

Disputation LVI: Humans should strive for utopia

Dear Peucinian Society,

Last Thursday, former Bowdoin professor, Dino Anderson and his friend, Dr. James Stillwagon, led the society in an exploration of Plato's *Symposium*. Attired in togas and ivy wreaths, the society sought to understand the nature of erotic love. Dr. Stillwagon argued Diotima's ladder of love is mythical, while Mr. Anderson challenged his view, stating the ladder leads to glimpses of infinitude. Ultimately, the society voted on the resolution "love exists;" it passed resoundingly with 15 yeas and 3 nays.

The following day, the society heard Mr. Anderson deliver a lecture titled "Anorgasmia in Plato's Symposium: The Educational Significance of Erotic Rupture." He focused on three moments of rupture in the *Symposium* where the word 'suddenly' appears. In complex but clear terms, he argued a successful curriculum is a deliberate coordination of images that ignites an erotic desire in students to become masters of images. Dr. Stillwagon held that civic virtues are located within erotic desire.

This week, we will turn to a topic familiar to Plato – utopias. Originating in Sir Thomas More's Latin novel of the same name, the term 'utopia' reveals the vexed status of the concept it represents. 'Utopia' is a Greek pun on *ou-topos* [no place] and *eu-topos* [good place], an ambiguity that suggests both the desirability of an idyllic realm and the impossibility of such a realm. For centuries, philosophers, theologians, and artists have endeavored to establish what form a utopia should take. Plato's *Republic* envisions a city-state led by philosopher kings; St. Augustine's *City of God* posits a city composed of people who renounce earthly pleasures and give themselves to Christian values; and H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* proposes a unified world state.



Sir Thomas More

Photo from the University of Warwick

Others have sought not only to envision utopias but also to actively create them. Colonialism of the Americas led to a series of attempts to create utopias, such as the Brook Farm in Massachusetts (a venture that Hawthorne would later criticize in *The Blithedale Romance*). Discarding Karl Marx's injunction to allow socialist societies to develop out of historical necessity, Marxists, in various forms, have endeavored to generate the ideal society by adhering to a predetermined blueprint detailing how each person ought to live. While some experiments such as the Brook Farm innocuously fizzled out, others had more catastrophic consequences. Russian communism under Stalin resulted in a horrific totalitarian regime that capriciously murdered its citizens. It is not surprising the brutal wars and regimes of the twentieth century gave birth to a literary preoccupation with dystopias, such as Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World*, which imagines an attempted utopia become an abhorrent dystopia.

Should we strive to create a utopia? Or is such striving a naïve attempt that will only result in the dystopia Huxley fears? Where do you stand?

Resolved: Humans should strive for utopia

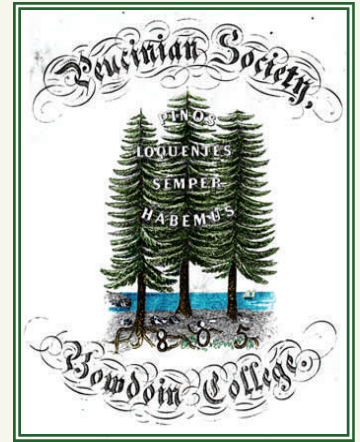
Affirmative: Hannah Lorastein '13

Negative: Nicholas Daniels '12

Thursday, April 8, 2010 Massachusetts Hall Faculty Room, 7:30 P.M.

Sincerely,

The Peucinian Society Council



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