

DISPUTATION CXCI

October 25, 2018

Dear Peucinians:

Good morning! After hemming and hawing about cogs, ice, the Borg, bikes, [jungles](#), and other kooky metaphors, we decided decisively in the *affirmative*, this Society finding that we'd rather be cogs in some great machine than a snowflake (not literally, of course; again, this is a metaphor).

This week we *shift gears* and ask, what of the children!? The frenetic tone of this question is no accident; what to do with children is a topic of some urgency because they grow up so fast (at least my grandmother claims). Many Peucinians work with kids during the academic year or the summers, many of us will become parents, and most of us were kids at some point, I'm fairly sure. (Some of us are still kids—whether this is good or bad is perhaps a question.)

I've heard from many Peucinians that one part of the many joys of working with children is the impulse to act as our best selves in front of them. And personally, very few things make me as happy as watching young kids run around Moulton Main Lounge during Jewish holiday dinners. I do not think I am alone in this. Why do children have such a strong grip on our feelings?

RESOLVED: THINK OF THE CHILDREN!

A Forum on parenting and childrearing presented by William Jennings Bryan '19

“Everyone knows how to raise children, except the people who have them.” —P.J. O'Rourke

“We know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man.”

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 1762.

By my immediate recollection, “think of the children” has played a major role in several disputations in recent years, including:

- **CLXXIX: CONSIDER NON-MONO GAMY**
- **CLXXVIII: WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO RAISE CHILDREN**
- **CLXXIII: WHILST SHAME KEEPS ITS WATCH, VIRTUE IS NOT WHOLLY EXTINGUISHED IN THE HEART**
- **CLXII: WE SHOULD LIBERATE OURSELVES FROM THE CITY**

I'm surely missing some, but these stick out. It's about time we really dug into this one.

Here's the rub. While parenting methods frequently follow some cultural precepts, every family is different. If we're not lazy relativistic sods, we should think some methods are better than others. And we're not lazy relativistic sods. This leads me to the uncomfortable and regrettable conclusion that some—if not most or all—of us were not raised optimally. Our upbringing might even have been indefensible and poor. We may

have come to terms with this; we may be in denial. But it's worthwhile to push beyond a defense of our own childhoods and parents, to think about what the ideal childhood—if it exists—looks like.

The problem, naturally, is that we have such different visions of what parenting is and nearly total control over them. Comedian Bill Burr once remarked that he'd like a child so he could "fill his head with all my theories." Ought we craft children in our own image? ([Is that even possible?](#)) Should we raise children in our religions, or let them choose? How about politics—should we remain neutral and allow our children to "become themselves" and find their own beliefs, or should we actively mold our children to believe in what we think is right? Will we censor what children see, curate the books on their shelves and the websites they visit: will we preserve their *innocence*? Will we place high expectations on them, or any expectations at all? How important is "independence?" Are there mutual fiduciary duties between parent and child that obtain at different stages of life?

Is the traditional parents-child relationship our best means of rearing children? We have previously discussed tribal upbringings, and the ancient Spartan method of child-rearing comes to mind: "...nor was it lawful for every father to rear or train his son as he pleased, but as soon as they were seven years old, Lycurgus ordered them all to be taken by the state and enrolled in companies, where they were put under the same discipline and nurture..." (Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*). And I also recall the more famous exchange between Socrates and Glaucon in Book V of Plato's *Republic*, where they envision a city in which all the children were raised in common, and all the citizens considered each other sibling, parent, or child. This is just to say that our conversation need not be bound to America, 2018, or any other familial assumption.

These are just a few of the many questions we will consider around the table. I encourage some self-reflection on these in the hours leading up to the Forum. The format of a Forum is a bit different from a normal disputation. Instead of hearing opposing philippics, we will enjoy an incisive, neutral oration from WJB that will raise more questions than it attempts to answer. At the end, we will not vote—but we will ask still more questions. As always, old- and first-timers will be welcomed with equally open arms.

Yours 'til Niagara Falls,
J.J. Rousseau

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Peucinian Society Disputation CXCI
Thursday, October 25th, 7:45 PM
Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall
Semi-formal attire encouraged (see Postscript)

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POSTSCRIPT

Why do we dress up?

Although our dress code can seem uninviting at first glance, we use it as a way to distinguish our discussions from the rest of the week's activities. This marks disputations as something special and worthy of our attention. In choosing to dress ourselves differently, we convey respect for the event and for each other, much in the same way one would for a *capella* or mock trial. If you choose to attend a disputation, feel free to dress in a way that is special and comfortable for you.

P.P.S. Please consider attending the Town Hall meeting this Friday at 4 PM in Smith Union. In the past, Town Hall meetings have generated thoughtful discussion and have made Bowdoin feel like a community.