

DISPUTATION CLXXV

November 30, 2017

Dear Peucinians,

It's been a while. I miss you. Before Thanksgiving, we left things off at a stalemate, unable to decide definitely whether capitalism is unjust. No matter, we have more pressing topics to examine. This week, we welcome the first member of the Class of 2021 to dispute—Brendan Murtha—and another first-timer at the lectern, William Godwin. They will be opining on another societal question, but this time, a more concrete one:

RESOLVED: REPEAL THE SECOND AMENDMENT

Affirmative: Brendan Murtha '21

Negative: William Godwin '20

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

The second amendment is only 27 words long, and yet it has sparked a centuries-long legal, ethical, and political debate. At a time when thousands of people die by firearm every year—through mass shootings, small-scale homicides, and suicides (about two thirds of all firearm deaths)—it seems indefensible for our legal code to enshrine, above legislative authority, the right to own a firearm. Mr. Murtha believes that the second amendment has hamstrung sensible gun control policy; as a result, the United States faces an epidemic to the tune of 30,000-odd deaths every year. This is morally repugnant, and no just society would allow innocent Americans to die on the altar of such vague notions as “liberty” and “independence.” Plenty of countries have done away with guns to great effect; there is no reason the United States can't evolve too—that is, apart from that pesky Constitution.

Godwin speaks on behalf of those who feel that despite these deaths, guns are an integral part of Americanism, independence, and liberty. These are not abstractions. Americans deserve the right to protect and provide for their families—including the tools to carry that out. The Bill of Rights reigns supreme over the legislature because it safeguards our most important freedoms, the ones that are at risk when untempered passions attend to democratic decision-making, as they often do. Occasional mass shootings, which can be prevented and palliated through other means, might be the price we must pay to preserve this principle. Furthermore, where the far-left and the group formerly known as the American far-right meet around the back, firearms are seen as essential for securing human dignity from tyrannical governments.

The stakes in this disputation are high and clear. Do you believe in the long-lasting wisdom of the Framers? Do you doubt the applicability of 230-year-old legal thought? Is our country in crisis, and if so, what should we do to save it? See you around the table. Don't hold back.

Thursday, November 30, 7:45 p.m.

Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall

Semi-formal attire

ex animo,

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus