

## Disputation XLIII (Alumni Disputation)

Dear Peucinian Society,

Hopefully all of you had a refreshing fall break. We have five more disputations before Thanksgiving arrives. During this time, we expect several associate members to deliver their disputation and advance towards becoming fellows.

Last week's resolution, "**There is no such thing as a noble lie**" failed with a vote of 14 nays to 7 yeas. The quickly solidifying tradition of featuring two "closers" at the end of each night gave the most passionate members a platform to present their final arguments to the society.

Judah Isseroff '13 opined that lying is often necessary to bring about a more just and compassionate world or to hasten the coming of what he called, "intellectual progress." While Isseroff enumerated several kinds of lying that deserve contempt, he also brought forth political and personal examples where lying can prevent disaster or injustice.

Ursula Moreno-VanderLaan '13 made a valiant attempt to inoculate the Society against Isseroff's arguments by exploring when lying is necessary: in situations created by liars. She contended that the Gentile hiding a Jew in the basement has only to lie to the Gestapo because of the "world of lies" created by the Nazi's in the first place. Moreno-VanderLaan's laudable faith in the power of truth to eradicate injustice from the world was not matched by the Society. The evening was complicated by the suggestion that the search for truth might itself be based on myths, fictions, and lies.

The search for truth is a key component of Peucinian's task, as our mission and constitution have committed us to "maintaining an environment that...celebrates free inquiry." This upcoming Friday, we will consider the social and intellectual preconditions for this "intellectual freedom." Over the past four-hundred years, men and women have brought forth serious arguments that one thing or another is hindering their intellectual freedom.

Milton blamed pre-publication censorship, Paine blamed monarchy, Rousseau blamed oligarchy, and Arendt blamed totalitarianism. Today, the ongoing quest for intellectual freedom continues with some asking, "Is religion holding us back?"

Despite the fact that most western institutions of higher learning dedicated to intellectual freedom were initially religious, the specter of Spinoza, Voltaire, Nietzsche, and now the "new atheists" confronts us with the possibility that religious faith, even if it is necessary for social stability, limits the intellectual freedom of the philosopher. To the champions of Augustine, Maimonides, or the great Christian theological tradition, this suggestion is astonishing and incendiary. Yet we are bombarded with decisive evidence that many intellectual seekers do regard their religious inheritance as an obstacle, rather than a gateway to, truth. Many physicists and scientists see Newton's Christianity as a hindrance, some Muslims reject certain incarnations of their religion as intellectually repressive, and Jews at our college are more likely to have read heretics like Freud or Marx than the Talmud. This week, we will pursue, and indeed celebrate, free inquiry in the company of the Society's alumni.

## Resolved: Religious faith is an obstacle to intellectual freedom.

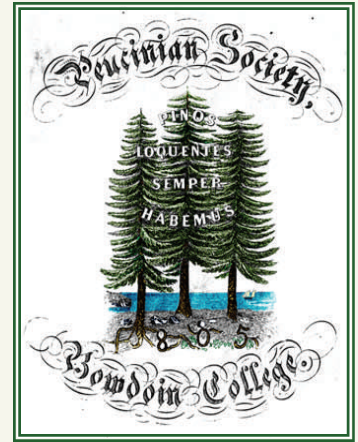
Affirmative: Benjamin Ziomek '13

Negative: Daniel Ertis '13

**Friday**, October 16, 2009

7:30 P.M. 3rd Floor Massachusetts Hall

Yours Truly,  
The Peucinian Society Council



### *Council of Eight*

President:: Ross D. Jacobs  
Provost: Christine M. Carletta  
Mstr. of Sessions: Samuel I. Smith  
Treasurer: John Cunningham  
Chronicer: Nick Daniels  
Herald: Rasha' Harvey  
Impresario: Daniel Jose  
Poet Laureate: Steven Robinson

### *Board of Advisors*

Mr. Faul Franco, Government  
Mr. William Watterson, English  
Mr. Robert Sobak, Classics  
Mrs. Jean Yarbrough, Gov't.  
Mrs. Jill Pearlman, Architecture  
Mr. Scott Sehon, Philosophy  
Mr. Craig McEwen, Sociology  
Ms. Ariel Saiber, Italian  
Mr. Angus King, Fmr. ME Gov.

Mr. Stephen Meardon, Econ

### *Website*

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

### *Address*

380 Smith Union  
Brunswick, ME 04011

### *Phone*

847-212-4682

who came here with “world of ideas” dreams, in our judgment, are not properly nourished. We find this depressing, but it is also an opportunity for the rebirth of liberal education. We believe that much of the continental tradition has collapsed on itself. And now, with Bush out of office, people are not as angry anymore and they realize that there is little positive intellectual life here. We are hoping you can step into this void and bring forth a vision of liberal education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are contacting you specifically because our school has an acute allergy to the conservative or “neoconservative” voices that have called for the rejuvenation of liberal education over the past thirty-five years. Fairly or unfairly, we have lost trust in their motivations and have come to negate their entire project, including their ambiguously genuine call for intellectual diversity. The students and professors at our school are reflexively closed to any thinker that would advocate any kind of sexual restraint and have successfully stifled the voice of anyone who disagrees with them on this topic and will undoubtedly continue to stifle these voices indefinitely.

Many of the best neoconservatives tend to believe that at this point, the liberal academy has shown itself unable to be a self-policing institution. Some, like David Horowitz, are now seeking legislation that would bring more conservative professors here and the GOP platform this year has called for greater political attention to the “leftist thought” coming out of the academies. These are disturbing developments— we are admittedly under the tyranny of professors who have all the liberal maladies you describe in such gruesome detail but we don’t want the Republican party counter-indoctrinating us. Their points about the lack of intellectual diversity here are well taken, but these measures will never work and will only increase hatred for the most reviled philosophy on the planet right now.

Students in the Society believe that you are one of the only thinkers today who has found a politics that reconciles a more traditional liberal education without overly restrictive sexual mores. In our opinion, the need for such a vision has never been greater. We are inviting you to speak in front of our entire school in the Picket Theatre, which can hold upwards of 700 people. If we can find funds that meet your demands, we are hoping to make this speech as epic as the one you delivered at MIT in the 1990s. You would deliver a highly allusive 35-50 minute keynote lecture and then field questions from students and professors. We would like to fly you here any Thursday in April for a whole day. This day will include an informal meeting with a few students and professors in the afternoon, a large lecture in the evening, and possibly participation in a debate with Peucinian Society that night. We can put you up in a nearby hotel on Thursday night and fly you back early Friday morning.

We have a budget of our own from the Student Activities Fund and might be able to get a limited amount of funding from the departments English, Government, Gender and Women Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Religion. In short, we are hoping for a multi-disciplinary, or anti-disciplinary, vision of, and a politics for, a rejuvenated liberal education that somehow navigates between the Scylla of vulgar neoconservatism and the Charybdis of postmodern nihilism. From your writings like *Sexual Personae*, we think such a vision can fruitfully challenge entrenched opinions about sexuality, religion, media, the economy, and art.

Yours,

The Peucinian Society Council

