

Disputation CCII

April 18, 2019

Dear Peucinians,

Last week, the Society did proud Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, our very own Peucinian alumnus of the Class of 1852, and resolved to strive for a more perfect Union. This time, we welcome the first member to dispute from our Class of 2022 – Ky Putnam. The question before us is a historic one, not least because we disputed it once, some time ago:

RESOLVED: SOCIETY NEEDS NOBLE LIES

Affirmative: Madame de Staël '19

Negative: Ky Putnam '22

We want to live in society with people who pursue the good. However, some among us might lack the discipline, time, education, energy, or even intellect to conceive of or achieve this good. At best, an ignorant multitude might be left with numerous half-truths – which still risk leading them to terrible conclusions and corresponding misdeeds. In order that these might be avoided, someone could deceive the people with lies that turn them toward the good. Noble lies are good faith efforts to help people. Socrates famously proposes the Myth of Er, which is meant to convince others of the eternity of the soul and punishment after death. This is his final effort to persuade others they will never get away with injustice. Alfarabi claims that all of religion is itself a noble lie: created by the philosophers for those who cannot deduce the universal principles of our existence. Religion thus makes a higher state of fulfillment available to those whose reason would not normally gain it for them.

Alternatively, we must deny the use of noble lies, as they are concerned with consequences, and forsake principles. Lying is wrong, and human dignity demands truth and authenticity. Who are these elites who claim to have a superior understanding of the good? It is the individual who is best suited to decide for himself. Noble lies constitute a level of paternalism inconsistent with societies of equality, and a deliberative, democratic political process. Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor spins noble lies to deny Christians the free will Jesus granted them. In order to end their suffering and ensure their salvation, he thinks it better that the church control everything in their lives. Noble lies can abolish the very possibility of individual agency and intent.

And yet, is fundamental human equality itself a noble lie? One created in the service of our democratic regime? Is someone likely to shout, “You can't handle the truth!” at this disputation? Will you come to find out?

Thursday, April 18th, 7:45 PM
3rd Floor of Massachusetts Hall
Semi-Formal Attire

Be sure to mark your calendars for this Friday's Homerathon, during which we will deliver the entirety of *The Iliad* from the steps of the art museum. I encourage everyone to come out and listen – we will be there for most of the day. Thank you to all those who signed up to read.

Sincerely yours,

✉

Gilgamesh

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus