

Disputation XLX: The Search for the Common Good is Enriching Liberal Education at Bowdoin College

Dear Peucinian Society,

Last week's disputation on "Healthcare is a right" failed with a vote of 14 nays to 8 yeas. A total of thirty-five people participated in the disputation, including prospective members delivering their declamations this Sunday.

Daniel Jose delivered an oration on behalf of the affirmative. He began by arguing that natural rights do not exist, but there are societal rights. Furthermore, he argued that the advancement of medical technology has created a situation where there are not enough resources to limit preventative deaths among all Americans. Jose argued that affirming that healthcare is a right, and making medical processes available to more Americans, would increase the vitality of our republic. He contended that the criteria we should use to determine whether a process should be considered a right is whether this right grows organically out of the traditions and culture of a society.

John Cunningham drew a distinction between natural rights and societal rights by arguing that societal rights were inalienable and endowed by a Creator. Cunningham based his argument on the Lockean idea that human beings have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of property. He claimed that a right to healthcare would be a "contradictory societal right" because such a right would impinge upon the freedom of a healthcare provider who would be stripped of the right to determine the cost of their services.

The most astonishing discovery of the night was that people's views on the existence or non-existence of a God exert a serious influence on the conception of rights they are likely to embrace.

This week, we will take step back to think about the overall meaning and purpose of Bowdoin College and liberal education. One of the most important statements about the educational mission of our college comes from Joseph McKeen's 1802 address at the College's opening. It reads, "...literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be enabled to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true, that no man should live to himself, we may safely assert, that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education, and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good." Is Bowdoin's emphasis on public engagement and community service furthering the educational aims of the College or harnessing our academic program to a mission that is unrelated, or even detrimental, to a genuine liberal education?

Resolved: The Search for the Common Good is Enriching Liberal Education at Bowdoin College

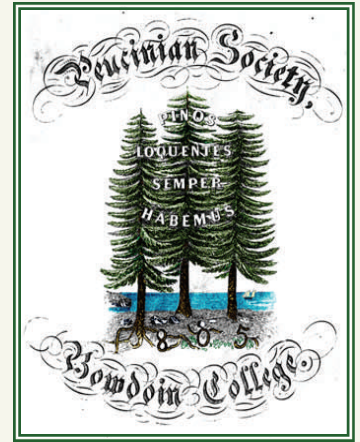
Affirmative: James Anderson '10

Negative: Samuel Smith '10

Thursday, February 4, 2010, 3rd Floor Massachusetts Hall, 7:30 P.M.

Sincerely,

The Peucinian Society Council



Council of Eight

President: Ross D. Jacobs
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Website

<http://studorgs.bowdoin.edu/apps/peucinian/drupal/>

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