A Student-Led Liberty and Economics Journal

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Our Mission

Quaestus is a student-led journal presenting ideas about Liberty, Faith, and Economics from a Christian perspective in order to promote human flourishing.

Our Vision

We aim to inspire the next generation of Christian thought and leaders by addressing global issues with sound moral and economic principles.

God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increse in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

Genesis 1:22

Editorial Board

A Discussion with Dr. Jay Bhattacharya

Transcribed by: Natalie Bodnar, Senior Editor

To highlight what he thought was a sensible public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Bhattacharya first explained the important lessons learned from his prior research experiences. He shared, "In March of 2020 when COVID hit, I had done work on H1N1 in 2009, and I noticed in that literature…the early estimates of mortality from the H1N1 flu epidemic of 2009 were catastrophically high…5% case fatality rate…people were obviously very concerned." He added, "There were these studies that came out that measured how many people in the population had H1N1 infection…there was almost 100 times more people infected than were identified as cases."

Bhattacharya described that a 99.99% survival rate transformed H1N1 public policy and proposed that a similar transformation should have been considered by the U.S. government during its initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Bhattacharya affirmed that the World

policy." He emphasized that there is a middle-ground [strategy]…that [has been successfully] followed for a hundred years [in] epidemics: identify the vulnerable [and] move resources to protect them while disrupting the rest of society as little as possible." As a result, Bhattacharya relates that we have created "institutionalized hypochondria" and that the Declaration became "a political thing" because "red states adopted something like the Declaration and blue states kept up with the lockdown policy."

Given that science is about exploration and humility, this lack of civil discourse affects progress by creating negative implications for those pursuing Truth. In response to being discredited for not supporting the mainstream position on COVID-19 lockdown policies, Bhattacharya revealed that many of his colleagues questioned his motives. He relates, "It became personally clear to me that if I am going to have any integrity whatsoever in terms of my professional life, I had to speak up about lockdowns. I had prepared my entire life essentially for this it turns out…I had [also] been preparing to lose many of my friends. It's been personally quite challenging…[but] it's not just me. Almost anybody who spoke out with credentials about the lockdowns was discredited…you've heard people say that the right credentials involve epidemiology, virology, and immunology—that's it. No one else has a right to speak; no one else has any relevant expertise… that is a lie…this is a policy that affects every single one of us in intimate ways." He concluded that "this is a disease and an epidemic that requires the expertise of everybody. Instead what happened was that people who started to speak up with different expertise were shot down. They were told they do not understand the disease and they therefore do not have the authority to speak…that was an enormous mistake made by the media, by politicians, and enforced ruthlessly through the whole epidemic. And I found myself in a very strange position…I felt that I had [to speak up]."

To address the two competing systems of norms for ethical scientific behavior, Dr. Bhattacharya described the

and open exchange of ideas is needed more than ever especially when there is a pandemic. There is a cost to that: people will say things that are wrong; others will believe them…but [here] we have suppressed the debate before it even happened." Bhattacharya also described the public health concept of precautionary principle in which scientists assume "the worst about the virus." He elaborated that it "is completely reasonable… to calibrate what your response is going to be. What's not reasonable is [simultaneously] assuming that the responses…you are proposing are automatically the best…or that [lockdown] interventions have no harm." He further warned that "the loss of trust in public health is near complete…the work of science depends deeply on public trust."

In response to early treatment protocols and physicians being able to prescribe off-label, Bhattacharya said, "The economics of this is really interesting. If you have a drug that is off-patent, there is nobody interested in testing it. So ivermectin is a drug that's incredibly cheap given billions of people around the world with river blindness and a whole host of other parasitic diseases [take it]." He described a thought experiment to the audience, proposing that "some scientists come up with the hypothesis that [ivermectin] works for COVID [treatment] and they have some in vitro studies…that suggest [ivermectin] might be useful…same thing with hydroxychloroquine… [with these] early hypotheses." He elaborated, "Hydroxychloroquine is another drug that is used for malaria intervention and treatment around the world…somebody comes up with the hypothesis that [these drugs] ought to work [for treating COVID] but there is nobody with an interest in testing them. [Conversely there is] a drug that is on-patent with a company that has a very strong interest in testing [it]. Very quickly in the epidemic, Gilead [which] is a pharmaceutical company in California…came up with the idea that remdesivir is useful for treating patients with [COVID]. They run a study and within two months, the FDA approves the drug for use in hospital settings— they still use it…though I don't think it works very well. Nobody has an interest in testing any of these other drugs [and] very quickly running studies. It's the responsibility of the NIH actually to do that…[testing]. It's the responsibility actually of the NIAID—Dr. Fauci's organization—to do that; but they didn't do that. There's now a study for ivermectin that the NIH has approved which I think is due to be complete sometime in 2023… we'll know the answer in 2023 for ivermectin. That I think…is an enormous failure of public health policy. We moved heaven or

the doctors have a right to do that? Absolutely… because [doctors] pay the consequences if they're wrong—it ends up being malpractice. Many doctors want to use ivermectin and yet they're prevented from doing [so]." Dr. Bhattacharya described how he personally would not try a drug that has not been FDA-approved "but that [he could] understand why someone who is in dire straits clinically would want that…there's a good ethical case to be made for allowing doctors to prescribe it in those situations…we as scientists have an obligation…when we see doctors using a drug…for thii8 it9 "h5ngists

"That's much more complete protection than [what] the vaccines [offer]," Bhattacharya noted. "Many of the people who got COVID [were] essential workers during the epidemic…they were regular working-class people who got COVID and recovered [and] the vaccine mandates put that working-class out of work." He related that the "vaccine mandate has created an enormous problem for public health, it's created a huge under-cutting of the trust in public health."

He openly stated, "I sympathize with people who don't trust public health and its pronouncements…particularly with this denial of natural immunity [conferring] protection. Public health has gone out of its way to deny overwhelming scientific evidence that there is…considerable [natural] protection…so I think the vaccine mandates in this setting undercut trust in public health and do not serve the purpose that people say they would, which is to end the epidemic. Even if 100% of us are vaccinated, COVID will still spread."

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Dr. Jay Bhattacharya (le) and Dr. Daniel Sem (right) discuss the ner points of COVID-19 response and American liberty.

Between different periods of complete and total lockdown, individual quarantine, and moments of tentative freedom, I've had ample opportunity to reflect on humanity's response to the notorious virus that radically transformed the face of humanity—masks and all. I have wondered how it is possible that in our age of incredible scientific achievement and understanding, American society should crumble when confronted with a biological enemy similar to diseases which we've long since overcome. There have certainly been a multitude of factors at play in the events of these past twenty months, but I firmly believe that a significant reason for our failures lies in the cultural and institutional reign of fear over facts. The political lawmakers, leaders, and media personnel whom God has charged to dutifully guide us have conjured up a monstrous cloud of anxiety and distress, hoping that the grave impressions of a true calamity will convince Americans that unprecedented measures must be taken to ensure the safety. I, however, cannot see even the theoretical good which can come about with this approach. For while the umbral haze of fear can only perpetuate itself unto death, the illuminating light of facts and the Truth have proven their ability to uncover a path forward into renewed life during this COVID-19 crisis.

Fear, especially for one's life and future, suffocates the mind and shrouds one's thoughts in a fog of apprehension and despair. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, fear is "the emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense

control, low certainty, and low external agency (Wagner, M. et al., 2019). These were all essential components of the news cycle and governmental messaging since the initial lockdowns began and pervaded the conversation during the following years. Fear feeds upon perceived threats and related uncertainties, looming ever larger in one's mind and driving him or her to seek solace of any kind, even death at one's own hand. The specific consequences of fear upon one's decision making are information seeking and conviction references habits. When fear enters the equation, individuals tend to want to seek out more information to reduce uncertainty, yet their judgements concerning this information tend to be much less reliant on foundational convictions and deep-seated reasoning (Wagner, M. et al., 2019). In this way, fear destabilizes and corrodes the mind, leaving it utterly unfit to make prudent decisions about the future.

When my father passed away, fear overwhelmed me and clung to me for weeks after he died. My mind was a roiling sea; emotions and thoughts crashing in on one another, lightning flashes of potential catastrophes and the booming thunder of the words "He's gone" all raged on inside of my skull. My aspirations for college, my future career, marriage prospects and so much more petrified and turned further into stone with every new Dad-shaped crater I discovered in the aftermath. I did not have the mental space necessary to make these important, critical decisions for myself because I was entirely consumed by the fear of what lay next without my father's guiding presence.

In the same way, the fear of COVID-19 and its potentially devastating effects on their lives drove the American response not to a place of preventative action, but crippling inaction. With pure physical survival at the forefront of the conversation thanks to a fear-driven narrative in the news cycle, many governmental actors instituted draconian lockdown measures. With little thought to the other consequences of such a seismic lifestyle shift for the citizen, those in

the physical disease might spread, but the spiritual disease of sin was free to metastasize in the hearts of many as a result. Even though we may now be emerging from the worst throes of the virus' rampage, we now stand at the precipice of a much graver concern. Psalm 119 implores us to let "Your Word [be] a lamp for [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path." It is imperative, therefore, that we reignite the flame of faith in Jesus Christ which now lies dormant in the hearts of many Americans.

Only this hope in our greater salvation through Him, the Word made flesh for our sake, can we carry on in a broken world where disease, war, and discord lie just around the bend.

In my pit of despair, God's Word was the only lamp bright enough to light a path through the waves of grief, shame, and regret that would rise and recede in the years which followed. I found that nothing else granted me the sure direction for my wandering feet, the straightforward answers to my bubbling questions, and the unyielding love of Christ which became a healing balm applied directly to my battered and bruised heart. Purely by clinging to the Truth as my life preserver, I forged onwards and followed God's call to study in preparation for the pastoral ministry here at Concordia University Wisconsin. The waves have not gotten any smaller, nor has the thunder become any quieter. Yet as I cleave to the Bible, the darkness around me increasingly fades from view, unable to comprehend the perfect light of Christ which now fills my life.

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The Foundation of Civility
By: Grace Hemmeke, Editor-in-Chief

Q [1]. What is your only comfort
in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,
but belong—

body and soul,
in life and in death—

to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious
blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;
in fact, all things must work together for my salva-
tion.

Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for him.

It may be odd to begin a discussion on civility with these wordsfrom the Heidelberg Catechism. Civility is often viewed as a peripheral, genteel aspect of life, while worldview and values are central to the identity of a country or culture. However, civility is the fruit of a Biblical worldview; one which roots itself in God's ownership of the universe.

At the foundation of many secular ideas is the belief that before we belong to anyone else, we belong to ourselves. Manifestations of this include the "I don't need no man" mantra of the feminists, the popular changing of wedding vows to omit the word "obey" (Tigar, 2020), and an increase in the culture of self-love or self-care, which, while promoting the value of good stewardship, removes God as the owner and creator of the things which must be stewarded.

In order to bring about a civil society, we must recognize God's kingship over the world. Yet following the West's increasing rejection of God (Lipka, 2015), secular humanists now demand basic human rights and dignity for all without any idea of where these rights come from. Many papers have been written by men, outlining these basic human rights. All of them have failed to recognize Yahweh as the Author of those Rights. Perhaps the most famous and most cited document on ethical guidelines is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in its very first article attempts to lay the groundwork for every right to which humans are entitled. The authors state that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one an-other in a spirit of brotherhood." (United Nations, 1948, art. 1). This article leaves a very important question unanswered: Who endowed humans with reason and conscience? The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, written during the French Revolution, states:

"For these reasons, the National Assembly doth recognize and declare, in the presence of the Supreme Being, and with the hope of his blessing and favour, the following sacred rights of men and of citizens" (National Assembly of France, 1789, para. 2).

Even the French, while chopping off their "divine-ly appointed" king's head, understood that some higher power existed. Although it is difficult to find a more secular nation than the Republic of France and its Temple of Reason, the United Na-tions does not even recognize that there might be Something more powerful or more important than humankind.

The American Declaration of Indepen-dence offers an insight which seems closest to the Christian worldview, stating famously that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their

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The Role of Social Media in a Civil Society

Transcribed by: Ben Dubke, Senior Editor

This is a summary of a keynote presentation given by Jaron Lanier at the Liberty, Faith, and Economics Summit at Concordia University Wisconsin in November 2021. Jaron Lanier (pictured left) is a computer scientist, author, and speaker. He coined the term "virtual reality," and was ranked one of the 25 most influential people in tech by Wired magazine. He is the author of numerous books about life in a high-tech world, including Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now in 2018.

Photo credited to Doug Menuez, Stockland Martel

What is Social Media?

Lanier began his presentation by defining "social media." In its most fundamental sense, social media is any personal connection or communication via the internet, and Lanier sees this broad concept as a net positive for society. He gave the example, "Before the internet, people with unusual diseases couldn't find each other to compare notes, and then once the internet started working, they could, which is transformative. That's just one of thousands examples I could come up with."

What people usually mean by "social media," however, is a particular business model built around "the science of behavior modification." Lanier stated, "Behavior modification is measuring what you have experienced and using it in a feedback loop to change what you experience next, in order to modify your behavior in the future, and to have an adaptive algorithm that optimizes itself to find out what kind of change in experience will have an impact on your behavior." The modern techniques of modifying behavior, also known as operant conditioning, originated in the work of Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. These researchers investigated how they could change animals' behavior patterns using rewards and punishments, often small candies and electric shocks.

Lanier explained that social media companies used the same principles to manipulate their users: "What Facebook discovered is that instead of candy and electric shocks, you can use vanity and social fears, so when somebody feels like they've been liked or followed, or have gone viral for a day, those are the candy. And when someone feels they are the targeted one, or ostracized, or ignored, those are the electric shocks." Social media companies have developed algorithms to find more and more reliable ways to keep users on their platforms, all with the goal of increasing profits from advertising. The algorithms they employ have discovered that social pressures are very effective methods to reach that goal. Lanier went on, "People are social creatures—we think together, our genetic heritage is to be together and to think together—so social pleasure and social pain are not arbitrary or incidental. They are profound and central to our experience of life."

The Lizard Brain

What is the problem with this business model? In order to find the most efficient doses of social pleasure and pain, the algorithms must constantly evaluate themselves by tracking any changes to users' behavior. Lanier explained, "The responses that you can read from people… tend to be the pretty dramatic ones, like if you click on something a lot or hover over something or comment on something, and it's right in real-time so that the algorithm can understand what the cause was that created that effect." The actions the algorithms can track tend to be governed by the brain's instantaneous "fight-or-flight" response, cognitive activity which Lanier termed "the lizard brain." Over long periods of repeated exposure, social media users' thought patterns begin to shift. In Lanier's words, "If you're exciting the lizard brain a lot, you make people into lizards."

Lanier went on to describe the effects of the lizard brain, "This is the problem that you gradually bring out the worst in people, where you have this totally contextless, weird, triggered response that is a normal part of being human, but normally wouldn't happen so much. When you're under a behavior modification regime, there's this effect on you that you become a little

more vain, a little more socially nervous, a little more socially fearful, a little more aggressive, a little more xenophobic, a little more irritable, a little more paranoid." Lanier was careful to say that all these qualities existed in people before the age of social media. Social media does not immediately transform all its users' personalities, but it exaggerates these parts of human behavior. It causes an overall, ambient change in how the population thinks and acts.

Lanier claimed that removing the social media algorithms would improve our society and reduce the characteristics associated with the lizard brain. He admitted this is difficult to prove because all the experimental data is kept under lock and key by the social media companies who first discovered the business model, especially Facebook. Nevertheless, researchers occasionally decide to whistle blow, and "from the little peeks we've had of their research, we know that these algorithms do have a profound effect."

Social Media and Civil Discourse

Lanier argued for a correlation between social media and the apparent paucity of civil discourse. He explained, "There's always been societies becoming more or less civil at different times…It's not that we're necessarily seeing the worst that there's ever been of humanity—we're certainly not. We're seeing a simultaneous, global effect, and that is actually different." He even noted, "It usually happens within a few years of the Facebook brand becoming big in a given country or region." On a broad scale, "All these places in the world that were kind of doing better in terms of democracy and civility and rational approaches to problems all started to get nuts at the same time, and that is the correlation that leads right to the door of Facebook and a few other platforms."

Lanier also connected the lack of civil discourse online to the massive wealth and social influence concentrated in tech companies. He theorized, "I think that [concentration of wealth and influence] leads many people around the world to have this strange feeling of their own futures being stolen. People wonder if they'll be obsolete, if their children will be obsolete. There's

Lanier argued that China's cyberactivity presents some geopolitical concerns for the United States. Although very few people, if any, have full knowledge of China's strategy in its complexities and contingencies, he offered a few general impressions of China's goals, "[China] thinks in long terms, and a lot of senior people in China are still upset about [being slighted in recent centuries] and feel that China should naturally be atop the world order…I actually think China has a view of the future of a world that works overall that they don't necessarily control completely. I think what they would like is to have a world that makes them rich, but I don't think they want to be administering Chile or something…I do want to say that we have a national security issue with allowing China to enter the platform war so successfully…If you own TikTok, there are so many things you could do. There are so many ways to be an evil mastermind if you own TikTok."

Cancel Culture / Free Speech

Social media can seem like a contributor to free speech because almost anyone can post almost anything they like. Lanier pointed out,

but not to the total expense of everybody else. Everybody else gets at least a little bit."

Lanier likened data dignity to the Total Quality Management movement in business. Launched by the work of W. Edwards Deming in the 1980s, this was an effort to improve manufacturing using quality control. According to Lanier, Deming's breakthrough was that "this information has to not just go to engineers and owners…It has to go to the workers in the factory lines so they can improve what they do with knowledge." The same idea should be applied to today's high-tech world. Oftentimes, tech companies enlist users to generate data without ever telling them the data's purpose. Lanier gave the example of CAPTCHA games, which require users to identify all the tiles that contain fire hydrants, or stoplights, or some other object. This is an approach Google uses, without telling users, to gain free data to improve its AI for self-driving cars. On the other hand, "With MIDs, people can become aware of what the purpose of data is and improve it."

Lanier closed his presentation by describing his vision of a thriving online world. "Let's say in the future there'll be thousand, tens of thousands of new types of robots and new types of algorithms that are doing this and that. Whenever someone hears about one of those, instead of saying, 'My jobs going to be obsolete. What will my children do? What will their children do?' they'll say, 'This is a great opportunity—I'm going to join the MID and make the data for that thing better and get paid for it and be proud of it. I'm going to make it more creative, and it's going to be like a new art form.' Instead of just solving one problem in a boring way once, it becomes an eternal new platform of creativity for an open-ended culture that goes on forever. That transformation is what hope has to look like in a high-tech society. I don't think there's any other way. That's data dignity."

Social Media: A Scarily Evolving Reality

By: Tyler Zacho, Guest Contributor

Ever since the turn of the century, technology has been continually growing, thrusting the world into a reality where smartphones, social media posts, and constant exposure to new information are simply a part of everyday life. As the internet and social media have grown hand in hand, society's ability to connect with others, listen to varying viewpoints, and share thoughts through these global platforms has forever altered the way people communicate and exchange information with each other. Messages and ideas that may have historically taken months or years to spread, can now be seen receiving millions of views in just a matter of hours and days. This raises the question of what the long-term impacts of this alteration will be, how it will change over time, and whether it's even a good thing. These are valid questions, and although this explosion in technology has brought many new convenient abilities to the world, it's increasingly important to consider the negatives, and what the risks of this evolving concept entail. Social media has endless possibilities, many of which have and can continue to enhance the world into the future. However, society's inability to separate virtuality from reality and to discern fact from fiction on these platforms will ultimately determine whether or not they're used for good.

There are currently 4.2 billion active social media users, or in other words, a little over half of the entire global population (Johnson, 2021). This is tough to fully conceptualize but is very telling of the influence that social media has on the world. Individuals from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, age groups, and belief systems use these platforms. Considering this, social media must expose individuals to a wide variety of ideas and content, oftentimes different from their own personally held beliefs, right? Wrong, quite the opposite. Regardless of the social media platform being discussed, they all use machine learning algorithms, which are capable of analyzing your actions on their platform to identify your interests, behaviors, and concerns to suggest and present content

to you that you'll enjoy (T.K. et al., 2021). Along these same lines, former workers of these social media conglomerates such as Tristan Harris, a former Google executive, have started to warn the public about how these platforms intentionally incorporate addictive qualities into their products to take advantage of their users' weaknesses and keep them hooked (Harris, 2017). This continues indefinitely, meaning that the more you use social media, the more data they collect from you, and the more they can tune what appears on your feed. As a result, everybody who uses social media ultimately ends up in their own personal echo chamber of content, where strongly held beliefs are reinforced, biases are fed, and exposure to opposing ideas is minimized. It's the ultimate paradox, where the more you use social media platforms, which house a wide variety of users with differing beliefs, the less likely you are to be exposed to new ideas and content that differs from what you typically see.

One might conclude that because social media platforms have built-in algorithms made to show specific content that they think their users will agree with and find appealing, this should have a positive impact on them, shouldn't it? Well, that doesn't appear to be the case, at least as far as mental health goes. Social media use has been found to have a negative effect on anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep quality, thoughts of self-harm and suicide, psychological distress, cyberbullying, body image dissatisfaction, fear of missing out, and life satisfaction (Sadagheyani et al., 2020). This is the grim reality of social media which these platforms won't tell you about, an unknown risk that arises when you go to create your Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account. Social media skews our view of reality and makes it difficult for many individuals to assess what's typical versus what's abnormal in the world around them. For example, social media serves as a platform to share personal accolades for many, whether that be the purchase of a new car, a post about a job promotion they just received, or photos from their destination wedding last weekend. In

other words, these same individuals are unlikely to post about the argument they had with their spouse last night or the credit card payments they've fallen behind on. Overall, individuals only post what they want everyone else to see, while hiding what they don't. All in all, the individuals who view these posts are likely to obtain a skewed understanding of the life of the poster, as their true reality is hidden behind the facade of their social media profile. As the previously mentioned research suggests, the impact of this can be detrimental. Furthermore, society's ability to interact with one another and participate in civil discourse is dependent upon a certain level of truth and understanding. However, an altered understanding of each other's livelihoods due to the false perceptions given off by social media has the potential to hinder the world's ability to understand and interact with each other effectively.

Social media is here to stay, and the ramifications of its use will perpetuate for decades to come, reverberating throughout the various generations of individuals who utilize this ever-growing technology. This has andwill continue to shape the way people view the world, and consequently, themselves, specially with regard to their self-image. The potential of this technology is unmatched and has had instances of creating wonderfully beautiful moments. However, the world cannot allow itself to ignore social media's undeniable pitfalls and the negative aspects of its existence which are continually inßuencing the lives of its billions of users globally. Ultimately, the impact of social media on humankind as a whole will come down to one thing and one thing only, the intent and social awareness of its users. Will they rise to identify and address the failures which social media has exposed thus far, or will they remain blind, within a lifestyle Plled with mindlessly scrolling and liking posts? That question remains unanswered, yet its potential solution lies within the hearts and minds of the next generation of social media users.

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The Critical Role of Social Media

By: Natalie Bodnar, Senior Editor

In a very tangible way, social media has become an extension of the democratic process by encouraging participation in civil discourse. Freedom of speech thus perpetuates the spirit of a free republic by enabling expression of life, liberty, and happiness. While the advent of big tech has radically transformed how individuals have expressed themselves, the desire to engage in public debate and express opinions has only grown stronger. Today, billions participate in this marketplace of ideas by sharing content, photos, and websites that facilitate dialogue and encourage debate on topics ranging from public health to education to economic growth. Through healthy debate and exchange, the pursuit of truth—rather than popularity—is maintained. The great American experiment relies on such uninhibited discourse because without debate, there can be no exercise of reason, no discipline of thought and opinion, no defense of liberty. Truth ultimately prevails in a civil society that honors an individual's inalienable rights. When individuals shirk their civic responsibilities and fail to participate in this experiment, free speech atrophies. By enabling constant discussion, questioning, and public engagement, media outlets serve a critical role in preserving freedom.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, however, social media has failed to provide an objective platform for the marketplace of ideas, controlling instead both the content and means of communication in the name of the public good. A 2020 study completed by the Pew Research Center, for example, revealed that nearly 75% of U.S. adults believe social media and big tech intentionally censor political viewpoints. In his The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Scottish economist Adam Smith likewise expresses concern when this "ideal [censored] society" is created and arranged at the expense of individual freedom. Austrian economist and philosopher Friedrich A. Hayek also warns of a fatal conceit that values oneness of mind over diversity of thought. Hayek retorted that such a civil body would "not be very complex but extremely primitive." Truly, controlling the content of speech limits the flourishing of a free society by removing the ability to question a fallible status quo and petition public authorities, governments, and officials for redress of grievances. There is no discourse, only silence.

Defending the free market, Hayek would further argue that the problem lies not in allocating resources or public favor but in the nature of knowledge itself. His article, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," demonstrates that all of human knowledge is scattered across countless market actors in a free society and that each actor holds a small fragment of knowledge particular to time, place, and experience. Only through free exchange does the actor reveal his limited knowledge to others: it is by revealing and sharing this limited knowledge that individuals are able to promote the public good.

When the liberty to freely share this knowledge on social media platforms is unilaterally censored, a pre-established narrative—not truth and critical thinking—dominates. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his The Gulag Archipelago warns his readers of the real result of such relentless censorship of freedom: "We forget everything. What we remember is not what actually happened, not history, but merely that hackneyed dotted line they have chosen to drive into our memories by incessant hammering." Ultimately, the cost of overt censorship is liberty. When people of good will knowingly remain silent and fail to voice reason, they surrender liberty: ultimately, tyranny reigns sovereign.

Furthermore, no true academic or personal freedom exists when individuals dare not break away from the mold of societal conformity due to fear of retribution. Free speech rapidly degrades when individuals continue to engage in self-censorship rather than self-expression. When individualism is targeted on social media platforms, for example, the orthodoxy of mainstream ideas provides irresistible security: what once served as the means of promoting freedom now halts reason and self-governance. While the Asch Conformity Study of 1951 is not directly related to the use of social media, the

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Taking Back Control
By: Ben Dubke, Senior Editor

In 1934, T.S. Eliot wrote, "Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" (1970, p. 147). Today, it is harder than ever to draw knowledge from our vast stores of information and to distill our knowledge into true wisdom. Sometimes, it seems like enormous tech companies control our access to information, our political discourse, our economic decisions, and our mental well-being. But with careful consideration of how social media operates, we can overcome big tech companies' far-reaching inßuence by using social media with more discernment.

Social media has beneÞted our society in many ways. The Internet allows us to create and store massive amounts of data, and the rise of social media has enabled every individual user to create information and share it widely. Platforms like Twitter have democratized civil discourse by enabling any person to publicize his opinions and ideas, and platforms like Facebook allow users to maintain contact with family, friends, and colleagues, even when separated by great distances. Across the Internet, people are Þnding meaningful communities and contributing to important causes.

In the early days of the Internet, the prospect of beneÞts like these caused an idealistic vision of what the world would become once everyone was connected online. Singer and Brooking quote Twitter cofounder Evan Williams, "I thought once everybody could speak freely and exchange information and ideas, the world [was] automatically going to be a better place" (2018, p. 19). Like Williams, many people imagined the Internet and social media would enrich people's lives, facilitate free speech for all, and help democracy sweep across the globe. We now know these utopian predictions were unrealistic. Social media has also been used to livestream terrorist attacks, to obstruct democratic elections, and to drive teenagers to suicide. The Internet has exponentially multiplied our data and information, but whether it will enrich our knowledge and wisdom remains to be seen.

We can never return to a pre-Internet world, but neither can we afford to let the Internet shape our world without cautious consideration. A full understanding of social media's effects, both positive and negative, demands inspection of its underlying business model. Social media services are typically free to users, so tech companies rely on advertising for revenue. Social media companies have two mechanisms to increase this revenue stream: maximizing the effectiveness of each advertisement to change the user's behavior and increasing the number of advertisements to which users are exposed by keeping them on the platform for as much time as possible.

The key to social media's effectiveness in advertising is targeting advertisements to speciÞc users. Social media corporations employ sophisticated algorithms which track every user's actions, create detailed personality proÞles for each user, and select which advertisements will most effectively alter each user's behavior. Shoshana Zuboff, professor emeritus at Harvard Business School, terms this system "surveillance capitalism" (2019). She writes, "With a new generation of research tools [Facebook] learned to plunder your 'self' right through to your most intimate core" (Zuboff, 2019, pp. 270-271). Most people have experienced this phenomenon at a basic level. They might search Google for a product or service, then notice an advertisement for the same product appear on their Facebook page.

The extent of targeted advertising on social media goes far beyond this rudimentary example, though. Zuboff explains:

"We are not scrutinized for substance but for form…It is not what is in your sentences but in their length and complexity, not what you list but that you list, not the picture but the choice of Þlter and degree of saturation, not what you disclose but how you share or fail to, not where you make plans to see your

using the word "diversity" and we will discuss the actual presence of diversity on this campus.

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De'Shawn Ford: On Diversity

Diversity. Merriam-Webster (2022) defines Diversity as "having or being composed of differing elements." When one thinks of the word, they are inevitably drawn to a key component of its definition: Difference. When one uses diversity in reference to other people, the differences they are referring to can be any number of things, ranging from skin color to sexual orientation. In

important component of its definition. It begins to corrupt the true nature of the word. This corruption of the word presents a number of issues. Most notably, it creates barriers instead of bridges and prevents the very appreciation that is essential for growth.

Diversity then becomes a "them or us" concept, rather than a "we" concept. It becomes a point of contention, as opposed to a point of conversation and conflict resolution among different groups of people. When someone says that they "don't support Black Lives Matter Organization" (important to note that the organization is separate from the movement here), it is common that someone might assume they must be against diversity, when in fact this could not be the case. It may simply be that an individual does not support a portion of the re),

Isaiah: In your introduction you write that differences "can serve as the foundation for learning, as long as one is willing to accept another perspective." To what extent must we accept other perspectives to have productive differences in a diverse society? Can I disagree with someone else's perspective, even disagree with things foundational to their identity, and still respect them?

De'Shawn: I think that if we want to have productive differences, we must be willing to fully accept another perspective. I'll explain this in a little more detail because I see where this may be confusing. I believe that we are able to accept perspectives freely, in the same way in which we can accept opinions, without agreeing with or internalizing those opinions. One can accept the way that another is interpreting something (perspective) without agreeing with their perception.

Now, as it relates to things foundational to another's identity, I think that the same train of thought applies, though this naturally takes on a more personal tone. I also think it is important that we not make snap judgements when it comes to perspectives, or even opinions. It is important to ask careful questions and take the time to understand others, because there are so many things that contribute to the way that we interpret the world around us (e.g. race, gender, economic status, sexuality). To respect another person is to give "due regard for their feelings, wishes, rights or traditions," and I fully believe that it can be possible to respect others, even when disagreeing with their perception of the world.

I'll use sexuality as an example. I think that it is certainly possible to respect different perspectives of sexuality, even as a Christian. I say this because our sexuality is not ruled solely by choice, but by a number of different components and contributing factors (e.g. genetics,

school. There is no questionnaire or labeling on applications that explicitly states, "if you have committed these sins or believe in this, we will not accept your money or application." If an institution is willing to accept tuition from an individual of a diverse background, I believe they not only can, but must support those students and at the very least, attempt to understand and respect their perspective. It ties back to what I said about respecting differences, it requires accepting and acknowledging challenges to the way one views the world. Providing resources and platforms for those under one's care or institution is not, and should not be seen as, the same as outright endorsement. I believe that this absolutely works both ways and requires the same approach on both sides of the argument.

Isaiah Mudge: On Diversity

Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also. This is an African proverb, one learned by my parents during their ten years of missionary service in West Africa. What it means is this: withhold judgement. Wait, listen, and see, until you think you genuinely understand both sides. Your first goal is not to determine what you think is true, it is to learn what you may not already know. The wisdom of this saying is important for

The Merriam-Webster definition of diversity is, "the condition of having or being composed of differing elements," (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Primarily this word is used regarding cultural and racial differences, and the presence of diversity brings the unique gifts mentioned above. Differences between people are normal and healthy. They help to teach people to communicate with one another, and the differences in belief and opinion cause a mutual sharpening of thought between people so long as they are speaking with and learning from each other. Diversity of thought, belief, opinion, race, creed, and culture forces a nation to endure conflict, to reconcile, and to grow. On a personal level, embracing diversity is important in protecting the various members of people groups, especially races, which have been treated as inferior and harmed. Use of the word "diversity," itself is important for a nation to remind itself of the value in its differences and to stay keyed-in to different perspectives and outlooks on life. Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.

I have never spoken with a person who disagreed with the points stated above regarding the goodness and importance of a diverse and respectful nation. Yet, there has been an outcry recently with the use of the word "diversity," at Concordia. The reason for this is that there are two primary ways in which "diversity" can be used. The first is the one named above, wherein diversity represents people of broad backgrounds all respected and listened to. I believe everyone I have ever met at CUW supports this. The second is identical to the first, but it is used as a means for political control.

Let me explain. Some groups, especially civil-rights organizations, use diversity as a means to push policy. Due to its prominence, Black Lives Matter will be the example used in this paper. BLM is certainly a powerful civil-rights organization which has done good for black communities and minorities in the U.S., promoting diversity of all kinds. Yet, one of BLM's central demands is to defund policing within the U.S. (BLM, 2022). One may believe that policing will encourage safer communities, which will assist with trust and cultural mixing, and therefore disagree not with BLM's goal, but with its methods. The proposed "second" use of diversity occurs when one person says "I do not support BLM," and the response is "you must hate diversity." Two people may have the same goal and disagree on methods. When the word "diversity" is used to prevent a complex view of our fellow humans, or to force one to conform entirely to the ideas of another, it is being abused. The Africans have it right in this instance. When our knee-jerk reaction as a culture is to accuse on impulse, perhaps we should slow down. Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.

When this second use of "diversity" occurs, it becomes difficult for people to hold nuanced views. It creates an "all or nothing" approach to thought; either you are entirely on the side of an organization, or you are entirely opposed to it. The complex situation which this creates for Christians is when some tenants of an organization oppose Christian beliefs. Let this be made clear: love and respect for all people, bar none, is biblically mandated (John 15:12, Gal. 3:28, 1 John 3:16). This is a powerful biblical defense for the first type of diversity which was named above, although many Christians throughout history have failed to uphold it. It is also true that Christ himself commanded Christians to defend and protect all biblical teachings (Matt. 28:19-20, Rom. 16:17-18, 1 Pet. 3:15). In essence, Christians must have nuanced views in this area. The Bible is not opposed to diverse groups of people, but sometimes it is against the beliefs held by them. To use BLM as an example again, the organization stated in 2020 that one of its core principles was to disrupt the nuclear family (Bernstein, 2020). This language was removed after backlash, but it alone would provide ample reason for a Christian to be non-supportive of the organization, since the nuclear family is instituted and commanded by God (Gen. 2:24).

As members of a Christian university, then, it is important for everyone to stay attuned to the complex relationship between the first and second use of "diversity." The first is love and respect for all kinds of people. The second is expected agreement with political movements

CUW does provide?

Isaiah: I think there are basic resources that must be provided for all students. These include food, housing, and safety. Assistance through the food pantry, the counseling office, or the comfort dog program would apply here as well. The various campus ministries also exist to support all students spiritually regardless of their allegiance to the LCMS. These are all resources which CUW has an obligation to provide to students who do not hold LCMS views, although it provides them to students who do hold LCMS views as well.

I think that CUW also has a responsibility to provide resources that push its students to learn and grow. For students who may not hold LCMS views this means ensuring that classes are teaching LCMS beliefs well so that students can learn and be challenged. This also means ensuring such students have the opportunity to voice disagreements and to have their own opinions without any fear of recrimination. This will force LCMS students to engage with different ideas as well, so that all students are mutually pushing each other, as is the goal of diversity.

Where CUW does need to limit resources is where the resources begin to actively support beliefs which Christianity/the LCMS deems to be wrong. I think CUW should provide resources for pregnant students on campus, for instance, but it must not provide resources directing students to abortion centers since that supports an act which the LCMS holds to be wrong (LCMS, 2022). As another example, CUW should allow students to meet and discuss in groups such as philosophy club, but it could prevent the club from using CUW funds to host an event which is raising

Isaiah: Love and respect for others comes down to recognition of God's love for all people. The heart of how we ought to treat others then comes down to following Christ as he acts in the Bible. He loved people. He valued them, encouraged them. He never mocked them or tried to hurt them. He listened to them and had conversations with them. However, He also corrected them and He resisted them when they believed things that were wrong.

This shows us that love and respect for all people is more complex than it may seem. In practice it involves upholding others in their physical, mental, and spiritual health. It means genuinely wanting what is best for those around us, no matter who they are. As Christ showed us, it also means lovingly and firmly pushing back when others follow an ungodly path. Christians must have this resistance in order to love rightly, because if you believe someone is harming his relationship with God, others, or himself and you simply stand by then you do not love that person at all.

As an example, the greatest place where the church has screwed this up has been with the LGBTQ+ community, and I will use homosexuality as the primary example. Through their fixation on a specific sin, many Christians have propagated the belief that homosexuality is a greater evil than the sexual temptation that nearly all people endure. These people have failed to remember that love must accompany firmness of belief. Christ would have resisted the LGBTQ+ community as well, but he would never have made them believe they are unloved on account of the struggles they endure. Emulating Christ is the Christian call.

As a Christian university, the administration and faculty of CUW must support this Christian call. They would be violating their offices if they did not. This means that CUW must ensure that all of its students, especially those who have endured the kind of mistreatment that many minority communities have, are loved the way Christ would love them. There must be support for physical, mental, and spiritual health with no discrimination. CUW must also uphold the Bible as true, and CUW must side with Biblical teachings where they conflict with the culture. To best support minority demographics at CUW, our administration must heed this call. It will ensure that the administration gives every support and help to such students that it can without going against its responsibility to uphold what is true.

To do better at this, I think the administration primarily needs to ensure that students and faculty have venues to communicate openly on these issues without any fear. Dialogue will allow the leaders at CUW to know what they need to improve on regarding all students. Finally, students need to have the charitability and carefulness to discuss these issues with each other. The administration of our university can make a space for these conversations but nothing will happen without our support. It would take effort but I believe it is possible to create a closer and more loving community if all sides are willing to try.

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