusion."³ This type of rhetoric lends itself to discussions similar to those concerning conversion therapy by assuming that there is somehow something unnatural or wrong with a person or that someone is



simply "confused." Yet, that's not the worst part.

What pulls the strongest in my gut is reading stories about two men who survived the Pulse

1. CHANGED Movement, 2019, accessed September 25, 2019, www.changedmovement.com.

2. Ibid.

3. "About," CHANGED Movement, 2019, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://changedmovement.com/about>.

Nightclub Shooting in Orlando, Florida in 2016. Angel Colon and Luis Ruiz share similar stories: after surviving the horrific instances at the nightclub that day, they decided to seek out pastoral care and leave the homosexual “lifestyle” behind.⁴ And just in September, Ruiz worked with other #Changed individuals to organize the Freedom March in Orlando, Florida. In an interview, Ruiz mentions that he didn’t “pray the gay away” but rather “now he doesn’t act on it.”⁵ Let me just say that statement again: “Now he doesn’t act on it.”

As other LGBTQ activists mention in the same Orlando Weekly article, this type of rhetoric does not stray far from the “Don’t be gay” rhetoric surrounding conversion therapy. LGBTQ activist Julie Rodgers wrote against this type of rhetoric in an opinion column in The New York Times when

queer people, just as many organizations have done for years.

Today however, organizations like QChristian, The Reformation Project, and affirming programs in churches like RIC (Reconciling in Christ) in the ELCA rise to counter the numerous voices that misguide LGBTQ people into believing that their identity is somehow the “wrong lifestyle” and that their “lifestyle is dangerous.” Not all individuals end up as Ruiz and Colon. In fact, some individuals like myself, find solace in these new organizations that are affirming for diverse gender and sexual identities. Affirming organizations now provide spaces for the LGBTQ community within the Church, and many of them stand to support the individuals who fall out of the ex-Gay organizations

Affirming organizations now provide spaces for the LGBTQ community within the Church, and many of them stand to support the individuals who fall out of the ex-Gay organizations because of their failed attempts to repress their identities in their relationships, marriages, and lives.

the first Freedom March came to Washington, D.C.⁶ Commenting on conversation therapy programs that fall along similar lines to #Changed and other “ex-gay organizations,” Rodgers points out, “Most conversion therapy occurs not with mental health professionals but in conservative Christian communities ... usually [in the form of] nonprofit ministries ... These groups are protected by religious freedom laws, so laws banning conversion therapy for minors do not apply to them.”⁷ So, although many people believed that the fight to end conversion therapy ended with the passing of bills that banned it and the fall of the organization Exodus International, it has never truly ended. Christian organizations like #Changed still tote the name of God for their own values that devalue the lives and identities of

because of their failed attempts to repress their identities in their relationships, marriages, and lives.

As for myself, I can’t imagine where I would be if I had found ex-Gay organizations like Changed when I was in high school. I can’t imagine how much closer I would have been to acting on suicidal thoughts. And, though I am still working on healing from the pain that the Church inflicted upon me in the past, I hold more hope now that there are people in the Church working against homophobia and conversion theology. And, in contrast to voices like Changed, which aim to stifle the identities of queer people, that hope is enough to empower me to speak up and be honest about my past.

4. “Luis Ruiz,” CHANGED Movement, 2019, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://changedmovement.com/stories/luis-ruiz>.

5. Jenna Lyons, “Freedom March wants gay people in Florida to know they’re ‘free to leave homosexuality,’” *Orlando Weekly*, September 11, 2019, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/orlando/freedom-to-march-wants-gay-people-in-florida-to-know-theyre-free-to-leave-homosexuality/Content?oid=25976107>.

6. Julie Rodgers, “What I Learned From Gay Conversion Therapy,” *The New York Times*, May 5, 2018, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/05/opinion/gay-conversion-therapy.html>.

7. Ibid.

Can't We "Gram" Our Cake and Eat It, Too?

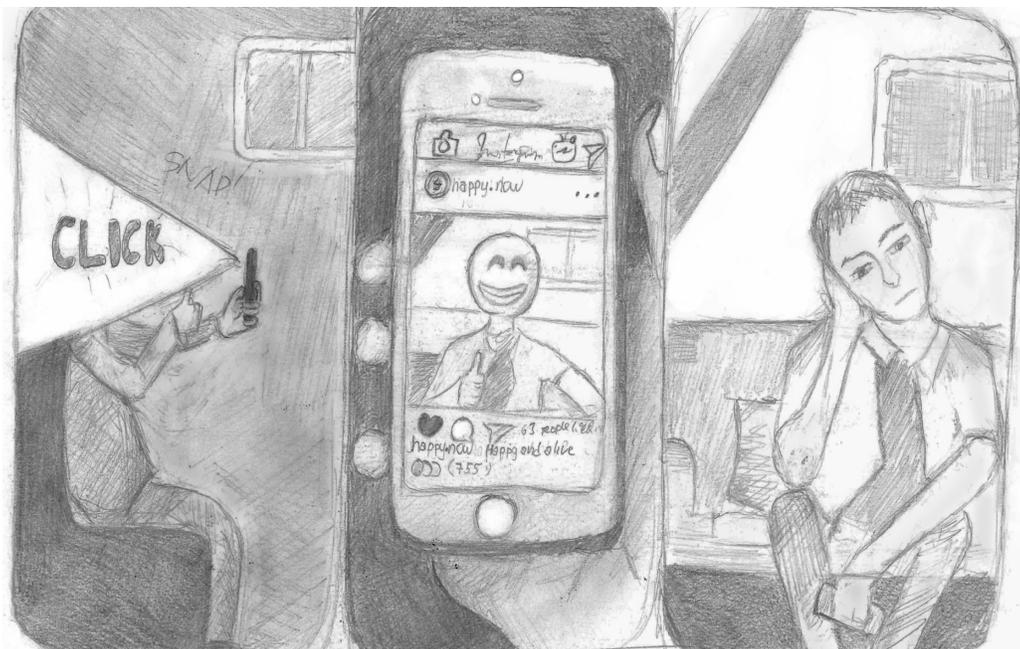
The effects of moralizing food on body-mind relationships

Gillian Klein (2019)

Art by Tomáš Dandáš (2019)

There's a yellow microwave in the kitchen of my home, glistening in the sunlight of the early morning Iowa sky. My pudgy, five year old fingers graze over the syrup-coated waffles my mother has toasted for me before school as I allow the enriching concoction

The pure, naive nature of a five-year-old is something of a memory to me now, because the once-organic connection between mind and body has been infiltrated by the messages I either willingly or subconsciously absorb. I return home as a young adult in anticipation of those waffles only to be greeted with a cacophony of dissonance between my rational voice and the voice of hate, the



of batter and butter to meet my awaiting taste buds. I rarely, if ever, questioned the gurgling of my stomach to mean I was hungry or the space my body took up to mean I was too big. Being five was a time in my life when the overstimulating cloud of American capitalism was just splays of images on an advertisement that in themselves held no connotations or deeply toxic meanings.

latter of which tells me all the "bad" consequences consuming waffles will have. I loathe the voice of hate as it whispers over my shoulder that syrup and waffles "sit heavy" and "go straight to the thighs." And that macro-breakdown...those numbers are impossible to work off. Is this the MOST nutritionally dense option? Worst of all, this food is BAD; waffles are egregious excuses for fuel,

and an abominable culmination of butter, flour and god forbid the dirtiest of five letter words: S-U-G-A-R. Disregard the taste or enjoyment, because those buttered waffles are not going to get you any closer to the summer body Seventeen magazine told you to begin carving in April. There is a nostalgia of sorts, a yearning desire for the mind of my five-year-old self to simplify the rather complex and confusing nature of the mind I now have. I contemplate food with the same sort of depth and time with which one might ponder how to solve an environmental crisis. Food has instantaneously become a means of cataloguing what is good and bad and anything between. All I can ask is why? The answer is alarmingly truthful: I am a result of a culture that has established deeply embedded roots in the moralizing of food.

Go to Instagram and you're bound to find some #foodporn amongst your regular morning feed. Searching for #food on Instagram will bring up over 300 million results alone.¹ The act of snapping a shot of your food while eating has become integral to many dining experiences, but what does it really mean to us when our decadent chocolate mousse photo gets over 300 likes in under an hour? Lauren Canonico, a psychotherapist who counsels women and those who identify as LGBTQIA/+GSM, noted the psychological impacts such posts have on our relationship with food. "Thanks to the effects of deeply ingrained diet culture, many of us still see foods as intrinsically 'bad' and requiring special permissions (via Instagram likes and comments) to 'justify,'" she says. "I think we turn to Instagram to validate our choices across the board, but like with all social media, what we see is usually the highlight

reel and not an accurate representation of day to day experience."² Even if we have an increased awareness of our media consumption, the slippery slope of disentangling reality from media messages is inevitable. Cultivation theory posits an explanation for the phenomenon of moralizing food; increased media exposure will lead to an internalization of such messages as reality.³ Consuming these messages is a passive act. Regularly, we are not cognitively aware of what we are consuming and HOW it makes us feel. That's what makes scrolling on social media feeds so alluring; it hardly requires any mental output and keeps our brains mindlessly wandering.

However, the consumption of media, specifically posts about food and the culture of food, become integrated into our beliefs and values much more than we know. Staged photos of gargantuan cheeseburgers and perfectly portioned platters increasingly distance us from our own appetites. And this is precisely where mind/body relationships become blurry; between the external feedback and psychological reliance on it, we have slowly lost touch with a truly phenomenological thing: trust between mind and body. Without mind and body trust, people must rely on external cues to gauge their hunger. Moralizing food is one of these external cues as we are guided to consume "good" food and avoid "bad" food.

I first came across this concept while reading a shortened excerpt by a student of Hunter College's nutrition program, The Medium. It read, "When we become inundated in diet culture and need external cues to determine what we eat, we lose the connection with our body as intuitive eaters."⁴ The so-called "intuitive eating" preached all around us is

Even if we have an increased awareness of our media consumption, the slippery slope of disentangling reality from media messages is inevitable.

1. Brittany Ross. "How Instagram Spoils Your Relationship With Food." Medium, November 19, 2018. <https://medium.com/@brittross/how-instagram-spoils-your-relationship-with-food-39cf0b5b8a9e>.

2. Ibid.

3. Kendall O'Brien, "The Cultivation of Eating Disorders Through Instagram," University of South Florida Scholar Commons, October 30, 2015: 1-30, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7200&context=etd>.

4. Ross, "How Instagram Spoils Your Relationship with Food," Nov. 19, 2018.

merely a pseudo-intuitive eating, as it still involves frequently deliberating what you put in your body and why. The why is where moralizing food kicks in. If food is good or bad, it becomes “apparently clear” what we should eat. The moment I sit down with a waffle and syrup in front of me, there is an immediate disconnect between mind and body. The body supplies me with what experts in the field call “hunger cues.” The driving force behind hunger cues are appetite, that is, the biological mechanism keeping us from dying of malnutrition and starvation. So then what’s up with Kim K’s Flat Tummy Lollipops that “decrease appetite” or those green tea appetite suppressants celebrities like Cardi B promote a la Instagram? It has never made sense to me why a biological factor meant to keep us alive is constantly advertised as something we need to control or suppress; in fact, it’s EXACTLY why I found myself sitting in front of that fluffy, Belgian waffle with fork in hand physically desiring but mentally resisting that first bite. We are no longer advocates for our bodies; we are slaves to a system which claims that anything with a hint of good taste is surely bad for us.

Good? Bad? First observed in the 1800s by European anthropologists and ethnographers studying various civilizations, it became apparent that “impurity” or “badness” is crucial to humans symbolically.⁵ Food is symbolic too; it is one of our means of survival and we literally take it into ourselves. And the notion of pure and uncontaminated foods (good food) are historically pleasant since they often connote to us that the food is not dangerous to our well-being. But, suddenly, “purity and lack of contamination” have manifested into something much more powerful: morality. Why is it suddenly such a “bad thing” to “‘Gram’ your cake and eat it, too?” The mind-body duality is especially prevalent in Western cultures. The mind is believed to be rational, privileged and obligated to use its knowledge in order to control and manage the

undisciplined and desiring body.⁶ As it is, it’s only through restrictive measures of dieting that we can tame these gosh darn appetites of ours because there could not POSSIBLY be anything more immoral than craving a slice of Wonder bread (carbs, duh). Restriction is the golden bridge to a life of “good” food, being a “good” person, and nourishing one’s body with only what’s “good” for it. Moralizing is an exercise of control that becomes an emotional pendulum. We swing back and forth between guilt and being bad on desires, or we feel “pure,” “in-control,” and “good” if we resist. We are teaching ourselves that in order to live “the good life,” we must resist our body’s natural and quite frankly, biological, drive for energy.

Food is a resource, not a landscape of judgment. We’re inserting a third party into the mind/body relationship: control. This is driven by our skewed regulation of hunger and in turn, control relies on the moralizing of food. If we control what we eat, i.e., good or bad foods, it’s instantaneously an indication of our worth.

And once again, I am back in my kitchen. Before me is this steaming waffle piled with whipped cream and chocolate chips, which holds a grasp over my mental stability. After all, am I not what I eat? Isn’t that what we tell ourselves? No. No. No. My choice to eat this waffle is MINE; it is my hunger which drives me to consume my breakfast, not my “rampant and uncontained,” “bad” desires which have long been repressed. I give myself the agency to be good at writing, to be a good person, but not to eat “good” foods. Suddenly, mind and body align as I tempt myself with that first bite, tempt myself to not eat “good” food, but eat food. Period. It’s a return to my five-year-old self whose notions of good were about people and places and feelings, not about food.

5. Heathers, James, “Why ‘clean eating’ is bad for you: The damaging psychology behind the latest health fad,” *Precise Nutrition*, 2016, <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/clean-eating-bad-for-you>.

6. Nailya Ordabayeva, et al., “Moralities in Food and Health Research,” *Journal of Marketing Management*, November 7, 2014: 1800-1832, <https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/qb7UA5qN3hB3NyvdbKiZ/full>.

“You’re Not As Tolerant as You Think You Are”

How relative importance of values determined permissibility of Opposition

by Robert Muller (2020)

Art by Kaitlynn Rivers (2021)

When, as active citizens of the world, need to realize that living in communities of different peoples, beliefs, and worldviews leads to disagreements and controversies. Today, there are three main responses used to address these differences: pluralism, tolerance, and opposition.

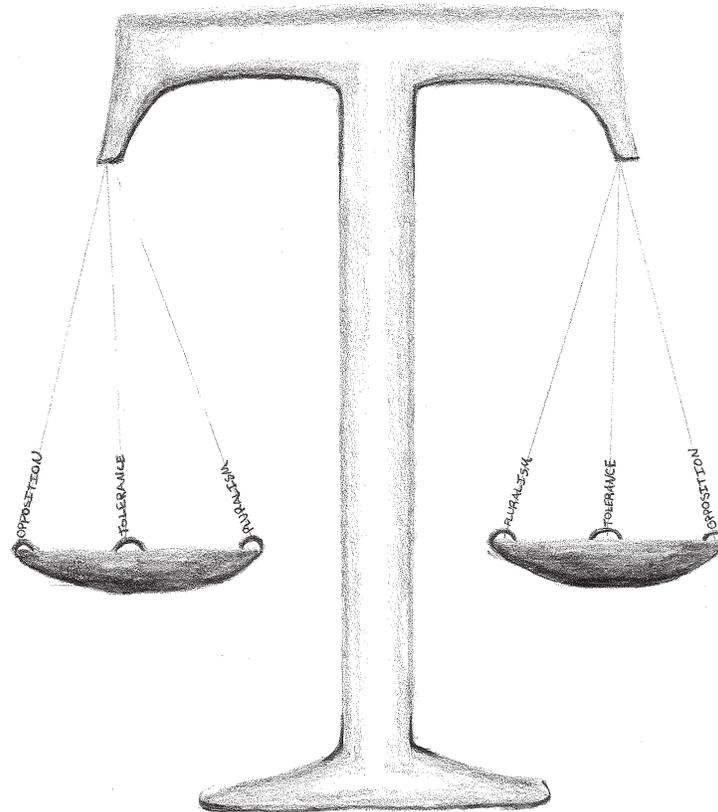
A person’s values not only determine what object falls into each category (examples of categories being politics, religion, best coffeeshop in Decorah, etc.) but also how the individual will respond to said category (with pluralism, tolerance, or opposition), and productive conversations along difficult and divided lines can only happen after we realize that *how* we value these domains of life affects how we talk about our differences.

First, It is important to define terms, as language is at the core of this argument. For the purpose of this article, “pluralism” is defined as the belief that different realities can coexist and be equally true even

in the midst of contradictions. “Tolerance” is the ability of two contradictory belief systems to coexist without the individual parties giving up their beliefs. “Opposition” is the act of trying to assert one’s beliefs as true over others’ beliefs. A typical example would be the Christian approaches to religion. Pluralism (as held by John Hick) would say that all religions are true. Tolerance would say that Christianity is the true religion but faith is an individualized spirituality so we should not try and push it on anyone else. Opposition would be Christian evangelism to try and convince nonbelievers to follow Jesus.

Much of educated Western society (and in particular Luther College) holds Pluralism, and possibly tolerance, as the status quo for how differences should be addressed. Opposition is seen as backwards and exclusive. Now, let us look at another example: climate change. Pluralism says that those who both believe and deny climate change

are equally true (since there are many coexisting contradictory truths). A tolerant person would say that climate change is real but does not want to convince others. Someone who is optional would argue that climate change is an issue and we need to ALL trust the data and take action. Pluralism is now seen



as unacceptable, Tolerance is at best negligent, and Opposition is the only course of action. The difference here is that it is no longer the approach (Pluralism, Tolerance, and Opposition) that determines the permissibility of the belief, but it is how YOU value the importance of the category to which the approach is applied (religion or climate change) that determines the permissibility of the belief.

Many people will have trouble likening religion and climate change as issues of equal importance. Religion is filled with abstract teachings and metaphysical beliefs while climate change is science. First, this statement presents a very Western view of the world in which there is a strict dichotomy between the Sacred and the Secular. Second, while climate change may be a science, how one responds to it is based on moral and ethical values that are inherently tied to religion (even though Enlightened thinkers may try and make you think otherwise). In his book, *Dynamics of Faith*, Paul Tillich gives a common language for us to use: Faith is the state of being Ultimately concerned.¹ This

opens up a new and radical door: religion may no longer be Ultimate. In fact, I would argue that for many Westerners it is not. A common claim that is made when discussing religious differences at Luther is “we must abandon all Absolute Truth claims in order to pursue justice.” In this context, the Absolute Truth claims were pointed at religious communities (primarily Evangelical Christians). The above claim argues that religious communities must de-absolutize all Truth claims in order to pursue... justice. Is this justice not Ultimate? If it were not, then there would be no reason to try and convince an entire class to pursue it. If justice is only a relative social construction, then, inevitably, the powerful will always oppress the marginalized. Therefore, I believe that we are speaking of an oppositional justice, one that must be fought for and of which others must be convinced. To rephrase the thesis: “you must give up what you value as Ultimate to pursue what I value as Ultimate.” This

is opposition.

So where do we go from here? Do we forsake the noble pursuit of justice because religion may get in the way? Absolutely not. By recognizing how different people value the importance of categories in our lives (religion, climate change, politics, justice, etc.), we are better able to navigate personal, cultural, and philosophical differences. In a meeting with the first Muslim Imam in Denmark for a Paideia 450 class, he stated that it was common for deeply-convicted Muslims to favor deeply-convicted Christians over more-moderate Muslims. This is because the deeply-convicted Muslims and Christians shared in the importance of God in their lives although their traditions and beliefs were different. This is interfaith work. If pluralism is the prerequisite to interfaith work, then you will get a room of pluralists and nothing more. In regards to religion, only allowing pluralists spots at the table is neither pluralism nor even

If justice is only a relative social construction, then, inevitably, the powerful will always oppress the marginalized.

tolerance, because they all believe the same thing: that all religions are true. There is no dialogue to be had. However, if multiple oppositional/exclusivist religious members come together and work towards justice *through* their differing religious beliefs and

traditions, that is interfaith through differences rather than in spite of it.

The person who campaigns for Bernie Sanders, the Evangelical Christian, and the Climate Change Activist are all oppositional. The only reason some are seen as small-minded and intolerant is because those who do not value the same things want to discredit what others view as Ultimate so that they can pursue what they consider to be Ultimate. Rather than discrediting and devaluing the belief systems of other people, let us all recognize and work through our differences to reach a common goal. If that is justice, bring your politics (conservative and liberal), your religion (or lack thereof), and your story to the table. Show me what gives you life, and I will show you what gives me life. We may be convinced or we may not be, but at the very least our beginning point is understanding.

1. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 4.