

DISPUTATION CXLVI

March 3, 2016

Dear Peucinians,

We find ourselves in a most unusual situation. The President has absconded, leaving our Master of Sessions at the helm as we plunge into the murderous maelstrom of midterms. But fear ye not, for he is a resolute pilot, and shall not let the good ship Peucinian sink beneath the frothing waves. He has lashed himself to the wheel, and shall not release his grip 'til he sees the deluge disperse, and the bonny blue Sky return.

Yes, Peucinians, [look at me: I am the captain now](#).

Last week, the knights of our round table declared, in ever so slightly more than one voice, that quality of life ought indeed outweigh quantity. Despite this apparent consensus, severe disagreements remain. For that, we should count ourselves lucky; nothing numbs the mind like unanimity.

But enough! Onto the task at hand.

RESOLVED: HUMANITY NEEDS MYTHS

Affirmative: Николай Васильевич Гогол* '16

Negative: Lucy Knowlton '16

What do we mean by “myth?” For the purposes of our debate, it encompasses all those cultural, political, and spiritual narratives that tie together disparate events, allowing us to make sense of them. The tale of Icarus, the Enlightenment, American Exceptionalism, the Fall of Man: we retell such stories for a menagerie of reasons.

Regardless of the moral or intended application of the story, this much is true: where we see a narrative, we can extract meaning. These stories are not false, per se, but exist independently of facts. In other words, their veracity is besides the point; their value derives from the meaning with which they imbue our lives. Even if you don't believe in such a thing as cosmic purpose, you may still be able - perhaps even ought! - to find value in the stories we tell ourselves. What would life look like without them? Is it too horrible to contemplate? Too strange? The Affirmative steps back from this precipice, and reaffirms the central importance of myths to the human experience: that they give our lives meaning and texture.

But why aren't the facts good enough for us? Are we really too weak to accept the randomness and contingency? Do we really *have* to spin everything into a narrative in order to enrich our lives? The Negative will argue that we are perfectly capable of accepting reality on its own terms, and that we do not lose some invaluable part of the human experience if we reject fable and narrative.

Keep in mind that this is not a debate about the Noble Lie. That term refers strictly to those falsehoods that elites knowingly push upon the populace, a cynical means to a noble end. Myths very frequently rise from the grassroots, and may be believed by all or by none. They need not be political, either.

And with that, dear crew, I bid you goodnight. Report to Mass Hall tomorrow evening: we will need all hands on deck if we are to survive the storm.

7:45 PM Thursday February 18th

Massachusetts Hall Faculty Room (Top Floor)
Semi-Formal Attire

Your captain,
Voltaire

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus

*Nikolai Vasilevich Gogol