

Dear Members and Prospective Members of the Peucinian Society,

Last week we gathered for this academic year's inaugural disputation, **Resolved: (Informed) Voting is Sufficient for Good Citizenship**, and we had a blast. After a far reaching and delightful discussion, the society decided in the negative. The majority of the body concluded that the health of our society and the richness of our neighborly relationships demand more than just a vote. Throughout the evening we debated the foggy but gravely important line that separates the social from the political, the private from the public, and the civic from the self-serving. Core to the night's discussion was also a debate over the hierarchy of excellence- juxtaposing the ancient view of greatness through politics against the liberal view of self-generated genius.

On a more personal note, I was overwhelmed by the aggressive, rich, and congenial contributions made by members new and old. Thank you all for a great disputation and a special thanks to George Eliot and James Madison for delivering orations that were nothing short of paragons for the rest of us.

However! no rest for the weary. This week brings us a question that ought cut us all to the quick. For the first, and certainly not final time this year, we will clutch after that flighty and tantalizing muse - the liberal arts.

Resolved: The Great Books Must be Central to American Liberal Education.

Affirmative: Allan Bloom (Samuel Karson) '14

Negative: Marcus Aurelius (Quinn Rhi) '15

Though we all certainly profit from a liberal arts education, we suffer to define it. The term seems to hint at some kind of well-roundedness, a more general and unspecialized education. One way to approach this subject is with the goal of the liberal arts in mind: the liberal arts seeks to create liberal humans. Such humans are liberal in that they can give freely of themselves. They suffer no intellectual entrenchment or narrow single point of view. Rather, these liberal persons have become well-travelled as a result of their studies. They are grounded not by a trade or discipline, but by a commitment to explore the variety and richness of human experience and learning.

The question of this disputation is how we access the treasures that lay buried in the vaunted vault of the liberal arts. On the one hand, Bowdoin and its students are inheritors of an immeasurably robust Western intellectual tradition. The Bible, Plato's Republic, Locke's Treatises on Government, Macbeth, Paradise Lost, and Moby Dick - these works are the dearest treasures, no doubt. They pose questions of God, country, love, and human fragility. But, are they *requisite* for a liberal education? Do the great books and the eternal questions really capture the impulsiveness, the whimsy, and the individualized nature of human experience?

Moreover, what is the role of the student to be in his or her liberal education? Should we rely on pedagogy that has predetermined what exposure we need and what is superfluous? Have we come to Bowdoin to feed our intellect or to nurture and amplify what it already contains? What do we value in our educations - the perennial or the original?

If you are so inclined, please read this short piece on the liberal arts by Professor of Government Paul Franco: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20711189>

Please join us at *8:00pm (to afford the possibility of attending Mr. Kristof's lecture)* this Thursday, September 20, 2012 in the Faculty Room (third floor) of Massachusetts Hall. You are encouraged to dress formally. After all, this is a celebration.

Joyously yours,
Rabbi Moses ben Maimon