

Dearest Friends,

Since the College forcibly evacuated us for the holidays, another year has ticked by (our calendars now read 2013) and another ancient civilization has revealed itself as utterly fraudulent. I don't even speak with people called Maya anymore. Yet the questions that pressed themselves upon us in the fall semester - breathing hot breath down our necks - have not relented. Perhaps the break provided us with relief from our pursuers. Perhaps the warm embrace of family and old friends dispelled the doubt and aimlessness that often plague our travels through this college and this life. But my dear dear Peucinians, now in my eighth and final semester at Bowdoin, I can very well assure you that you have only known panic's overture. Soon the curtain will unveil its contents, and a full cast and orchestra will begin its assault on the convictions you cherish. For some the music will blare brassily, and for others, only woodwinds will whisper of your travails. But, each of us will find that we are seeking in the dark.

So, in a few short days, let us again slough off (with Machiavelli) our "clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire" and instead don our "regal and courtly garments." If there is a God or gods, let it or them be reanimated by the chants of the freest and boldest inquiry that we can muster.

Let the question of **Whether our professors ought provide answers or pose questions only** be resolved by a roundtable convened by the Peucinian Society.

Max Weber, in his essay 'Science as a Vocation,' argues that the boldest aim of science (which here means natural *and* human/social science) is "to gain clarity." Weber tells us that while we may be in search of a god or prophet or ideology, our professors are not the ones to dispense the advice of where to look or whom to follow. That, by the way, does not just include one's choice of religion, but advice that pertains to all decisions that we must make between warring values: militarism or pacifism, socialism or individualism, visual art or music.

Weber writes: "Science today is a 'vocation' organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe. This, to be sure, is the inescapable condition of our historical situation." In essence, if we look to our teachers for more than the clearest form of a question - if we look to them for answers - we are asking them to violate their teacherly integrity. A teacher "cannot do more so long as he wishes to remain a teacher and not to become a demagogue."

Meanwhile, Weber's own teacher - Friedrich Nietzsche - argued that the failure of the modern German education was in its *inability* to provide answers. Nietzsche decries an education that floods its student with historical context and with the belief that the student can express him or herself with models derived from the past. He responds that an education *should* be concerned with the student's "desire to express something himself and to feel evolving within him a coherent living complex of experiences of his own." In other words, clarity, even knowledge itself, is not an appropriate goal for an education. Such an education breeds a bias towards objective critique rather than a thirst for life.

Professors can certainly dissent from Mr. Nietzsche and teach other values besides vitality. They might instruct piety, humility, or worldliness. Indeed, the Bowdoin mission statement sings: "to be at home in all lands and ages." Are our professors condemned to teach values? Ought they strive only to be clarifiers? Should our national virtues impact the sort of education we receive? Is the academy beholden to reason only, or morality as well?

**Please gather in the Faculty Room of Massachusetts Hall at 7:30pm this Thursday, January 31. Dress UP. Machiavelli will be watching.**

Alacritously yours,  
Maimonides