

DISPUTATION CLXXIII

November 9, 2017

Dear Peucinians,

We've all heard it, and maybe we've all said it: "Don't judge." After all, who are we to cast judgment on the choices others make? If someone wants to dress oddly, that's their prerogative. Put cocktail sauce on fried seafood—whatever. Forget to floss—not my business. Get wasted at a college house party and hook up with a stranger to fill an emotional void—to each their own. Cheat on their spouse—#shameless. Right?

RESOLVED: WHILST SHAME KEEPS ITS WATCH, VIRTUE IS NOT WHOLLY EXTINGUISHED IN THE HEART

A roundtable presented by William Jennings Bryan '19 on whether shame be a force for good in society

We borrow the resolved from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* to enflame the idea that shame has some role in maintaining public virtue. Is it an inner morality that keeps us from behaving immorally, or is it the judgment—the shame—we will face after we do a bad deed? In a world where people are increasingly espousing relativist beliefs about proper conduct, telling themselves "don't judge" and taking pride in their shamelessness, are we at risk of degenerating into moral decrepitude? In a nation of liberal laws, what stops us from treating each other poorly, if not the pain of social punishment?

No, we are not, some argue. Shame is merely a tool used by scolds and curmudgeons to maintain the *status quo*, often at the expense of women and people whose sexual orientation isn't straight. Indeed, infidelity and other immoral acts deserve reprobation—but shame will invariably be used to police the sexuality of women and members of the LGBT community, perpetuate harmful attitudes about sexual assault, and restrict the expression of healthy masculinities. Perhaps we are better off without shame: maybe a different social tool should be used to limit unseemly behavior, for fear of shame's ever-widening scope and abuse.

"O shame! where is thy blush?" And where should it be?

Thursday, November 9, 7:45 p.m.
Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall
Semi-formal attire

ex animo,
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus