

Disputation CCXIV

February 20, 2020

Dearest Peucinians,

I write to you tonight not as Aldous Huxley, your faithful Master of Sessions, but as Aldous Huxley, 6th King of Uruk—that is to say, your acting President for tomorrow’s proceedings. If you’re confused or concerned by this development, I promise, all will become clear. Introduction aside, I hope all of you have had a wonderful past week—filled with lots of friendship and Eros, but, of course, devoid of pornography (at least for the majority of you). Tomorrow night we will foray into waters perhaps equally as (un)traveled as last Thursday, and certainly as prescient.

The English poet Edward Young once wrote, “By night an atheist half believes a God.” Tomorrow we mean to go beyond half-measures. We will eschew the purely instrumental and genuinely ask ourselves: what does religion mean in our lives? When the night comes to a close, should we drift off to sleep (or supers) as believers? I therefore put the following proposition before you, Peucinians:

RESOLVED: WE NO LONGER NEED RELIGION

We live in a spectacularly non-committal age, spiritually speaking. In some sense, it would take a profound act of the imagination to dream up a world *without* religion, so deeply is it ingrained in our social structures, our values, our traditions, our literature, and our philosophy. However, despite this almost inescapable history, ours is not a religious time—fewer and fewer people identify as religious, and fewer and fewer of those who do really mean it. In many places, serious religious belief has gone for something assumed to something exceptional, from something dominant to something marginal.

But who better to put the fear of God back in us than our very own demigod, taking the **Negative, King Gilgamesh**? After all, being two-thirds god himself, he certainly has some stake in the affair. I am drawn to think of Tolstoy’s philosophical-biographical *Confessions*, where he recounts the story of a hunting trip with his older brother. Upon kneeling down to pray, his brother simply asks, “You still do that?” After this simple, crushing question, it was decades before Tolstoy wholly regained his faith—though when he did, it was in one of the most inspiring religious visions I have ever encountered: a universal, divine spirit which suffuses and animates the world, guiding us out of ourselves and toward an uncompromising Good. Can we not regain the courage to pray? What could our lives look like if we take what Kierkegaard calls the “leap” and affirm something which goes beyond us, inexplicable and eternal? What if we need religion now more than ever?

However, a lingering doubt remains—what if it *is* time to move on? Making this case to us tomorrow night, for the very first time, in the **Affirmative**, will be **Matthew Saveliev**. After all, religion is well and good for someone like Gilgamesh, the mythic remnant of a bygone age, but isn’t it time for something new? Lest we get swept away too easily by the daunting absence which faith leaves behind, by the drama of the apocalyptic pronouncement that “God is dead, and we have killed him,” we should remember what Nietzsche thinks comes after: the breaking of the clouds, and dawning of a new day. Perhaps this vision has the power to replace the religious one—fresh, hopeful, and maybe just the right amount of naïve. When all is told, is our attachment to religion anything more than that of a child who desperately needs the blanket—desperately,

that is, until the blanket is taken away? The world *has* changed; will we not rise to meet it? Can we see religion as simply a stepping-stone towards something better?

I hope to see you tomorrow night—I have a feeling we all have quite a bit to learn and consider.

Thursday, February 20th, 7:45 PM

Massachusetts Hall, Third Floor*

Semi-Formal Attire

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus,

Aldous Huxley

* This room can be reached only by stairs. Please contact me if you wish to attend and this presents a difficulty for you.