

## DISPUTATION CXLII

November 19, 2015

Hello Peucinians,

My apologies for the late email - but circumstances beyond my control are at play! Speaking of...

### **RESOLVED: WE OUGHT DEFY HUMAN NATURE**

**Affirmative: Benjamin Ratner '19**

**Negative: Voltaire '16**

Assume that there is a "human nature" both immutable and dispositional. In other words, human beings are a certain way *naturally*, and that this nature is the same for every person - across all history. For example - if I were to say that man is naturally "social," I would be making a claim about the fundamental nature of apes - that they tend toward group activity, relationships, etc. However, while their nature is unchanging, it is likely that man may find themselves in a number of circumstances where this nature expresses itself differently. Man's inherent sociability may demonstrate itself differently - depending on circumstance. The question that naturally arises from the idea that "man has a nature" is the following: what ought we do with this nature? Ought we defy or embrace ourselves?

The affirmative takes a somewhat Hobbesian view of human nature: certain aspects of man are inherently bad. According to this view, humans are inherently selfish, callous, and confrontational. However, this does not necessarily entail that we ought submit to this wicked conception of ourselves. From this view, one can make the following claim: we ought combat these antagonistic natural impulses and hold ourselves to a higher code of conduct. Given that we are prone to behave a certain way, ought we welcome that reality and work against it?

The negative will offer a different treatment of human nature. Voltaire (our Voltaire, not the dead one) will claim that humans have a desire to acquire things, materials, or goods for the sake of the group. This desire to acquire is neither inherently good or bad, but takes on a characteristic dependent on the circumstances in which humans find themselves. What is important to take away from the negative's view is the idea that the problems that arise from our nature (oppression, violence, etc.) has less to do with our nature but more to do with the circumstances we find ourselves in. For example, the invention of agriculture paired with our nature unleashed forces beyond our control - slavery, patriarchy, class distinction, inequality, etc. Our nature has not been able to catch up with the circumstances we've found ourselves in, and as a result we mistake the tortured expression of our nature for our nature per se. Therefore, we ought not *reject human nature*, but recognize that the affirmative's negative conception of our nature is flawed - as it mistakes the way we are with the circumstances we find ourselves in?

On the other hand, ought we hold ourselves to a higher standard, as the affirmative will suggest? Should we reject the view that our circumstances are to blame, and work to guide ourselves with an objective moral standard? Or ought we re-examine the basis for those standards and acquire a more realistic understanding of human nature that allows us to craft less futile and more productive mores? Ought we defy human nature?

My apologies for the length of this email - but I wanted to make sure you all understood the terms of this debate... If you still don't understand, please come - this discussion addresses fundamental question of: *what are we like and what ought we do with ourselves?* As a human, a lover of truth(?) and the good(?), you should be at the table tonight.

*7:45 PM Thursday November 19th  
Massachusetts Hall Faculty Room (Top Floor)  
Semi-Formal Attire*

Sincerely,  
Ajax

*Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus*