

Dear Members and Prospective Members of the Peucinian Society,

Last week's resolution **The Great Books Should be Central to the American Liberal Education** passed convincingly. The society, in good faith and with great spirit, took on questions that are fundamental to Bowdoin's mission and which ought continue to resonate with all of us: Is there a hierarchy of academic disciplines or media? Do we favor a method of pedagogy that displaces or one that nurtures? What are the merits of an education in diversity of experience as compared with one that looks to a particular intellectual tradition? Ultimately, the society did affirm its commitment to our Western intellectual forbears. It did so for the sake of humility in the face of genius, for the status of the liberal arts college as a higher community, and for the preservation of the school of hard knocks rather than its alternative, the academy of euphemisms and tickling. *However*, for those of us that did come down in the affirmative, this is no time to relax. One who wanders and experiments is far better off and far freer than the demagogue or the idolator. Let us give ourselves to what we love, not to what is fetishized and thereby made trite.

This week we turn our attention to a little-known Biblical maxim.

**Resolved: Do to Others as you Would Have Them Do to you**

**Affirmative: Wystan Hugh Auden (Nathaniel Houran) '13**

**Negative: Adam Smith (Ruxton Dellecese) '14**

The Golden Rule, which has (nominally) dominated Western morality for over two millennia, first appears in the Bible in the Jewish Pentateuch. Leviticus 19:18 reads: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." Despite the countless gruesome convulsions of violence that have shaken the Judeo-Christian world, the humility, compassion, and obedience embodied by "Do unto Others" undergirds nearly all of what we (Westerners), religious and atheist, call 'good.'

The proliferation of Biblical morality, in contradistinction to Greco-Roman virtue, heralded in an ideology of man's smallness in comparison to the one true God. We saw ourselves as derivative of an omniscient creator, necessarily less powerful and creative than Him. However, the ascendance of the Bible also inaugurated a new social possibility. Man, as divine creation, becomes inviolable. Love, altruism, compassion topped the social order of the day. Selflessness, once deplored by the ancients, grew exalted.

Now, after religious faith has fallen far from its perch of ubiquitousness, Judeo-Christian definitions of love, friendship, and the moral human remain with us. Are we on the road to finally disowning this mistake of 'slave morality' or should we sustain the hallowed place of empathy in our social discourse? Are humans created somehow equal or should the strong remorselessly pillage the weak? Will you take up the argument for compassion or will you boldly push the limits of this morality and all morality? License or restraint? Love or glory? Where do you stand?

**Please join us this Thursday, September 27th, at 7:30pm in the Faculty Room (third floor) of Massachusetts Hall. Dress with respect.**

Repentantly yours\*,  
Judah Isseroff

\*it is Yom Kippur