

Disputation CCIV

September 19, 2019

Dear Peucinians,

Now that we, as a Society, have resolved that man should make his home in the stars, a new, but quite related question comes before our consideration. Americans are no strangers to this predicament: during the weekdays we associate as good, commercial Lockeans. On the weekends, we retreat into the privacy of nature for those introspective, asocial moments commended by Rousseau. As we come together this Thursday evening, in the liminal time between these realms, two seasoned Peucinians will offer up some impassioned speeches to spark our investigation.

RESOLVED: WE FLOURISH BEST IN ISOLATION

Affirmative: Paul Tillich '21

Negative: Susan Sontag '21

We would do well to abide the Pythian Oracle's great maxim: "know thyself." Yet, in our world of such cacophony and conformity, it is difficult to both identify the self, and fashion the person one wishes to become. As human beings, we have been granted an interiority – one which enables our imagination, contemplation, and perhaps even our relation to the divine. If these are our highest pursuits, then it would make sense to order our lives around them. While we shall still have to engage with other human beings, interaction should ultimately come to support these solitary moments when we are at our greatest. Isolation is a mode of thought, a conception of the good life that entails directing oneself inward. Seclusion in nature is undoubtedly a great help in this endeavor, but one can still achieve this disposition even when among other humans.

On the other hand, it is worth recalling Aristotle's own maxim: "man is by nature a *zōon politikon*" – a political animal. In ancient Greece, privacy was for the most part undesirable. It meant *deprivation*, that is, of time which might have been spent on the ennobling part of life: achieving excellence in the community. The greatest human virtues: love, wisdom, justice, friendship, are all made possible by and realized within a network of human relationships. If we do feel a tendency toward hiding deep within the self, this indicates a greater sickness about the current state of societal relations, rather than the desirability of isolation. Such a condition also bodes ill for government and morality. Hannah Arendt posits that it is a mass psychology of isolation, coincident with the breakdown of normal social relationships, which opens the door to totalitarian rule.

In your quest for human fulfillment, are you better served by looking inward or outward? Do you seek immortality in the world, or the sublimity of eternity? I hope you will join us – whether a Peucinian veteran or newcomer – and contribute your thoughts to our discussion.

Thursday, September 19th, 7:45 PM

Massachusetts Hall, Third Floor

Semi-Formal Attire

Sincerely yours,

☞☞☞☞☞

Gilgamesh

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus