

## DISPUTATION CLXVIII

September 21, 2017

Dear Peucinians,

Last week, after a rousing disputation on whether or not we have the right to die, and despite St. Dominic's incredibly persuasive rhetoric, we voted narrowly in the negative with that Great Commoner, W.J.B. Much like the logic problem sets, the disputations are getting more intense—fast. This week we're releasing Bulgakov—an elder statesperson—from her duties at the head of the table so she can take on the young rising star Gilgash. Sparks are sure to fly, reactionaries and leftists alike will get triggered, and I guarantee we will all learn something new as we take on a question as real as it is abstract:

### **RESOLVED: GENDER ROLES BENEFIT SOCIETY**

**Affirmative:** 𐎗𐎛𐎠𐎧𐎺𐎠, Fifth King of Uruk '20

**Negative:** Михайл Булгаков '18

Fortunately for liberal arts students, society is complex and human nature is mysterious. We spend much of our time and intellectual bandwidth at Bowdoin questioning what constitutes “identity”—should such a thing exist, either naturally or through social construction—to better our understanding of society and ourselves, so much so that the College dedicates entire academic departments toward examining these ephemeral and yet foundational aspects of human life. (In fact, one of our strangely less-honored alumni helped advance the field of human sexuality.) Oftentimes our study dissects the *is* of these topics, but perhaps less frequently do we question the *oughts* of identity in our society. Thursday evening we will tackle gender roles, a set of social norms dictating behaviors considered appropriate, acceptable, or desirable for people based on their perceived sex or sexuality. [*Per the disputants' agreement, we define gender as a social construct which consists of social arrangements organized around sex. Sex refers to the biological differences among people related to genitalia and chromosomes.*] Are these gender roles pathways for us to express ourselves meaningfully in a culture full of rich ambiguity and tradition, or are they binding shackles that hold us back from becoming who we really are?

One view holds that there are inherent differences in the natures of men and women, and these differences equally contribute to the continuity and success of the human race. Although the nature of people can change, this occurrence is rare, and we ought construct society so that the two sets of natural tendencies complement each other and combine to best aid the ends of social community. Gender roles across time and culture realize varied constructions, but they all rest on the natural predispositions of men and women—an unavoidable feature of human nature. These distinct gender roles—provided they are constructed properly—benefit society by aiding personal and cultural communication, by helping people to build meaningful relationships and strong families, and by promoting wholesome child-rearing. Gender roles provide a steadying order to society, a stability we should cherish and strive for.

But you might think gender roles are not natural (or grounded in nature); instead, they are socially constructed and taught to children (both explicitly and implicitly through music and media) at a young age so thoroughly that as we grow we begin to believe that our gendered behavior is natural. Gender roles might become second nature, but we cannot discount the harm they cause. Gender roles in our society are unequal; everything that is not male is subordinated. And the very constructions of these roles trample women and non-cisgendered people, generating a power dynamic in which gender roles themselves are unhealthy and

dangerous, and their continued existence is policed with violence. Ultimately, gender roles are an oppressive tool of social control for the powerful masked in a tempting story about order and structure.

What do you all think—do gender roles add meaning and order to our lives or anxiety and constraint? Are there inherent differences between men and women? If so, what are they? How should we order our society (if at all)? How should we raise our children, and what should we encourage them to believe? And where do gender-nonconforming people fit into this question? Come new, come old (or very old, as may be the case this week)!

**Thursday, September 21, 7:45 p.m.**  
**Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall**  
**Semi-formal attire\***

Sincerely,  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
Peucinian Society President

*Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus*

\*For men, this means at least a shirt and tie with khakis or slacks. No jeans, please. If attire is an issue for you, please email me personally and we will work something out privately—no judgment or embarrassment.\*\*

\*\*This might be an opportune disputation to question the explicitly gendered nature of our decorum. Feel free, but please do so respectfully—the Provost\*\*\* *will* still enforce the spirit of decorum.

\*\*\*Monique Wittig '18 will sit as substitute Provost for Mikhail Bulgakov.