

## DISPUTATION CLXXII

November 2, 2017

Dear Peucinians,

Welcome back from a brief hiatus. I hope you all had a spooky Halloween, if not a fun one. Last time we debated whether we should embrace domestic surveillance, and we found ourselves in a stalemate. This week we consider a question that bears on how we will conduct ourselves as we peruse the fresh course catalog.

### **RESOLVED: A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION OUGHT PREPARE US FOR SERVICE TO SOCIETY**

**Affirmative: Denis Diderot '19**

**Negative: Saul Bellow '20**

Since one disputant, when I asked for his main points, replied, “You’ll hear if from the f—ing podium,”\* I decided to change course and keep this preview brief.

Diderot believes that as students at an elite liberal arts college, we are in a position of great educational privilege. This education hones our minds, connects us with others holding privilege, and gives us the tools to succeed in life, however we may define it. But the world suffers from many grave problems and threats, so we should dedicate our energies—and our educational might—to solving these problems in pursuit of the common good. We must take courses that will help us pursue this goal, and Bowdoin must demand from us training in public service to make us leaders in the cooperative effort to effect it.

Bellow believes that education should instill virtue in us, and these virtues are not understood in relation to the common good. These virtues are good for their own sake. Furthermore, the “common good” is subjective, so an education that orients our activity toward a particular conception of the common good will demean our ability to make moral judgments of our own and turn us into mere tools. Another negative view, not held by Bellow but certainly a feature of this debate, is that learning for our own pleasure is valuable—as is learning for learning’s sake —whether that pleasure be of the academic or financial flavor.

For what courses will you sign up, and does it matter? What will you do with your education, and what will you do with your incredibly value time and talents? Does the common good rely on an elite cadre of well-educated people to lead it, or is this a misled understanding of how social change occurs? To what extent are selfish actions justifiable in terms of education and career? What is the common good?

Let’s ponder these questions and many more. See you around the table.

**Thursday, November 2, 7:45 p.m.**  
**Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall**  
**Semi-formal attire**

*ex animo,*  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

*Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus*

\*We use a lectern.