

Dear Peucinians,

Last Thursday night, on the eve of Fall break, with the Bowdoin campus already beginning to empty of the bodies that keep it warm, we turned our collars up against the chill and gathered on the third floor of Massachusetts Hall to generate some authentic Heat. We put on our finest lacrosse jerseys, sequined skirts and cowboy hats for a round table discussion of an axiom near-if-not-dear to all of our hearts: **Work Hard, Play Hard**. What should be the relationship, we asked, between grinding our sweaty bodies against other sweaty bodies and grinding our sweaty brains against books until essays pop out as if by some magical power belonging to exhaustion? How do we define work and play and how do we evaluate them? Should we live grandly from extreme to extreme or seek perfection through moderation? Do we need to be electric at all time or should we allow ourselves to sometimes switch off - and is relaxation compatible with playing hard? The vote at the end of the night favored the negative. Our majority opinion, it seems, prefers moderation and a collapsing of the polarity suggested by the resolved statement into a harmonious action that is neither work nor play but rather both at their best and most creative, over a call to feed the animal as often and as lovingly and fully as the psyche, to embrace every situation as an opportunity for complete devotion to a total experience in any direction it might happen to pull. Wherever you come down, and whether you find joy or illumination or release in the social house basement or not, we had a Heck of a good time talking about it. Work, play, both or neither, I think we can all agree that whatever we were doing was certainly Hard.

For those of you who found joy or illumination or release in last Thursday's discussion, and those of you who were not able to be there, you are in luck! This Thursday night, we will be gathering together once again to exert our collective self on a topic that should be equally exciting:

Resolved: Historical Consciousness Doth Make Cowards of Us All

Affirmative: Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Judah Isseroff) '13

Negative: Ernest Hemingway (Lindsay Welch) '15

We are historical creatures. There is no escaping that. You personally have, if not a detailed knowledge, then at least a sense of what has come before. Perhaps you also have a sense of a time, a place, a culture to which you and all that you own belong. With this comes a choice. Do you believe that every individual, every culture, every set of values, belongs to a certain time and place from which it would be both foolish and impossible to remove it? Or is there a universal culture, an absolute set of values, to which all people at all times inherently belong?

On the one hand, the urge to contextualize everything locates it somewhere that is not inside you. Once you deny morality an existence of its own and relegate it to the vicissitudes of historical being, you lose the right act against infamy; the heinous dictates of today's tyrant here are the just acts of yesterday's benevolent king there. An excessive devotion to scholastic rigor (where does this fit? what lead to this?) ultimately prizes context itself as a high good, and guards it jealously against the usurping inquests of rival goods. In becoming understanding and tolerant of all, you lose both agency and freedom to act in the name of What Is Right and become a coward, forever afraid to step on the toes of those you disagree with - Those toes are legitimate too, if I can only understand them well enough!

On the other hand, the heinous dictates of today's tyrant ARE the just acts of yesterday's benevolent king. To deny this is merely foolishness. If we are to seek What Is Right, why would we divest ourselves of a historical awareness that comprises the greatest data spreadsheet ever compiled? We have all of

history at our fingertips, what was valued when and why, the most powerful tool ever devised to help us decide what is right now and guide us into the future. Nothing can be understood completely without its proper context; intolerance can never be called courage. After all, didn't Nietzsche prove that, since the past is something rejectable, it is possible to historicize courageously?

Is truth helped or hindered by placing it in context? Is context itself a form of truth? Do we have more freedom through being able to act on belief or through being act knowing how our beliefs change? Does everything belong in its context, or are contexts simply iterations of something universal? When faced with the historical reality of all things, will we be brave or wimpy?

Please join us at 7:30 on the evening of Thursday, October 11th in the Faculty Room (third floor) of Massachusetts Hall. Wear dress appropriate to a civilly uproarious celebration of intellect and humanity, and please, be on time.

Yours in high spirit,
Wystan Hugh Auden,
The Trans-Atlantic Poet standing in for the Rabbi.

p.s. I am delighted to report that last week's vote on our beloved walking ritual passed unanimously, giving it official status as part of standard procedure. As this usually happens near 10:00pm, I'd advise you all to consider a warm overcoat.