

DISPUTATION CLXII

March 2, 2017

Dearest Peucinians,

Last week we considered the relevance of philosophy for life in the modern world, and we decided that we are not ready to cast it off entirely for a scientific worldview. This week, we ask yet another question about how we ought to live our lives...

RESOLVED: WE SHOULD LIBERATE OURSELVES FROM THE CITY

Affirmative: Eddie Korando '20

Negative: Jean-Jacques Rousseau '19

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was wary of city living. In the *Emile*, he recommends that anyone interested in raising a child properly must do so in a rural environment. Only in nature, far away from the influence of the financiers and the intellectual elites, can one truly connect with the sweet sentiment of existence, that pure notion that life is beautiful and awe-inspiring all by itself. The arrangement of cities, with everyone living on top of everyone else, is not only unnatural, but it inflames our worst instincts. *Amour-propre*, our tendency toward envy and hatred which is rooted in our own self-love, becomes unleashed in cities. Extravagant displays of wealth, success, and intelligence forces us to compare our own accomplishments with the accomplishments of our neighbors. As a result, the city-dwellers become more concerned with appearances and performance than virtue and happiness.

Thomas Jefferson illuminates the political benefits of rural living. People that work and live off the land make the best citizens because they know what an honest day's work means. They are producers; they can watch the fruits of their labor grow right before their eyes. Rural areas demand that everyone possess a certain measure of self-sufficiency, but nevertheless foster a strong sense of community and belonging. Untainted by cosmopolitan influence, this life offers a purity of morals that city life simply cannot. The yeoman farmer is the image of the virtuous democratic citizen.

But is this aversion to cosmopolitan values merely a prejudice? Liberalism, after all, secures for all citizens the right to pursue their own ends. Isn't this a fertile breeding ground for diversity and pluralism? Cities attract individuals from all over the world because they offer endless opportunities to explore the good as one sees fit. Indeed, some feel the need to liberate themselves from [their small towns](#) to pursue a goal or a lifestyle they could not otherwise. The need for tolerance is built into the fabric of city life, just as much as it is inextricable from liberalism. Perhaps, then, the ideal democratic citizen is not the virtuous one, but the one who can best live among those different from themselves.

Karl Marx argued that the progress of knowledge is directly tied to the gathering of peoples into one area, noting that the bourgeoisie "has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life." Civilization and culture thrives in cities, where fresh ideas and bold innovations display humanity at its finest. Isn't this the type of environment that brings out the best in us?

Is the good person the same as the good citizen? Under what conditions do humans thrive? Where do we find anonymity, and it is harmful or beneficial to us? Where is the "real America," and what are "American values?"

*Thursday March 2nd, 8:15 PM
3rd Floor of Massachusetts Hall
Semi-Formal Attire*

Yours,
μὲνω - Meno

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus