DEAR CHOATE,

WELL, FOLKS, IT’S WINTER. THE WALLINGFORD SKY IS AS COLD AND GRAY AS EVER, THE GRASS IS PULPY AND MATTED, THE ASSIGNMENTS ARE PILING UP (OF COURSE THEY ARE), AND THE NORTH FACE PUFFERS ARE BEING DONNED. PERHAPS YOU ARE READING THIS FROM THE DINING HALL, AFTER WE’VE FLUNG A COPY IN YOUR FACE SCREAMING “NEW INQUIRY!”; PERHAPS, YOU ARE IN THE LIBRARY PROCRUSTINATING YOUR CALC AB PROBLEM SET; PERHAPS YOU ARE SITTING IN FRONT OF THE CHOATE STORE, ORANGINA AND SOUR-SGHETTI IN HAND, HAVING JUST FINISHED YOUR LAST EXAM. IF IT IS THE LATTER, GOOD FOR YOU, BUT NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE, WE HOPE YOU’LL TAKE A MOMENT TO READ WHAT WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER WITH AN OPEN MIND AND SKEPTICAL ATTITUDE. WE’VE PUT TOGETHER THIS ISSUE TO HIGHLIGHT WELL-STRUCTURED, CRITICAL, PERSUASIVE, AND ENGAGING DEBATE AS A SHOWCASE OF THE MECHANISMS WE HAVE TO PRESERVE OUR ROLE AS STAKEHOLDER IN OUR SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

THE WINTER TERM WAS AN UNSUCCESSFUL ONE FOR CIVIC DISCOURSE AT CHOATE. WE BEGAN THE TERM WITH A BROADLY ANTICLIMACTIC DIVERSITY DAY PUNCTUATED BY KEYNOTE LECTURES THAT AT MANY MOMENTS FELT CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT OF IDEAS. THIS DAY WAS OVERWHELMINGLY CENTERED AROUND CONGRATULATION RATHER THAN COMMUNICATION. WHERE ANGELA DAVIS LAID HER PROVOCATIVE IDEAS OUT ON THE TABLE FOR ALL TO DISCUSS, DR. ILYASAH SHABAZZ AND NDABA MANDELA CREDITED US FOR HAVING THE EVENT AT ALL. WE WERE COMMENDED FOR “GETTING THERE” (“THERE” BEING THE POINT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ENLIGHTENMENT), AND WHEN ASKED HOW SHE WOULD TRANSITION HER FATHER’S VISION OF AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY INTO THE PRESENT DAY, AN OPPORTUNITY TO PERHAPS CONFRONT HER FATHERS ARDENTLY ANTI-SEMITIC ANALYSIS OF POWER, DR. SHABAZZ ONLY INVITED US TO PAT OURSELVES ON THE BACK ONCE AGAIN, THEREBY EVADING ANY DISCOURSE ON THE DEFINED BRAND OF ANTISEMITISM NOW ADOPTED BY FIGURES LIKE KANYE WEST. IT IS EXCLUSIVELY AFFIRMING RHETORIC LIKE THE KIND WE RECEIVED ON DIVERSITY DAY THAT STAGNATES ANY PROGRESS INTO A MORE PLURALISTIC WORLD. IN FACT, THIS TERM, WE HAVE OVERWHELMINGLY FAILED TO SPARK THE CONVERSATIONS THAT NEED TO BE HAD, AND IT SEEMS THAT THE EXCHANGE OF DIALOGUE AT CHOATE IN GENERAL HAS SLOWED AS A RESULT.

WE DO NOT MEAN TO WRITE TO YOU WITH AN AIR OF DEFEAT, NOR DO WE MEAN TO OFFER THIS PUBLICATION AS A LAST BEACON OF HOPE TO SAVE OUR COMMUNITY. OUR WRITERS ARE NOT THE VANGUARD OF DISCOURSE ON CAMPUS, BUT THAT IS TO A GREAT EXTENT, THE POINT. THE ESSAYS WE PUBLISH ARE DESIGNED WITH THE INTENTION OF RESPONSE, WITHOUT WHICH, DISCOURSE HAS NO ROOM TO THRIVE. TAKE WHAT YOU LIKE FROM EACH ARGUMENT, REFUTE WHAT YOU DON’T.

OUR PUBLICATION DOES NOT TOLERATE HATE SPEECH OR BIGOTRY IN ANY FORM, HOWEVER, TO LOOSELY QUOTE OSCAR WILDE: “A GENTLEMAN (OR PUBLICATION) IS ONE WHO NEVER GIVES OFFENSE UNINTENTIONALLY.” WE HOPE YOU DISAGREE VEHEMENTLY.

OONA YAFFE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
ELIA AHMADI, MANAGING EDITOR
IS ORGANIZED RELIGION A FORCE FOR GOOD?

IN SUPPORT: HARPER MARSDEN-UREN

Organized religion has divided discussions throughout the past decade, and these discussions have confused what it means to be ‘religious’ and what it means to be ‘extremist’. In this article, the intention is to take a step back and recognize that the intent of organized religions is not to tear a society apart, but to bring it closer together. The power of religion is its influence. Organized religion has, historically, been the biggest drive for quantifiable change in a nation’s political system, and has often been a call to action in bringing about justice and order in a society. Organized religion has the capacity to create a more moral and structured society, foster a greater sense of community, and has been the greatest impetus behind the most significant pieces of art, literature, and media throughout history.

The majority of organized religions have the inherent value of enforcing moral good on society. In my opponent’s utopian society, in which the general public all follow a strict moral code, the importance of religion would be mitigated; however, by having ancient texts that inform core values of kindness and compassion, there are guiding principles of what a society should look like. My opponent neglects to understand that much of the fundamental principles we deem right or wrong stems from the teachings of Abrahamic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By having ancient scriptures that are, essentially, parables of what to do and what not to do, it incentivizes adhering to morality; it’s much harder to force someone to do the right thing when the chance of getting into ‘heaven’ is off the table. This

Intrinsically makes society more moral and creates the basis for what we believe to be ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Although some rules within these ancient religions are archaic nowadays, the major ideologies stay true: “Love thy neighbor as thyself”, “Love peace and pursue peace”.

The majority of Americans in 2019, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, believe that churches do more good than harm in our society. Organized religion has the objective of creating a structure for what is right and wrong, what dictates good and evil, and thus has the power to enforce this in the status quo. More so, religion has the impact of encouraging its followers to do even more for their society; consider church bake sales, flea markets that benefit charities. These substantial acts of good samaritanism are encouraged in many organized religions, as a method of giving back to those less fortunate than themselves. Similarly, Islam enforces a rule in which Muslims must donate 2.5% of their yearly wealth to charity in a process called zakat. The opposition fails to understand that organized religion is still a necessary pillar of our society to uphold many of the values we have built our foundation on. Furthermore, another tangible example of the moral good of religious institutions is their obligation to provide sanctuary; often, homeless people go to churches or other places of worship to receive shelter, food, clothes, and other necessary provisions. The impact that organized religion has is its capability to incentivize morality, but also the achievement of greater, quantifiable positive change in a society.

Furthermore, religious communities, such as that of regular church, mosque or synagogue participants have a greater sense of belonging and relation with one another than that of non-religious communities.
WHAT RELIGION OFTEN PROVIDES PEOPLE IS A SAFE HAVEN, A PLACE IN WHICH PEOPLE FEEL A KINSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER THROUGH THEIR SHARED EXPERIENCES.

THIS NOT ONLY PROVIDES AN OUTLET FOR MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH TO SHARE THEIR STRUGGLES WITH A COMMUNITY BUT ALSO, MOST NOTABLY IN CHURCHES, DONATIONS ARE MADE TO PEOPLE IN THEIR PARISH GOING THROUGH FINANCIAL STRUGGLE. IF A MEMBER OF A PARISH, OR OTHER ORGANIZED RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, VOICES THEIR ADVERSITY, THERE ARE COLLECTIVE FUNDS PUT TOGETHER, WITH NO OBJECTIVE OF BEING REMONETIZED. THIS ACT OF SOLIDARITY FROM A COMMUNITY IS LESS COMMON IN NON-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, AND IS THUS VASTLY MORE DIFFICULT TO COME BY. BY REINFORCING AND REINIGORATING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH OPEN DIALOGUE AND VOICING OF THEIR STRUGGLES, IT CAN HELP MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY FEEL A GREATER SENSE OF CONNECTION WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND IMPROVE UPON MENTAL HEALTH. FURTHERMORE, RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES PROVIDING FINANCIAL AID TO MEMBERS OF THEIR CONGREGATION IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THE STRONG COMMUNITY RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS PROVIDE, AND THE SAME SCALE OF THAT SIMPLY HASN’T BEEN PROVIDED IN THE STATUS QUO BY NON-RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS.


THE MAJOR CRUX OF THIS DEBATE HAS BEEN THIS QUESTION; DOES RELIGION STILL HOLD VALUE IN REINFORCING MORAL GOOD? THE OPPOSITION ARGUES THAT RELIGION HAS DONE GOOD IN THE PAST, BUT IS NO LONGER NECESSARY IN THE PRESENT. THIS IS A MAJOR FOIBLE; NOT ONLY HAVE I OUTLINED HOW RELIGION STILL MASSIVELY HAS THE POWER TO GROUND A SOCIETY, BUT THIS ALSO CONCEDES THAT RELIGION HAS BEEN A MAJOR FORCE FOR GOOD FOR CENTURIES. THE OPPOSITION SIMPLY CANNOT PROVIDE THE BOUNDLESS POSITIVE IMPACTS ON OUR SOCIETY, IN WHICH ORGANIZED RELIGION HAS, HISTORICALLY, BROUGHT ABOUT A STRUCTURED SOCIETY BY ENFORCING MORAL GOOD, AND REINFORCING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND SECURITY WITHIN A CONGREGATION.
IS ORGANIZED RELIGION A FORCE FOR GOOD?

IN OPPOSITION: DYLAN CLACK

BEFORE I BEGIN MY CRITICISM OF ORGANIZED RELIGION, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE MISSING ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM. BY THIS, I MEAN I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLAIN MY CHOICE TO IGNORE THE WARS, GENOCIDE, AND HATRED THAT HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED BY ORGANIZED RELIGION. NO, I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THEM. I SIMPLY BELIEVE THAT ORGANIZED RELIGION IS NOT REALLY IN THE BUSINESS OF GENERATING NEW IDEAS, HATEFUL OR NOT. ALTHOUGH THE WORDS OF PROPHETS AND SAINTS WERE UNDOUBTEDLY INSPIRATIONAL, I BELIEVE THAT THE GENERAL IDEAS OF RELIGION, IDEAS THAT ULTIMATELY JUSTIFIED THE AFOREMENTIONED ATROCITIES, ARE MORE OF A REFLECTION OF THE VALUES OF A SOCIETY AT THE TIME OF THE RELIGION’S CREATION. SURE, THE PEOPLE WRITING THE SCRIPTURES WERE MORE VERBose AND INSIGHTFUL THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION, BUT I DON’T THINK THAT THE IDEAS THAT THOSE PEOPLE WROTE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ORGANIZED RELIGION ITSELF. YES, CHRISTIANITY CONTAINS SOME HOMOPHOBIA, BUT I THINK THAT PEOPLE AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDING OF CHRISTIANITY WERE PROBABLY PRETTY HOMOPHobic, WHICH IS WHY IT GOT TRANSCRIBED INTO RELIGION, NOT BECAUSE RELIGION ITSELF GENERATED THIS IDEA. I HAVE DECIDED TO FOCUS ON HOW RELIGION HAS AFFECTED THESE IDEAS (THAT WOULD HAVE EXISTED REGARDLESS OF RELIGION) ONCE THEY WERE ACCEPTED BY RELIGION. HOW DID THE STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZED RELIGION MIRROR THE WAY THAT THESE IDEAS MANIFEST THEMSELVES IN SOCIETY? THE MOST EVIDENT ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS THAT IT LEGITIMIZES THE VALUES IT IS PRESENTED WITH BY CLAIMING THAT THEY ARE ENFORCED AND SUPPORTED BY A HIGHER POWER. THIS DIVINE LEGITIMACY, THOUGH, CAN LEAD TO TROUBLE. THIS ESSAY WILL EXPLORE THE ISSUES WITH DIVINE LEGITIMACY BY BREAKING THEM DOWN INTO THREE MAIN CATEGORIES: THE DANGERS WITH LEGITIMIZING INDIVIDUALS, IDEAS, AND ANSWERS.

LET’S START WITH LEGITIMIZING INDIVIDUALS. WHEREAS TYPICAL ORGANIZATIONS CHOOSE THEIR LEADERS THROUGH MERITOCRACY, DEMOCRACY, OR EVEN THROUGH VIOLENCE, RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS TYPICALLY VIEW THEIR LEADERS AS APPOINTED BY GOD THEMSELVES, TO SOME DEGREE. SINCE GOD’S REASONING CANNOT BE QUESTIONED, THIS LEADS TO UNCHECKED POWER THAT INEVITABLY BECOMES CORRUPTED BY THE HUMAN THAT HOLDS THIS POWER. ALTHOUGH EGREGIOUS EXAMPLES OF THIS EXIST THROUGHOUT ALL OF HISTORY, CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES MAY SERVE TO REMIND PEOPLE THAT THIS ISSUE IS STILL EXTREMELY PREVALENT. TAKE PETER POPOFF FOR EXAMPLE. HE IS A TELEVANGELIST AND SELF-PROCLAIMED CLAIRVOYANT. ALONG WITH CLAIMING THE POWER TO CURE CHRONIC DISEASES, HE ENCOURAGED HIS VIEWERS TO “BREAK FREE FROM THE DEVIL” BY RIDDING THEMSELVES OF THEIR PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS. POPOFF USED A HIDDEN EARPIECE TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT HIS AUDIENCE MEMBERS THAT HE WOULD THEN PROCLAIM OUT LOUD, CITING HIS “SUPERNATURAL KNOWLEDGE” AS EVIDENCE FOR HIS SUPPOSED PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH GOD. EVEN AFTER HIS FRAUD WAS WIDELY PUBLICIZED, HIS TELEVISION SHOW IS STILL RUNNING IN 2023, ALLOWING HIM TO AMASS AN ESTIMATED NET WORTH OF 10 MILLION DOLLARS. OF COURSE, ANY REASONABLE PERSON WOULD STOP BELIEVING HIM, BUT BECAUSE OF THE WAY RELIGION IS ORGANIZED, MANY BELIEVE THAT THAT WOULD BE TO STOP BELIEVING IN GOD HIMSELF.

THIS ISSUE BECOMES EXACERBATED TENFOLD WHEN BELIEVERS DON’T HAVE ACCESS TO A SERVICE LIKE THE INTERNET THAT MIGHT PROVIDE CONTRADICTION INFORMATION TO THEIR BELIEFS. IN 1515, POPE LEO DECREED THAT MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH WOULD EXCUSE THE SINS OF THE DONOR EVEN THOUGH THE CLAIM HAD NO BIBLICAL SUPPORT, ENRICHING HIMSELF OFF THE FACT THAT HIS CHURCH HAD EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE. RELIGION IS USED TO LEGITIMIZE THE AUTHORITY OF PEOPLE LIKE POPE LEO AND PETER POPOFF, AND AS LONG AS THE
ONLY THING HOLDING THEM ACCOUNTABLE IS A GOD THAT, FOR SOME REASON, PUT THEM THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE, THAT LEGITIMACY IS HARMFUL TO SOCIETY.

THE SECOND DANGER IN THE DIVINE LEGITIMACY OF ORGANIZED RELIGION IS IN THE WAY THAT IT PRESERVES IDEAS LONG BEYOND THEIR SOCIETAL EXPIRATION DATE. BY DEFINITION, ORGANIZED RELIGION OFFICIALLY CODIFIES VALUES IN THINGS LIKE RELIGIOUS TEXTS, RITUALS, AND HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURES. WHEN THESE VALUES ARE CODIFIED, THEY BECOME SIGNIFICANTLY LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHANGE, EVEN IF THAT CHANGE IS POSITIVE. ALTHOUGH I DO NOT BLAME RELIGION FOR CREATING THESE IDEAS, THE STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZED RELIGION INEVITABLY KEEPS THEM AROUND LONGER THAN THEY SHOULD BE. A PARTICULARLY STRIKING EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN JUSTIFICATION OF AMERICAN SLAVERY. WHEN THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN, SLAVERY WAS WIDESPREAD, AS SEEN IN EPHESIANS 6:5, WHICH COMPELLED THOSE IN SERVITUDE TO “BE OBEDIENT TO THEM THAT ARE YOUR MASTERS ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, IN SINGleness OF YOUR HEART, AS UNTO CHRIST.” OF COURSE, OVER THE CENTURIES LEADING UP TO AMERICAN SLAVERY, ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS LIKE LOCKE AND EVEN THE FOUNDING FATHERS ADVANCED SOCIETY TOWARDS A MORE LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONAL AGENCY. HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE VALUES OF THE BIBLE’S ERA WERE ORGANIZED INTO AN OFFICIAL RELIGION AND SET OF BELIEFS THAT ENDURED UNTIL THE TIME OF SLAVERY IN THE U.S., SLAVEHOLDERS IN MODERN AMERICA COULD USE THE BIBLE TO JUSTIFY THEIR ACTIONS. ALTHOUGH AMERICA WAS FAR FROM COMPLETELY BEYOND SLAVERY IN THAT ERA, THE BIBLE AND THEREFORE ORGANIZED RELIGION ACTED AS A FORCE AGAINST POSITIVE REFORM, SLOWING AMERICAN SOCIETY’S PROGRESS AWAY FROM SLAVERY. LIKewise, THE CASTE SYSTEM EMERGED OVER 3,000 YEARS AGO WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HINDU BELief SYSTEM, AND IT IS STILL PREVALENT IN INDIAN SOCIETY TODAY. WHILE THE VALUES THAT MAKE UP AN ORGANIZED RELIGION WERE ORIGINALLY MADE FROM THE SOCIETY THAT THE RELIGION COMES FROM, ORGANIZED RELIGION KEEPS THOSE VALUES AROUND FOR LONGER THAN THEY SHOULD BE, LIMITING A SOCIETY’S ABILITY TO MOVE FORWARD.

EVEN WITH ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS, ORGANIZED RELIGION DOES HAVE SOME GOOD DEEDS TO POINT TO. IT PROVIDES DIVINE JUSTIFICATION FOR MORALITY IT ENCOURAGES IN ITS TEXTS THROUGH DIVINE DEGREE OR A PROMISE OF REWARDS IN THE AFTERLIFE. HOWEVER, HIDDEN IN THESE GOOD DEEDS IS THE THIRD AND FINAL NEGATIVE EFFECT OF ORGANIZED RELIGION, THE LEGITIMACY IT GIVES TO THE ANSWERS IT PROVIDES FOR HARD QUESTIONS. OF COURSE THE QUESTION OF WHY ANYONE SHOULD ACT WITH ANYONE BUT THEMSELVES IN MIND IS A DIFFICULT ONE TO ANSWER, AND I COMMEND ORGANIZED RELIGION FOR FINDING AN ANSWER TO IT THAT HAS LASTED THIS LONG. HOWEVER, THESE JUSTIFICATIONS ARE QUICKLY LOSING TRACTION. SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES MAKE RELIGIOUS CLAIMS MORE AND MORE IMPLAUSIBLE, LEAVING SOCIETY WITH A VACUUM OF JUSTIFICATION FOR MORALITY THAT WAS ONCE FILLED BY ORGANIZED RELIGION. THE GRADUAL DECLINE OF ORGANIZED RELIGION REVEALS THAT THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WERE NOT TRULY SUFFICIENT ANSWERS. MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO BE GOOD IN ONE LIFE JUST SO THEY CAN BE REWARDED IN ANOTHER IS NOT TRUE MORALITY. RELIGION DOESN’T ACTUALLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION, IT SIMPLY FINDS A WORKAROUND TO MANUFACTURE MORALITY IN THIS LIFETIME. AND OF COURSE IT DIDN’T FIND THE ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS. THESE ARE EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS. BY DEFINITION, THEY CANNOT BE ANSWERED IN A UNIVERSAL TEXT THAT ONE IS MEANT TO JUST ACCEPT. IN ORDER TO TRULY BEGIN TO FACE THE EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS SURROUNDING MORALITY, EXISTENCE, AND PURPOSE, AND GROW SPIRITUALLY AS A SPECIES, WE MUST REJECT THE SIMPLE WORKAROUNDS THAT RELIGION PROVIDES US WITH. ONLY BY BUILDING A CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALLY WRESTLING WITH THESE QUESTIONS AND EACH FINDING OUR OWN ANSWERS TO THEM WILL OUR SOCIETY BE ABLE TO BUILD A SENSE OF MORALITY THAT IS IMPERMEABLE TO SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES. ONLY BY REJECTING THE SIMPLE ANSWERS TO EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS THAT RELIGION GIVES US WILL WE BEGIN THE LONG, AND POSSIBLY NEVER ENDING TASK OF TRULY ANSWERING THEM.
SHOULD CRIMINAL JUSTICE BE A FORCE FOR RETRIBUTION OVER DETERRENCE?

IN SUPPORT: MICHAEL KORVYAKOV

IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO: YOUR FAMILY IS MURDERED. YOU’RE DEVASTATED – THIS HORRIBLE HUMAN BEING HAS TAKEN FROM YOU WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT IN THIS WORLD. LUCKILY, THE MURDERER IS CAUGHT, CHARGED, AND FOUND TO BE GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW. YOU ATTEND THE SENTENCING IN THE HOPE OF SEEING THIS CRIMINAL SERVE THE REST OF HIS LIFE BEHIND BARS.

BUT NO! THE COURT HAS HAD A MASSIVE TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGH! THERE’S A DEVICE THAT CAN ENSURE THAT THIS CRIMINAL NEVER HAS THE PROPENSITY TO COMMIT MURDER AGAIN. HE’LL CONTINUE LIVING HIS LIFE BUT WILL NEVER BREAK THE LAW IN THE FUTURE. SO, THE COURT FIGURES, WHAT GOOD IS LOCKING THIS MAN UP? THEY RELEASE HIM INTO THE WORLD TO LIVE AMONG LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS. YOU ARE JUSTIFIABLY OUTRAGED.

THIS IS THE WORLD OPERATING UNDER A UTILITARIAN THEORY OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE. IT SEEMS LIKE A GOOD IDEA: THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM OUGHT TO FOCUS ON PREVENTING FUTURE CRIME RATHER THAN GIVING OFFENDERS WHAT THEY “DESERVE.” HOWEVER, THIS PERSPECTIVE IGNORES THREE CONCEPTS THAT ARE CRITICAL TO THE FUNCTION OF THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND MORALITY:

1. THERE ARE OBJECTIVE MORAL WRONGS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PUNISH.
2. TRUST IN GOVERNMENT IS BETTER ESTABLISHED IN A RETRIBUTIVE SYSTEM AS OPPOSED TO A CONSEQUENTIALIST SYSTEM.
3. THE RETRIBUTIVE SYSTEM UNDERGIRDs EVERY RIGHT GRANTED TO AMERICAN CITIZENS

OPPONENTS OF RETRIBUTIVISM ASSERT THAT SUCH A SYSTEM ALLOWS THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPOSE MORAL AXIOMS, CLAIMING THAT THIS IS A DANGEROUS STEP TOWARD TYRANNY. HOWEVER, THIS FEAR-MONGERING IGNORES THAT EVERY GOVERNMENT ACTION IN HUMAN HISTORY HAS IMPOSED SOME MORAL AXIOM. WHY DO WE HAVE TAXES? BECAUSE THERE’S A SOCIETAL (AND THEREFORE, A MORAL) BENEFIT TO CREATING PUBLIC GOODS. WHY DO WE PUNISH MURDER? BECAUSE MURDER IS A MORAL WRONG.


SECOND, AS WITH EVERY LAW OR PRINCIPLE THE GOVERNMENT STANDS BEHIND, WE MUST CONSIDER HOW IT WILL IMPACT THE CITIZENRY’S VIEW OF GOVERNMENT. MY OPPONENT
Postulates that a retributive system puts worry in the minds of Americans — it encourages a brutal system of punishment that is sure to make us distrust our government. However, we don’t have to speculate about the “cruelty” of a retributive system — it’s our current system in the United States. While we can acknowledge the faults of our current system, it’s a far cry from the overreaching tyrannical government that we’re told is the result of a retributive system.

In reality, a retributive system better communicates a consistent message to those subjected to it. It objectively punishes criminals for their crimes based on a set of maximum and minimum prison sentences, most often with little regard to specific circumstances. A consequentialist system would mandate criminals be subjectively judged case-by-case — if the goal is simply to better society, it’s justifiable to lock up some criminals but not others. On the other hand, with a retributive system, it’s exceedingly clear what the law is and the punishment for violating it. So, which of these systems really produces more trust in the government? It must be the one that has an objective set of rules.

The utilitarian theory of justice also threatens many of the rights we hold dear in our nation. The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits “cruel and unusual punishment.” Regardless of the brutality of the crime, every American citizen has the right to not be excessively or strangely punished. A utilitarian perspective throws this principle out the window. Certainly, if the government was to torture criminals brutally, potential perpetrators would think twice before violating the law. If we don’t adhere to any universal moral principles, why not give excessive punishments when it might help deter more criminals?

The same can be said for the right to a fair trial. If we abolished the right to due process, citizens would be wary of being falsely accused of crimes. This would likely result in people avoiding dangerous situations and being more cautious about associating themselves with untrustworthy people — a net benefit to society. But even though we acknowledge the benefits of eliminating due process, the U.S. government rightfully considers it an inalienable right.

If the only principle we value in our criminal justice system is the number of utils it produces, the government can justify all kinds of moral wrongs for the sake of a “better outcome.” However, if you agree that there exist moral principles that supersede the simple pluses and minuses that it produces, you can join the retributivists in protecting the ethical principles that are critical to our free society.
**Should Criminal Justice Be a Force for Retribution Over Deterrence?**

**In Opposition: Oona Yaffe**

My opponent has chosen a very flashy analogy for his opening statement, so in return I will offer one of my own. Your family is murdered! You’re devastated! Oh, the humanity! The murderer is caught, tried, found guilty, and punished exactly in the way he deserves to be. You want him tortured? He’s tortured. You want him imprisoned? He’s imprisoned. But there’s a catch. In exchange for the punishment of your choice, he gets to murder five more people’s families. Bonus points if you meet every single one of them before the murders. In what world is that a justifiable method?

We are constantly caught up in the ongoing question “What does our government owe us?” Deontologists might say we are owed the enforcement of a collection of moral paradigms by which our society should operate. Consequentialists might say we are owed a society which maximizes the quality of life for the most people. Either perspective can be used to justify anything from the welfare state to policing to infrastructure, but key differences in ideology emerge when we are faced with the question of how to punish our wrongs. Where a deontologist might say it is the government’s job to “do the right thing” (demonstrate a standard to hold our citizens), a consequentialist would claim that the importance of punishment lies in its capability to reduce crime. I am taking the consequentialist perspective in this article, asserting that the purpose of criminal justice is to prevent crime, not to smite the members of our constituency that don’t obey our laws. Despite the benefits of validating victims, it is not the government’s responsibility to offer a retributive criminal justice system, which fails to prevent crime, and empowers the state in a way that is not sustainable in a democracy.

It is undeniable that a state is stronger when its constituents feel protected. Of course, a quick way to achieve that feeling of protection is to give citizens the impression that if they are wronged, their government will enact swift and brutal revenge. That being said, for every criminal who is brought to their knees at the altar of Themis, there is a community around them who is bound to closely witness needless cruelty at the hands of power. As distrust in government spreads, as distrust is wont to do, there becomes an increasingly rarified group of “good ones” in the eyes of the criminal justice system, and an increasingly mainstream group of those who have been wronged. Retributive justice does not breed security, it breeds resentment.

This “revenge as law” is also an ineffective deterrent for crime. My opponent also raises the issue of subjectivity in the way criminals are tried. He claims mandatory minimums and maximums produce clarity and equity. In fact, mandatory minimums are inevitably higher than is sustainable, and mandatory maximums are so high that they fail to exist as a maximum at all. This leaves punishment just as inequitable as it would
BE IN AN OUTCOME-DRIVEN SYSTEM, WITHOUT THE BENEFITS OF THE, WELL, OUTCOME. THERE IS A TIME IN LIFE, AROUND THE LATE TWENTIES TO LATE THIRTIES WHEN STATISTICALLY SPEAKING, PEOPLE STOP COMMITTING CRIMES, NON-VIOLENT AND VIOLENT, RESPECTIVELY.

CRIMINAL CAREERS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY SHORT, BUT THEIR SENTENCING CAN EXTEND THROUGH FIFTY YEARS TO LIFE. IN PRISON, CRIME IS STILL ALIVE AND WELL, IT JUST ISN’T RECORDED OR PREVENTED IN NEARLY THE CAPACITY IT IS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD, AND FOR OFFENDERS RELEASED BEFORE THE AGE OF 40, EVEN THOSE WITH SENTENCES OF OVER 20 YEARS, THERE IS A 60% RATE OF RECIDIVISM. SIMPLY PUT, RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, WHICH MY OPPONENT NOTES IS WHAT WE HAVE NOW, IS NOT WORKING TO KEEP CRIME DOWN. INSTEAD, WE CAN SEE THAT IT CREATES VICIOUS CYCLES OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE MASSIVE HOLES WHERE THEIR MEMBERS ARE IN PRISON, WHICH IN TURN PRODUCE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKELY TO BE ARRESTED. SENTENCING THAT OUTLASTS AN OFFENDER’S ABILITY AND INTEREST IN COMMITTING CRIMES FAILS TO REDUCE CRIME AT ALL, AND INSTEAD SPENDS COUNTLESS MAN HOURS AND DOLLARS ON WHAT BOILS DOWN TO SENDING A MESSAGE AND ABUSING A CONVICTED INDIVIDUAL OUT OF EVER BEING A PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITY MEMBER. HALF OF ALL PEOPLE IN PRISON HAVE A CHILD. WITH SENTENCES THAT STRETCH ACROSS MANY LIFETIMES, THESE CHILDREN ARE Brought UP WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR GOVERNMENT IS KEEPING A CARETAKER OUT OF THEIR LIFE. WHETHER OR NOT THESE PARENTS ARE DESERVING OF THESE PUNISHMENTS, THEIR ABSENCE FROM THEIR COMMUNITIES IS A NECESSARILY DESTABILIZING FORCE, WHICH CAN BEGIN CYCLES OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY.

RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT GIVES THE STATE THE POWER TO ENFORCE MORAL AXIOMS, WHICH IS A DANGEROUS STEP IN THE DIRECTION OF AUTHORITARIANISM. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT MURDER SHOULD BE ILLEGAL, BUT THE PURPOSE OF MAKING MURDER ILLEGAL IS SO FEWER MURDERS OCCUR, NOT SO THE GOVERNMENT AND DECLARE THEIR DISTASTE FOR THE CRIME.

DEONTOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT IS A SLIPPERY SLOPE. IF LEGISLATION IS PUT INTO PLACE ON THE BASIS OF ARBITRARY ASSIGNMENTS OF VIRTUE, THE RESPONSIBILITY FALLS TO THE SELECT FEW IN POWER TO DEFINE WHAT “VIRTUE” MEANS. OUR COUNTRY IS DIVIDED INTO THOSE THAT MAKE AND ENFORCE LAWS, AND THOSE THAT OBEY THEM. IN ROLES LIKE JUDGES, PROSECUTORS, DISTRICT ATTORNEYS, (ROLES THAT ARE OVERWHELMING THE ONES ACTUALLY CONTROLLING HOW CONVICTED PEOPLE ARE TREATED), THERE IS NO REAL OBLIGATION TO A CONSTITUENCY. THESE ARE APPOINTED FIGURES, NOT ELECTED ONES. IN THE ABSENCE OF TRUE SCANDAL, THEY ARE NOT PARTICULARLY AT RISK OF REMOVAL IF THEY FAIL TO IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNITIES. WITHOUT THE ACCOUNTABILITY OFFERED BY ELECTIONS, IT IS THAT MUCH MORE OF A RISK TO LEAVE THE DEFINITION OF JUSTICE IN THE EVER FICKLE HANDS OF WHICHEVER TECHNOCRATS RULE OVER A GIVEN HAMLET. JUDGES BECOME FEUDAL LORDS PUNISHING PEASANTS ACCORDING TO THEIR EVER SHIFTING FAVORS. “GOOD WORKS” IN THE EYES OF THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT BECOME A QUESTION OF ARBITRARY IDENTIFICATION DELEGATED TO ALL–POWERFUL AGENTS, BUT A PROCESS DESIGNED TO ELICIT TANGIBLE BENEFITS.

EARLIER I ASKED, “WHAT DOES OUR GOVERNMENT OWE US?” THERE IS NO ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION THAT DOES NOT LEAVE THE GOVERNMENT OBLIGATED TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE FOR CITIZENS. WHEN THE STATE DEGRADES OUR CITIZENRY’S TRUST TO THE POINT OF REBELLION, IT FAILS IN THAT OBLIGATION. WHEN IT IS UNABLE TO PUNISH IN A WAY THAT REDUCES CRIME, IT FAILS IN THAT OBLIGATION. WHEN IT DISENFRANCHISES OUR CITIZENS OF THEIR REPRESENTATION TO THE POINT OF TYRANNY, IT FAILS IN THAT OBLIGATION. IN ESSENCE, RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE IS NOT A GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTION, BUT A MECHANISM OF SPITE, WHICH, IF LEFT IN GOVERNMENTAL HANDS, IS JUST ONE STUMBLE ON THE DESCENT TOWARDS FASCISM.
Should Choate Consider Athletic Ability in Admissions?

In Support: Lily Hrazdira

As I’m sure we’ve all seen on countless web pages like Niche, Choate is consistently considered one of the United States’ best high schools. From what I’ve witnessed and learned over the past three years, I believe that Choate is such a great school and leaves such a long term impact because it truly is a place of many paths, as we’re given unparalleled liberty with choosing curriculum offerings and extracurriculars. The student body is diverse with talents which are displayed through concerts, athletic competitions, and presentations. Diverging just onto one path, Choate’s athletes have earned their positions just as much as any other student. Recruiting athletes is essential to perpetuate Choate’s mission and should continue this practice, as Choate is a place that is known for excelling at academics, extracurriculars, and more.

Choate’s admission’s process is based on holistic review: meaning applicant’s are not taken into consideration solely for their academic metrics but also their experiences and attributes which equally contribute to the learning and teaching on campus. Our job as students is to not just enjoy Choate and apply its many teachings towards our future, but also to give back to Choate and make it a better place. Choate’s varsity teams typically put Choate on the map, providing the school with exposure. Through softball, soccer, and many of our other NEPSAC title winning sports, or a student committing to an impressive college to continue their athletic career, the feats of Choate’s sports are undoubtedly good for the school. Just look at athletes like Hillary Knight ’07 and Julie Chu ’01 that left an everlasting impression on this community. Hearing those names as a hockey player drew me to want to apply to Choate, as those are inspiring peoples’ careers and people I have looked up to throughout my life. There’s no doubt that recruiting athletes will bring talented students here that will have successful athletic careers and draw positive attention to Choate.

For athletes that are trying to play at the next level in college, a high school team can be important for recruiting. At a place like Choate that gets lots of exposure to colleges, deserving athletes have the opportunity to be thrust into the spotlight. Many high school students deserve to play sports, go to classes, and prepare for college at a school like Choate, but are unable to do so because they simply don’t have enough money to pay for tuition. Choate should continue to recruit these athletes so that they can have the opportunity to get the recognition they deserve. As an athlete, having me and my teammate’s spots here questioned (I believe solely due to the “dumb jock” stereotype) leaves me with confusion. Are athletes to stop coming here to make way for the larger majority of students here: students with mostly very wealthy backgrounds? Additionally, many of Choate’s athletes go to the United States’ top academic and athletic schools because of their hard work, dedication, guidance, and exposure they have gotten from Choate. As a three sport varsity athlete myself, the things that Choate has taught me, including teams I’ve been on, have been unforgettable; the experiences were priceless, and they make me personally indebted to Choate forever.
To say athletic recruitment should play no role in Choate’s admissions is to imply that no one’s extracurricular activities or involvements should be considered. Extracurricular activities are what makes a student stand out, separating them from the numbers—test scores or GPA—that people assert so much value and judgment onto. Additionally, we are so lucky to have countless impressive facilities for the athletes of Choate to use. Lots of investment has been done in order to provide students with the best quality courts, rinks, and fields. This is done so that athletes of all levels can enjoy sports. Choate has some of the best facilities, teachers, and coaches, so we should find the best students to work with and to traverse Choate’s many paths. Choate should put effort and emphasis on finding people that will drive this programming, finding the most talented individuals possible.

By getting rid of athletic recruitment, Choate wouldn’t be a school of many paths; we become less attractive compared to other schools, we stop finding people that drive programming, and we reduce access to talented people who deserve all that Choate has to offer. With such a low acceptance rate here, a Choate student isn’t picked over possibly 10 other applicants because they’re only an athlete. Athletes add a plethora of interests to the student body, and utilize the amazing facilities Choate has to make this a better place. We shouldn’t perpetuate the “dumb jock” stereotype to drive out talented people who are more than just athletes. Choate is no “varsity blues” scandal, our recruited athletes deserve to be here just as much as anyone else.
SHOULD CHOATE CONSIDER ATHLETIC ABILITY IN ADMISSIONS?

IN OPPOSITION: BEVERLY RENSHAW

TO SAY THAT ATHLETICS ARE NOT A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS WOULD BE TO DISCOUNT THE VALUE OF A SPORTS EDUCATION, AN EDUCATION THAT OFTEN CONTRIBUTES TO AN APPLICANT’S SENSE OF COOPERATION, TENACITY, AND CONFIDENCE. HOWEVER, ATHLETIC RECRUITMENT INVOLVES THE SCHOOL’S RESOURCES DEVOTED TO SEEKING STUDENTS THROUGH A SOLELY ATHLETIC LENS. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT AN ATHLETIC RECRUIT CANNOT BE AN “ACADEMIC WEAPON,” AS MANY CALL THEM. IN FACT, I AM DELIGHTED BY THE DAILY WISDOM AND INSIGHT CHOATE STUDENT-ATHLETES BRING TO THE CAMPUS’ CLASSROOMS. NONETHELESS, IT’S THIS VERY POINT FROM WHICH I DERIVE MY ARGUMENT AGAINST CHOATE’S ATHLETIC RECRUITMENT. CHOATE’S FLOURISHING ACADEMIC SPHERE (THE SCHOOL’S PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL FOCUS) ALREADY ATTRACTS MANY ACCOMPLISHED ATHLETES, MAKING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS SUPERFLUOUS AND, ULTIMATELY, A SELF-INJURIOUS ONE THAT THE ADMISSIONS OFFICE SHOULD NO LONGER CONTINUE.

TO THE POINT OF ITS BEING SUPERFLUOUS, THE SCHOOL RECEIVES AMPLE AMOUNTS OF ACCOMPLISHED ATHLETES APPLYING EACH YEAR WITHOUT GOING THROUGH ADDITIONAL CANDIDATE POOLS. MANY STUDENTS ON CAMPUS WHO “JUST HAPPEN TO BE GREAT AT A SPORT” AND WERE ATTRACTION TO CHOATE FOR ITS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, FACILITIES, AND COMMUNITY

HOWEVER, BY ACTIVELY SEEKING ATHLETES THROUGH EMAILS, VISITS, AND THE OTHER VARIOUS SCOUTING METHODS, ATHLETIC RECRUITMENT STEADILY PUSHES FORWARD AN ALREADY BORDERLINE UNHEALTHY FOCUS ON SPORTS INTO A SYSTEM OF NEAR ATHLETIC INDUSTRIALIZATION; THE STUDENT BECOMES, IN THEIR OWN EYES AND OFTEN TO OTHERS, A SPORTS MACHINE WHOSE ROLE BECOMES JOB-LIKE. YES, RECRUITMENT, IN THIS WAY, CAN BE A SUREFIRE WAY FOR THE SCHOOL TO BOOST ITS ATHLETICS AND CAN BE A FAST TRACK FOR THESE ATHLETES TO COLLEGIATE LEVELS, BUT THE GLARING ISSUE REMAINS. CHOATE SHOULD NOT PURSUE SUCH AN ENDURER BECAUSE PLENTY OF ATHLETICALLY-TALENTED STUDENTS ARE ALREADY APPLYING IN GREAT NUMBERS. SHIFTING FOCUS TO ATHLETICS IN TURN SHIFTS PRAISE TO ATHLETIC ABILITY OVER HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.

FROM THIS VIEW ON DEVELOPMENT, I DRAW MY MOST PERTINENT QUESTIONS—WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL, AND HOW DOES THE SCHOOL SHIFT ITS FOCUS ACCORDINGLY? WELL, OUR MISSION STATEMENT ITSELF ACKNOWLEDGES THAT “IN CLASSROOMS, ON PLAYING FIELDS, [AND] IN RESIDENTIAL HOUSES, STUDENTS GROW IN CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM, AND ARE INSTILLED WITH SUCH FUNDAMENTAL VALUES AS HONESTY, INTEGRITY, TEAMWORK, GENTILITY, AND COMPASSION TOWARD OTHERS.”

AGAIN, THOUGH, I REMIND THE READER THAT WHILE THIS EMPHASIS IS FREQUENTLY AN UNFAVORABLE RESULT OF THE PRACTICE OF RECRUITMENT, THE ENTIRE SYSTEM IS UNNECESSARY IN THE PURSUIT OF “BETTERING OUR ATHLETICS PROGRAM” BECAUSE OF THE ALREADY-EAGER POOL OF APPLICANTS WHO JUST SO HAPPEN TO HAVE A MEAN SWING, SERVE, OR MILE TIME. THESE MAY JUST BE THE QUALITIES THAT GET THEM THAT BIG, GREEN “ACCEPTED!” CHECK BY THEIR NAME.
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