

Disputation LII: All Atheism Leads to the Crisis of Nihilism

Dear Peucinian Society,

As you noticed, the scheduled Dino Anderson lecture on "Anorgasmia in Plato's Symposium" was postponed. We will need to wait until later in the month to learn about the provocative theme of "erotic rupture." Last week's disputation on the resolution: **The Green Movement is a Threat to Our Liberty** failed with a vote of 14 nays and 7 yeas.

Steven Robinson accepted the idea that there was a serious "environmental crisis" in our time, but warned that some groups might use the severity of our difficulties as a justification for radical solutions averse to our liberty. Steven warned of the possibility of global administrative centralization featuring authoritarian regulation of every aspect of our lives, a growing "deep ecology" movement that seems willing to sacrifice present liberties, and overweening cap and trade policies that limit economic freedom.

Wesley Hartwell's main point of contention was his claim that the environmental difficulties we face today might actually enrich institutions of local government. He used his experience with the Swiss canton system as an example of local communities coming together to address broad environmental challenges. Hartwell admitted that certain radical strands of environmentalism, notably the Klimaforum in Copenhagen, are a minority, and that prevailing movements tend to, and ought to, seek an approach that finds a "middle way" between Hobbesian environmental authoritarianism and ecologically irresponsible political libertarianism. The evening reached its peak when members began to agree that if we are speaking of some kind of "negative liberty" from governmental control, environmentalism might be dangerous; but if we are speaking of a positive liberty championed by theorists like Rousseau, environmentalism might actually provide emancipatory unity for the peoples of the world.

This week, we will turn to the most important theologico-philosophical question of the past two hundred years and arguably ever: Can human beings find meaning without the existence of God or Gods? Cheerful atheists of our time like Richard Rorty believe this. Some radical scientists like Dawkins believe atheism is a fundamental human responsibility. In the other camp are the "children of Dostoyevsky" who convulse with a palpable existential crisis and worry that "all is permitted" if there is no God and that the ejection of God or Gods from the universe will leave humans without orientation in the world. Can atheists keep their promises? Do they have a basis for morality? Do they have an objective goal for inquiry?

Resolved: All Atheism Leads to the Crisis of Nihilism

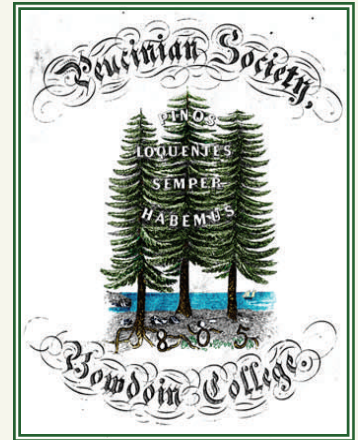
Affirmative: Tobias Nickel '13

Negative: Melanie Tsang '13

Thursday, February 18, 2010, Massachusetts Hall Faculty Room, 7:30 P.M.

Sincerely,

The Peucinian Society Council



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