

Disputation CCVI

October 3, 2019

Dear Peucinians,

By the narrowest of margins, we recently decided that all art should be available for our enjoyment. This week, we shall consider another aspect of the relation between humans and objects: the process of labor. In the beginning, we are told, God himself worked to make creation, and then took His rest on the seventh day. Some indeterminate amount of time after this, John Locke (alternatively read: liberal Jesus) swaggers onto the scene. Ever the hyperbolic defender of property, he ultimately theorizes that labor imbues an object with 99.9 percent of its value, and therefore grants one ownership of it. Then comes the profaned spirit, Karl Marx. He tells us to take heed, lest our labor itself be prostituted as a commodity to the cruel powers of capital.

Automation can bring us all together – ending human strife over property and permitting us to create and rest at our leisure. Yet, any good sci-fi movie can demonstrate that such utopian aspirations tend not to end well: either for humans or automatons.

RESOLVED: AUTOMATE EVERYTHING

Affirmative: Hunter S. Thompson '21

Negative: Saul Bellow '20

Everywhere man is a slave to necessity. We spend the better part of our lives engaged in labor to support our mere subsistence. To add insult to injury, in our present economic condition, necessity is weaponized against us – compelling us to spend additional time deteriorating while producing commodities. We receive no immediate satisfaction by the fruits of our labor, and find ourselves alienated in our work and zombified in our recovery. For the first time in human history, automation may soon completely liberate us from this process. We should embrace this, as it will permit us a choice in the life-activities we pursue, and an ability to bring passion and imagination to our daily endeavors.

However, there is a certain dignity to labor. One can derive contentment, self-possession, and self-knowledge from supporting oneself – even in subsistence. Though the ancients may have disdained labor as acquiescence to the process of life and death, we might now view it as a harmonization with nature. Humans could spend all of their time attempting to create immortal works, but there is a foolish arrogance in this – which might estrange us from harmony. Furthermore, we should be wary of the unlimited choice which comes with automation. Radical choice is paralyzing, and many people might find themselves lost and despondent without the occupations which have conditioned them for so long.

What are the limits of automation? Will it encroach upon and threaten artistic creation or human interaction? Will the seniors be forced to confront their existential dread about going to work, all too soon, in the “real world?” I look forward to discussing these, and many more questions with you around the table this Thursday evening.

Thursday, October 3rd, 7:45 PM

Massachusetts Hall, Third Floor

Semi-Formal Attire

Sincerely yours,

✉

Gilgamesh

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus