

DISPUTATION CLXI

February 23, 2017

Dearest Peucinians,

Last week we asked what, if anything, technology has done to our sense of wonder, and we explored the implications of easy access to knowledge and the problem of overexposure to beauty. This week we ask ourselves another timely question: what can philosophy do for us?

RESOLVED: PSYCHOLOGY OUGHT TO SUPPLANT PHILOSOPHY IN OUR LIVES

Affirmative: Mary Shelley '19

Negative: 觀世音菩薩 '17

Since its birth in Athens, Western philosophy has always regarded itself to be the only serious discipline concerned with how one ought to live their life. Socrates interrogated the brightest politicians, poets, and youths of his day and found that they had little wisdom to share, but plenty of ill-founded opinions. Socrates then spent his life playing the gadfly, urging his fellow citizens to leave no opinion unexamined and to consider the erotic pursuit of knowledge as a way of life rather than a pastime. The poets, with their seductive myths about the gods and the heroes of old, promote passionate without moderation, drunkenness and orgies, vices of every kind. Only philosophy demands that we seek the good, the beautiful, and the noble, and that we learn how to temper our passions and leave room for contemplation. Above all, philosophy seeks to improve the quality of our lives by identifying what is worthy of our attention and what will bring us true happiness as opposed to mere pleasure.

Over the past 200 years, however, philosophy has been a primarily academic enterprise, and a dwindling one at that. Many of the disciplines that are built on the insights and methods of philosophy claim a superior understanding of the human condition. Why should one speculate about the causes and effects of human behavior when there is sufficient data at hand to give us more precise answers? The only way to truly “know thyself” is to engage in an objective study of human activity and interaction. The scientific method, itself a product of philosophy, has given us the tools we need to interrogate our motives, our morality, and our relationships. Psychology can do away with much of the guessing and the logical leaps that philosophers indulge in because it relies on fact-based models of reality. By minimizing the need for metaphysical assumptions, it becomes a powerful force for honest self-criticism.

Can philosophy still tell us how to live our lives, or has it merely become a source of intrigue for pretentious intellectual elites? Is psychology too reductive to help us understand ourselves, or is philosophy too grandiose? Does psychology offer any guidance on questions of morals and meaning? Do we *need* either?

*Thursday February 23rd, 8:15 PM
3rd Floor of Massachusetts Hall
Semi-Formal Attire*

Yours,
μὲνω - Meno

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus