

## **DISPUTATION CLXVI**

September 7, 2017

Dear Peucinians new and old:

I hope you all had amazing summers, whether they were adventurous, relaxing, fulfilling, or—dare I mention it—“productive.” I was lucky enough to spend the summer keeping watch over four bright and kind 13-year-old boys while also teaching canoeing to and leading trips for boys of many ages. I’m nostalgic for them and the beautiful place we were located, but I’m also restless for engaging conversations with my enthusiastic professors and classmates, diving into that massive pile of books on my desk, and more late, thoughtful nights with the Peucinians.

It is fitting that we leave the beauty of summer and begin the academic year with a disputation on the nature of human beauty, its role in our self-striving, and its place in how we view and appreciate others. More specifically, for how much does physical beauty count?

### **RESOLVED: DISREGARD PHYSICAL BEAUTY**

**Affirmative: Louisa May Alcott ‘19**

**Negative: Aldous Huxley ’20**

Physical beauty, many say, is superficial or skin deep. It doesn’t matter what we look like, and it certainly doesn’t matter what our friends look like. As for our lovers, perhaps some of us believe that their appearance doesn’t—or shouldn’t—matter either. Humans are sentient beings capable of rational thought—the composition and arrangement of our organs and meat shouldn’t have anything to do with our value to ourselves and to others. Furthermore, “beauty” is a societal concept, not a natural one. With proper reasoning, we can intellectualize ourselves out of our social context, freeing ourselves from subjective—and possibly biased—understandings of beauty.

And yet, one might think, our bodies are themselves a part of nature, solidly separate from our minds and identities. Whether or not our bodies are beautiful is often a reflection of the work and care we put into the maintenance of our brain-carriers. Like any piece of art in a museum, our bodies are subject to aesthetic judgments, but not meaningless ones. These judgments have profound effects on our attraction to each other, especially in romantic or other sexual relationships. Appreciation for the physical form of another person is perhaps as essential in romantic relationships as respect for the other’s mind.

If this topic generates within you an itching to listen, speak, learn, persuade, or ask questions (non-exhaustive list), please join us around the table tomorrow evening for a riveting discussion about how we ought live our lives. All are welcome.

**Thursday, September 7**

**7:45 p.m.**

**Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall**

**Semi-formal attire**

Sincerely,  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus

