The Purvis Journal

2025-2026



CRANLEIGH

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Editor's intro

Coco Beaumont



Dear Reader,

> "We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge."
> John Naisbitt

Welcome to the sixth edition of the Purvis Journal.

We live in an age of relentless noise. Screens compete for every spare moment of our attention, and content is increasingly designed not to challenge us but to consume us: faster, shorter, shallower. In this environment, the act of sitting down to read a carefully argued piece of writing, or of writing one yourself, has become something quietly radical. It is a refusal to be passive.

The Purvis Journal exists in that spirit: as proof that young Cranleighans are not only capable of deep, sustained thinking, but are actively choosing it.

When putting together this edition, one ambition above all others guided every decision made in these pages: that wherever you choose to open this Journal, the page you land on should captivate you. Whether you are a seasoned reader of the Purvis Journal or picking it up for the very first time, our hope is that every section offers something that is not only thought-provoking but genuinely accessible, because intellectual curiosity, at its best, should never feel like hard work.

This edition is, as ever, entirely student-led. Every article you will read has been written voluntarily, by students from the IVth form all the way through to the UVIth, each bringing their own perspective, voice, and academic interest to the page. That breadth is one of the Journal's greatest strengths. It is a reminder that academic life at Cranleigh is not confined to the classroom; it spills into debate, into curiosity, into the questions students choose to ask when nobody has told them they have to.

The Journal is divided into five sections. Our Politics section turns its gaze to the wider world, tackling the questions that shape the societies we are inheriting.

Answering the Difficult Question does exactly what it promises: students take on the problems that resist easy answers, approaching them with rigour and imagination in equal measure.

The Dangerous Minds Competition section preserves the best speeches from our annual event, a celebration of persuasion, rhetoric, and bold thinking. Purvis Talk Summaries distil the ideas and insights from our speaker events throughout the year, and finally, the Purvis Year Group Summaries offer a window into the academic life of each year group: a record of what it meant to be a Purvis student this year.

Taken together, these sections reflect something important: that the best learning happens not when a subject is handed to you, but when you pursue it yourself. The Purvis Journal exists because students chose to write, chose to think, and chose to share, and in a world that so rarely encourages any of those things, that is worth celebrating more than ever.

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Editor's intro

Dangerous Minds is an annual speech competition at Cranleigh in which students first apply and pitch their ideas in an interview with Mrs Best, who then selects the final speakers.

The challenge is to present a 'dangerous' idea: to use eight minutes to change the world.

This year's competition showcased a remarkable range of topics and perspectives, delivered by speakers who engaged their audience with originality, courage, and intellectual ambition. The standard was exceptionally high, making the final decision a difficult one for judges Mrs Price and Mr Hopcroft. The three finalists were Riley, Coco, and Emilia, with Coco awarded the overall win.

What follows are the speeches from this year's competition in full. They span conformity and identity, perfection culture, sleep science, linguistic power, wealth inequality, and gender equality. Each one begins from a different premise and arrives somewhere unexpected. That, after all, is the point. Read them as they were delivered: as arguments designed not just to inform, but to unsettle.

8 MINUTES TO CHANGE THE WORLD



The fiction of fitting in

Amaya Ahmed



Why do we laugh at jokes we don't find funny? Why do we check who's around before we answer a question? Amaya's speech cuts to the heart of one of the most quietly damaging forces in modern life: the slow, invisible erosion of who we actually are.

You can't control other people's opinions. You can't control what they say about you. All you can control is how you live, whether you speak honestly, whether you stand by what you believe. So why does that feel almost impossible today? Because one wrong action can turn into complete isolation. Why is it so hard to just say what you think? Why do we check who's around us before we answer a question? Why do we laugh at jokes we don't find funny just so we don't look different?

Because standing alone in a room full of people who are similar is terrifying. The truth is, individuality is disappearing, and it's happening quietly. We are so worried about fitting in that we're slowly forgetting who we actually are, even when no one's around, even before filtering ourselves, even when we aren't needing approval. We live in a world full of carbon copies of each other.

At Cranleigh, it often starts in Fourth Form. We arrived nervous, desperate not to stand out for the wrong reasons. So what do we do? We adapt. We start to dress the same, talk the same, and act the same because being different feels dangerous. The minute someone dresses differently, acts differently, or steps outside what we've silently decided is normal, they get judged. Maybe not always loudly, but subtly: quiet comments, looks, and group chat messages. And that's how individuality begins to shrink.

When was the last time you did something at school purely because you wanted to, not because everyone else was doing it? At school, fitting in is easier than standing out. Standing out requires confidence; fitting in requires silence. We wear the same things every day. The girls in boarding houses wear grey trackies and colourful tank tops; the boys wear sports tracksuits and plain t-shirts. And I'm not judging that, I do it too. Not because I'm lazy, but because sometimes it feels easier not to deal with the judgement that we receive every day from our peers.

And that's the point. It's not about clothes; it's about what they represent. Why is it that if someone wears a full face of makeup every day, they're judged for trying too hard? Why do we care so much about what everyone else is doing? At a boarding school especially, our opinions spread quickly. We live together, eat together, and socialise together. Views become contagious. You defend the people you live with even when they're wrong. You adopt opinions because they're easier than challenging them.

But isn't that just another example of conformity, of choosing comfort over individuality? The truth is, though, that realistically you will not know all the people you choose to agree with in a few years, and even if you do, they aren't the ones depicting the rest of your life; you are. So you need to start making your own decisions and forming your own views, as these people won't be able to shape your opinion forever.

Fundamentally, it's pretty obvious that we constantly conform to society. This isn't just a theory; it has been proven by psychological experiments. In the 1950s, psychologist Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments that revealed something disturbing about human nature. Participants were asked to match line lengths and identify which ones were longer and shorter. The answer was simple and obvious, yet actors were placed in the room to deliberately give the wrong answer. Many participants followed the group even when it was clear they were wrong. Around 75% conformed at least once. Even when the answer was clear, people chose to fit in rather than tell the truth. This is the sad reality: social pressure silences individuality. People are no longer able to trust themselves.

Social media is the new version of Asch's experiment, except now the pressure comes from thousands of people instead of just a few. Trends move fast. One day something is popular; the next day, it's embarrassing. One opinion gets thousands of likes; another gets attacked. On social media, popularity starts to look like truth. When we see

thousands of people agreeing with something, it feels right even if we haven't properly thought about it ourselves. It doesn't just affect what we buy or wear; it affects what we say, what we believe, and sometimes even who we are.

We're constantly scrolling. Video after video. Opinion after opinion. Someone speaks confidently about politics or a big issue, and that becomes our source of information, not because we researched it, not because we checked if it was true, but because it had loads of likes and everyone in the comments agreed. We always want to fit in with a trend, so we change what we want to post, what we wear, and who we are. It is evident that social media is a major influence on why we constantly conform to each other in the 21st century.

There is evidence as to why we let ourselves be so easily influenced. Researchers from Harvard University studying social conformity discovered that social rejection activates the same areas of the brain as physical pain.

Being excluded does not just feel unpleasant; it physically hurts. Not being invited to that party, not being asked to go to dinner, or something as simple as someone not asking how your day has been can physically hurt you. And when you hear this, it makes sense why you would avoid rejection, as it feels like an injury.

But are we really willing to shape our entire identity to avoid temporary pain? Yes, rejection hurts; science has proven it. But pain is supposed to protect us from danger. Since when did having your own opinion become dangerous? So yes, it hurts to be excluded and turned against, but isn't it strange that we let the fear of that pain decide who we are? We would rather betray ourselves than run the risk of not being invited to something.

And this is where the idea of diversity becomes complicated. We say we value it; we celebrate different cultures, backgrounds, and identities. But diversity isn't just what we can see; it is also our different opinions. If people are too afraid to disagree and to challenge a group, then we cannot actually create the diverse environment that we all say we want. We are creating a comfortable and easy one where people aren't challenged. In an environment where only the safest opinions survive and anything else is considered weird or outrageous, different perspectives and views aren't just ignored but rejected because it is easy. Diversity is becoming a slogan, not a reality.

So the real question isn't why we conform, but what we're going to do about it now. Individuality doesn't require a big change; it can start small. Wear something you like even if it's different. Don't ask others what they think; form your own opinion. Don't make fun of someone for doing something different; try to defend them. And most importantly, form your own opinion before asking your friends and looking at comments. Ask yourself: do I actually think this, or am I just repeating it? Look into politics and the news and try to form your own thoughts and views, rather than believing the first thing you see.

At school, the bravest thing you can do is not stand out dramatically. It's maybe talking to someone new, not joining in when someone is being judged, or posting something you care about rather than something you think will get likes. This requires consistency, and suddenly standing out won't feel so daunting because this confidence will spread to our peers. We can't control what people say or think. But you can control whether you stay silent and follow the crowd. So maybe the real legacy you leave to this community isn't how well you fit in, but how much of an impact you can make standing alone, confidently.



When ‘perfect’ becomes dangerous

Emilia Anchordoqui-Petersen | Runner-up



We grow up thinking danger is something loud. For Emilia, it was silent. In one of the most courageous speeches ever delivered at Dangerous Minds, Emilia speaks openly about her experience with anorexia for the first time, and asks why we are so willing to let an industry built on our insecurities take everything from us.

We grow up thinking danger is something loud: sirens, fire, something obvious. But for women, it is silent: a reflection in the mirror they fear to look at, the number on the scale they fear to step on. The body we chase, the body we feel we must apologise for, that is danger. It is in the word ‘perfect,’ something that sounds so innocent, harmless, even inspiring, until you realise the lengths girls will go to in order to attain the unattainable. Tonight, I’m here to challenge how social media use is generating unrealistic standards of perfection, and how you need to aim to change your harmful habits. I want to talk about how something so admired became something so destructive, and why the most dangerous thing about perfection is that it simply doesn’t exist.

At the age of 13, I was diagnosed with anorexia. At the age of 15, I was released from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. I am now 16, and I have never openly spoken about my experience until this very moment. At just 13, I believed there was a version of me that would finally be enough, if I just looked different, acted different, took up less space. Social media was the root of it all. Every scroll felt like proof that everyone else had figured out how to be perfect, and I hadn’t. I didn’t tell anyone because I was embarrassed. I was scared that if people knew, they’d look at me differently, because being anorexic is not written in the books as perfect. So I stayed silent. I didn’t want pity. I didn’t want attention. And the same still applies here: I’m not asking for you to feel sorry for me; I am here to be the voice for those trapped in this sad reality.

Chasing perfection didn’t make me better; it made me hide. Now, three years later, I can see how dangerous that was. I realise that surviving what I went through is greater than perfection ever will be. Writing this speech gave me the courage to finally say it out loud, because perfection nearly cost me my life, but I won’t let it take my voice. What I was experiencing wasn’t personal failure; it was a system working exactly as designed. Beauty standards are constantly changing, never stable, never achievable, because if we ever reached them, the industry constructed from our insecurities would collapse.

Media, advertising, and the algorithm don’t just enhance our insecurities; they create them, feed them, and profit from them. It’s about control. Women’s insecurities are holding together an industry-designed system where perfection is supposedly achievable. But if perfection were achievable, they wouldn’t keep redefining it. By the time girls reach their early teens, research shows that over 50% say they want to change the way they look. Insecurity is learned before confidence ever has a chance to grow. Research across dozens of countries links social media use to higher anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and self-worth issues in teenagers. It is not a coincidence; it’s a pattern. Platforms know that when insecurity increases, engagement increases.

A study on this topic was published by psychologists Thomas Curran and Andrew Hill in 2019. They analysed data from over 40,000 college students across 27 years. They found that all forms of perfectionism are rising, but one in particular is skyrocketing: the rise of socially prescribed perfectionism, the feeling that your social environment will only value you if you are perfect, and it is seeing a 33% increase. But how can you be something that doesn’t exist? When will we wake up and realise that people are profiting from the way we hate ourselves, and we are doing nothing to stop it? We wouldn’t let teenagers smoke for six hours a day, yet we let them consume content proven to damage their mental and physical health for potentially longer than six hours a day.

New research finds that self-critical perfectionism is directly proportional to higher screen time and social media use. Stepping away from your screen more often could ease the effects this is having on society. Be pretty, but not threatening. Confident, but don’t be too loud. Curvy, but not bulky. Skinny, but not a twig. Dress modestly, but not boring. Dress sexy, but don’t ask for attention. Be natural, but wear makeup. And this isn’t something only women carry. Men are handed their own impossible standards too: be strong, be silent, never struggle, and never break. They are taught that vulnerability is weakness and that asking for help makes them less of a man.

So while women are pressured to be perfect from the outside, men are pressured to be perfect on the inside. Different expectations, same damage. To be a perfect man, you must have the perfect emotions, which is to say, none at all. Can’t you see the issue? The danger? The expectation to be perfect is not only changing society; it is taking lives. Speaking out and helping to change societal expectations is greater than perfection ever will be. Perfection was never supposed to be the goal; it was the trap set by society. And if you don’t change your harmful habits on social media and on your phone, you will be feeding into the problem. You are adding fuel to a fire that is burning down society.



Image from Pixabay

The truth about sleep deprivation

Riley Osborne | Runner-up

How tired do you feel right now? Riley's speech reveals that the exhaustion students feel is not laziness, not weakness, and not a personal failing. It is biology. And the institutions meant to support young people are, quite literally, working against them.



How tired do you feel right now? Do you ever wonder why you're so tired? Let's have a show of hands: how many of you are feeling tired? A lot of you. Well, Cranleigh is a busy place, so it doesn't come as a surprise. But do you ever wonder why you are so tired so much of the time at school? It's simple: not just Cranleigh, but schools across the world are inadvertently depriving students of their sleep. This is a substantially overlooked societal problem that has not yet been addressed.

At Cranleigh, Fourth Formers who want to get to breakfast on time have to wake up as early as 6:30, and for most Sixth Formers, around 40 minutes later at ten past seven, give or take a few minutes. And yes, we are capable of managing these early wake-ups, but the fact is that these school schedules are neither healthy nor convenient for teenagers. The importance of our sleep is dismissed by our superiors, seemingly in all schools, which leads to students experiencing dips in academic performance, happiness, and physical health. Simply put, the schedule is completely wrong, and here's why.

School schedules don't line up with teenagers' circadian rhythms. Both adults and younger children find early wake-ups and bedtimes appropriate for the times of day where they feel they need to sleep or wake up. However, as children go through adolescence, their circadian rhythms experience a biological shift. Your circadian rhythm is essentially your body's assigned sleep schedule, or body clock, located in your hypothalamus, and it represents the times of day where you begin to feel tired or ready to wake up. When the body needs to go to sleep, it releases a hormone called melatonin. For adults, this occurs around 9 to 10 p.m.; however, for teenagers, the release of melatonin is delayed, and it can start as late as 1 a.m. Therefore, a substantial gap is left between students' bedtimes and when they actually start to feel tired. This means that we, as students, are too alert and awake by the time we are required to sleep if we want a substantial time in bed before breakfast. Every school schedule is therefore vastly inappropriate for teenagers, the very people it is attempting to support, as it is literally depriving us of our precious rest.

School timings are actively counteracting our circadian rhythms, aligned as they are with the sleep schedules of young children and adults when they should be geared towards those of a growing teenager. This problem is unintentional. School management teams aren't actively trying to deprive us of our sleep. The schedule works for teachers and management, as explained, because these timings perfectly align with their own circadian rhythms, so it doesn't seem like a problem and thus goes unnoticed. Therefore, every day teenage students experience a severe burden that completely flies under the radar of student wellbeing measures, which is the most important priority for Cranleigh and all schools.

Now I want to talk about the importance of this sleep. The immediate lack of sleep for students can cause chronic sleep deprivation, which can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety and could also significantly worsen students' learning capability and mental health.

A study from the National Institute of Health showed that teenage students who were limited to six and a half hours of sleep per night had much higher stress and anxiety levels than when they had ten hours of sleep. I now want to ask: how many of you use alarms to wake up at school? Raise your hand. Keep your hand raised if you rely on your alarm to wake you up and, if it wasn't there, you would still be asleep. Again, a lot of you.
The fact you need an alarm to wake up is the simplest way your body tells you that you need more sleep. Students across the world use alarms every morning; unbeknownst to them, every day they need it, they aren't getting enough rest. Let's say they attend around 180 days of school per year and they would have preferred to sleep for two or so more hours; they miss out on 360 hours of sleep per year from school alone. Your use of alarm clocks is evidence for the possibility that you are developing a state of chronic and cumulative sleep debt.

Now let's say you had a really bad night of sleep and, on top of the fact that your melatonin release is delayed as a teenager, you fall asleep at around 3 a.m. This results in you getting around four hours of sleep. According to the scientific studies of sleep expert Dr Matthew Walker, limiting your sleep to four hours for one night results in a 70% decrease of components in your immune system called natural killer cells. A fact about natural killer cells worth knowing is that they are the only cells in your body able to recognise cancer. So, one night alone of sleeping for four hours or less decreases their numbers drastically, and bear in mind that natural killer cells identify cancerous cells in your body every day. How many nights have you only had four hours of sleep?

If you sleep another night for less than four hours, you lose 70% of those cells again, meaning if on the first day you started with 100, you had 30 on the second day, and then on the third you had only nine. In two days alone, you are able to decrease your fighting chances against cancer by a staggering 91%. Cancer is the second largest human killer in the world behind cardiovascular disease; it seems extraordinary that this problem is dismissed weekly as something you just have to push through. Fortunately, we can regenerate these cells after a night of adequate sleep for an appropriate time period; however, long-term sleep deprivation of around six hours consistently can still decrease the numbers of these cells over time.



Image from Pixabay

So, there is clear evidence that this schedule just isn't appropriate. However, there are solutions, and they work for schools. It's difficult to make such a drastic change to the shape of the day as it aligns very closely to the working day of adults. Even a 30-minute to one-hour pushback of the schedule would make a difference, improving mood and functioning in students, which I'm sure the teachers wouldn't mind at all.

In 2016, a public school in Seattle pushed school times back by 55 minutes, which gave students an average of 35 minutes of extra sleep; this resulted in better attendance and even higher grades. They are not the only school to have tried this.

Now I've done my job, I've said my piece, and I've made the school aware of this problem, but it's now up to them to fix it. If not, they are actively contradicting their main goal of optimising students' safety and wellbeing. By forcing teenagers to wake up early and actively defying the way we students are naturally wired, our school systems are depriving us of our sleep, which ultimately impacts our cognitive ability, mental health, and could even lead to chronic sleep deprivation. Teenagers' circadian rhythms don't align with current schedules, the impact on our wellbeing is real, and it increases our chances of cancer. We have evidence-based solutions for this, but these start with change. It's about time we prioritised students' wellbeing to truly allow them to reach their full potential.

English is not neutral

Tiana Iiriti



You probably haven't thought about why English is the global language. Not just that it is, but why. Tiana's speech will make you think about it differently, and once you do, it is very difficult to go back to seeing it as simply useful or convenient.

How many of you have ever thought about why English is the global language? Not just that it is, but why. Most of us grow up believing something very simple: English spread because it is useful, because it is easy, and because it connects the world. But what if that story is not actually true? What if English is not just a convenient tool? What if it is power? English doesn't just connect the world. It shapes whose ideas are heard, whose voices are valued, and whose culture dominates.

English feels neutral. It feels like a bridge, a shared language, something practical. But the linguist Robert Phillipson calls it something very different. He calls it linguistic imperialism. His argument is uncomfortable: the global dominance of English is not accidental. It is the continuation of historical power structures through language, first through empire, then through economics, then through culture. And once you start noticing it, it becomes very difficult to ignore.

Take science. Today, over 90% of articles in major scientific journals are published in English. That means if you are a researcher in Brazil, Japan, or Germany, you cannot just have good ideas; you must first write those ideas in perfect English. Studies show that non-native English academics spend far longer writing papers, often pay thousands for professional editing, and are more likely to be rejected because of language clarity. Think about that. Your research might be brilliant, your data might be groundbreaking, but if your English is not good enough, your work might never be taken seriously. Fluency becomes a gatekeeper. Intelligence is not enough; ideas are not enough. First, you must master our language. In other words, English decides who gets to participate in the global conversation. That is not equality; that is hierarchy. The same pattern is starting to appear in technology. Many artificial intelligence systems, including tools like ChatGPT, are trained on huge amounts of English-language data. That means English is not only shaping global research; it is starting to shape how new technologies understand the world and generate knowledge.

Now let's look at universities. Most of the top universities in the world are in the United States or the United Kingdom. And even when they are not, something interesting happens: they still teach in English. Universities in the Netherlands, Sweden, and South Korea increasingly offer entire degrees in English, meaning students might study subjects like engineering or economics in English even though it is not the country's own language. This is called English-Medium Instruction. The idea is simple: teach in English to attract international students and climb global rankings.

But research shows serious consequences. Students speaking in a second language participate less confidently, they simplify complex ideas, and they struggle to express nuance. Over time, something else happens too: academic vocabulary in the national language begins to disappear. Whole intellectual traditions slowly shrink. Higher education becomes more global, but also more linguistically uniform. What looks like globalisation is really English imposing a single way of thinking on knowledge worldwide.

The consequences go deeper than universities. According to UNESCO, around 40% of the world's languages are endangered. There are over 7,000 languages in the world, and it is currently estimated that a language disappears roughly every two weeks. When a language dies, we do not just lose words. We lose oral histories, cultural metaphors, ecological knowledge, and entire ways of understanding the world. When a language disappears, culture disappears with it. And very often, the language replacing it is English.
There is also something more subtle happening. Language shapes how we think. Take something as simple as love. In English, you say 'I love you' for everything: your friends, your family, your partner. One phrase fits all. In Italian, it's different. You say ti voglio bene to a friend or family member; it expresses deep affection but isn't romantic. You say ti amo to a romantic partner. Two completely different feelings, two completely different words. English merges them into one. That is more than grammar; that is how English shapes thought. And when English dominates globally, it privileges one way of seeing the world over countless others.

There is one more example worth thinking about.
During colonial rule in parts of Africa, European powers imposed their languages in schools: English, French, and Portuguese. Students were often punished for speaking their own languages. The goal was simple: to reshape education, government, and identity around the colonial language. Even after independence, many countries kept those languages as official languages. Why? Because by then, they had become the languages of power, education, and opportunity. Language had reshaped the system itself.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described language as a form of capital, something that gives you social and economic power. Right now, English is the most valuable linguistic capital in the world. If you are a native English speaker, you automatically begin ahead in international job markets, academic conferences, diplomacy, global media, and publishing. Everyone else has to learn your language; you almost never have to learn theirs. That imbalance shapes opportunity everywhere.

And then there is culture. English dominates Hollywood, global news, Silicon Valley, and social media. Content in English spreads faster. Algorithms push English content further. Global movements often start in English-speaking spaces before they spread elsewhere. That is not just communication. That is soft power: the ability to influence others through culture, ideas, and attraction rather than force. And soft power is incredibly effective because it is almost invisible.

Which brings me to something slightly uncomfortable: schools like ours. Every year, fewer students take languages. And honestly, it makes sense. English works almost everywhere. You can travel the world, study abroad, work internationally, and survive almost entirely in English. But that is exactly the privilege. Across Europe, most students grow up bilingual. In many parts of Africa and Asia, people speak three or four languages. Multilingualism is normal. Monolingualism is not normal; it is the luxury of dominance. If you never need to learn another language, it means the world has already adjusted to you.
So here is the real question: if one language dominates science, universities, politics, media, and culture, whose worldview becomes the default? Whose metaphors shape global debates? Whose definitions of progress win? English absolutely connects the world. That part is true. But it also flattens it.

I am not arguing that we should abolish English. That would be ridiculous. But I am arguing that we should stop pretending it is neutral. Because it is not. And maybe that is exactly why learning another language matters, not just for travel, not just for exams, but because the moment you struggle to express yourself in another language, the moment you cannot find the right word, the moment you realise how hard it is to explain a simple idea, you suddenly understand something. You understand how much power your own language gives you. And maybe changing the world does not always start with louder voices. Maybe it starts with recognising whose voices we have centred all along.

When wealth becomes inequality: a maximum wage policy

Emmie Hepburn

Two people sit in the front row. One will die from starvation. The other has more money than the rest of the room combined. Emmie's speech doesn't just diagnose the problem of extreme wealth inequality; it proposes a radical, carefully argued solution, and dares you to find a reason it wouldn't work.



I want you all to imagine, just for a second, that this speech hall is representative of the global population. Ten percent of you live a comfortable lifestyle; you have more than you need. Forty percent of you make enough to get by. Forty percent of you don't know where your next meal is coming from. Ten percent of you can't afford food at all. Let's focus on two of you in this room, both sat in the front row, maybe even sat next to each other. One of you will die from starvation, and the other has more money than the rest of the room combined. While we debate the rising cost of a cup of coffee, they are controlling the world's resources and puppeteering global politics. Tonight, I am here to convince you that the most dangerous thing we can do for our future is allowing a few people to run the world, while the rest of us try to survive in it.

I am proposing, for the future of our society, we implement a hard limit on personal wealth and accumulation. The top 0.01% of the population own more than the bottom half combined. That is an abomination. It is proof of a failed society which allows individuals to gain billions of dollars above what they require to live a more than comfortable life while others starve and freeze to death. This must change. No individual should have the right to consume resources at a level that not only prevents others from meeting their basic needs but also simultaneously destroys our planet. In a world full of extreme wealth which goes beyond leading a prosperous life, it means that there is excess money sitting in a pile, growing and growing, which could be used for a much greater purpose. That money could be used for something so much more progressive and powerful, such as tackling global poverty and world hunger. We must aim to cease the idea that validation and societal acceptance are defined by the number of zeros at the end of your bank balance.

I propose a maximum wage: a legal limit or cap on how much an individual can earn. This is implemented through a 100% tax on any income over a certain amount annually, for example 1.5 million pounds. Having this limit as a fixed amount not only allows for wealth variation throughout the world, but also limits the concentration of wealth as seen today. It would allow for a more understanding, democratic, and equal world. The money taken after the tax would be used to eliminate poverty and put an end to world hunger.

Let me be clear: I'm not Robin Hood. This would not be giving the money of the rich to the poor. It is a system that balances the extremes of wealth distribution while still encouraging creativity, entrepreneurship, and hard work. Without the pressure of as much competition for the highest salaries and extreme bonuses, the environment in an office will shift from vicious competition to a collaborative and productive setting. It is a system which enables a wealth gap of a healthy and stable size which allows society to function. It is a system which would not discourage education, well-paying jobs, or new discoveries; instead, it is a system that would promote a more balanced approach to money and the ultra-rich.

This is the solution. Originally proposed by Ingrid Robeyns, this idea questions what we believe about society and challenges some of the most widely accepted views of both the economy and the way society functions. But the reality is, if we do not begin to challenge and reform the society we live in, it will reach a point where individuals own trillions while more and more people suffer and starve.

Now let's talk numbers, because it is all well and good explaining the policy, but without a realistic proposal of how it would work, the idea means nothing. According to the Forbes Billionaires list from 2025, there are 2,781 billionaires in the world. Together they are worth a total of 14.2 trillion US dollars. If each billionaire was limited to 10 million dollars in assets as well as a 1.5 million dollar annual income, this policy would generate around 14 trillion US dollars. Ending world hunger is estimated to cost 400 billion US dollars per year and ending poverty a further 300 billion US dollars, totalling 0.7 trillion US dollars a year. Therefore, it is fair and justified to say that with this policy we can end world hunger and global poverty for good.

Most of you in this room would agree that democracy is one of the fundamental principles allowing our society to function and flourish. You would probably say that democracy is what keeps our politics fair and equal. I want to challenge that. The political system as we know it today may be democratic, but it is certainly not fair. It is a system centred around allowing the rich to get richer while keeping the poor poor. Who knows, maybe even in 100 years the planet will be unsafe to live on and we will have to evacuate, but who do you think will be the priority to get off the planet? The world as we know it is spiralling out of control; we are living in what will soon be a dystopian reality where every single aspect of society is designed to serve and protect the ultra-rich.

But we still have time; we are not yet living in this dystopian world. The implementation of this maximum wage policy solidifies our future as one of equality, fair representation, and political stability. This idea is dangerous because it flips the structure of society as we know it on its head, but it is necessary in ensuring that we don't end up in a reality where half the population is starving and the other half is living off-planet throwing lavish parties. Together we have the opportunity to ensure that the whole planet now has enough to eat. Let's not waste it.



The equality paradox

Coco Beaumont | Winner

Coco's winning speech doesn't tell you what to think. It does something more unsettling: it asks you to question what you already think you know. On gender, equality, and the assumptions buried so deep we've stopped noticing them, this is precisely the kind of dangerous idea the competition was made for.

It would be easy to stand here tonight and spend seven minutes presenting the right statistics, the right stories, and the right emotional cues to persuade you to see the world exactly as I do. But the most powerful ideas, the most dangerous ones, aren't the ones that tell you what to think. They're the ones that force you to question what you already believe to be true. In the wise words of Mrs Thatcher: 'Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't.'

Dangerous ideas, the ones that truly shape societies, don't need to shout. Instead they quietly dismantle the assumptions we think are obvious. One of those assumptions sits right at the heart of modern society: the notion that the question of men and women is already close to being solved. Because on paper, things have never looked better. Women today have more legal rights, more educational access, and more career opportunities than at any other point in human history. That's, of course, something to be proud of. Yet, for a generation told it has never had it better, there is also a great deal of unhappiness. Women are now expected to succeed in every sphere simultaneously. Professionally accomplished. Effortlessly attractive. Independent but still desirable. Nurturing but never dependent. Liberation might have removed limits, but it did not remove expectations. It just expanded the checklist.

It is not just women who are unhappy. Men are reporting record levels of loneliness. Purpose, role, direction, the things that once defined masculinity, feel entirely unclear. When women are told they no longer need men, and men are told their traditional traits are toxic, it isn't surprising that something begins to feel wrong. So if equality has progressed so far, why does the relationship between men and women still feel unresolved? To answer that question, we have to step back from politics entirely. Because the issue may not actually be about men and women at all. It may be about something much deeper.

Human beings have always struggled with difference. History has taught us that when two groups are different from one another, we do not simply observe that difference. We turn it into conflict. Wars, political divisions, persecution: again and again they emerge from the same impulse. The persecution of millions of Jews across centuries, culminating in the Holocaust, is a devastating example of what can happen when difference is turned into division. The moment human beings encounter difference, we don't just sit comfortably with it. We weaponise it, or worse, we attempt to erase it entirely.

But difference isn't always a bad thing; it does something else as well. Long before it becomes political, it becomes practical. Human beings instinctively organise themselves around difference. When children play, they assign roles almost automatically. A little girl lines up her dolls and decides who cares, who works, who protects. There is no ideology, no manifesto. Just an intuitive understanding that roles give shape to the world. For centuries, however, that difference was distorted into hierarchy. Women were confined. Men were hardened. Liberation was therefore necessary. But this raises a really difficult question: in dismantling patriarchy, did we begin dismantling the distinction itself?

Somewhere along the way we began to assume that equality requires men and women to be the same, as though the only way to prevent difference from becoming oppressive is to dissolve it entirely. But when structure disappears without being replaced, people do not feel liberated. They feel adrift. And this raises an even more uncomfortable question. How can we empower a group we refuse to define? For decades, the fight for equality relied on recognising women as a distinct group with distinct experiences and barriers. Progress was made precisely because those differences were acknowledged. But if the line between man and woman becomes so blurred that the categories themselves disappear, we risk erasing the very framework that allowed equality to advance in the first place. Equality cannot exist in isolation. It requires understanding the past.

The irony is that the old system was never capable of working either. Because patriarchy relies on an impossible assumption: that four billion men can be treated as one category and four billion women as another, defined purely by chromosomes and expected to behave accordingly. Human beings are not that simple. Yes, there are some women who thrive in traditional roles, while others feel called elsewhere. The same is true for men. To assume half of humanity must live one way, and the other half another, is not just restrictive. It is mathematically absurd. A society built on sweeping generalisations is bound to fail. And when people attempt to defend those rigid roles, they almost always turn to the same argument: they say it is simply natural. I once used that argument myself. But the natural world does not tell a simple story of male dominance. In a beehive, the entire colony revolves around the queen. In lion prides, it is the lionesses who hunt. Even in some species of spider, the female is so dominant she may consume the male after reproduction. In other words, nature is not organised around a simple hierarchy. It is organised around variation, complexity, and most importantly, balance.

That is the real lesson. Human beings are not identical, but neither are we predictable. The challenge of equality is not to erase difference, nor is it to imprison people within it. It is to understand difference without turning it into hierarchy. I would love to end this speech by providing a clear answer, a solution to everything I have just described. But the reason this idea is so dangerous is that I cannot do that, nor can you. Problems that are this deeply rooted in human nature do not disappear because we declare them solved. Which means the question of men and women is not finished. It is the most dangerous idea our society is yet to confront. I'll leave you with this: a society that assumes a question has been solved is a society that has stopped thinking.



Editor's intro

This section explores the workings of both British and American politics, examining the systems themselves as well as the figures and events that have come to define them. From the constitutional mechanics of Westminster and Washington to the personalities reshaping the political landscape on both sides of the Atlantic, the articles collected here offer analysis that is rigorous, opinionated, and entirely student-written.

The section opens deliberately with two foundational pieces explaining how the British and American political systems actually function, followed by a comparative analysis of the two. Readers who wish to build their understanding before diving into the more argumentative pieces are encouraged to start there. Those already familiar with the basics are equally welcome to jump straight to whichever headline catches their eye.

Whether you already follow politics closely or are simply curious about the world you are inheriting, there is something in these pages for you.



The British and American political systems: a guide and comparison

Alfie, Tabi, and Tom | LVIth

Two nations, one language, and two profoundly different ideas about how power should work. In a specially collaborative piece, three sixth-form students take apart the British and American political systems from the inside out, before setting them side by side to reveal what their differences tell us about democracy itself.

Part I: The British System
Alfie

The UK is a unitary state, meaning that power is kept and regulated by one central authority: Westminster, the home of the UK Parliament. This means that Parliament is sovereign, making it the highest legal authority in the UK. Westminster is the sovereign legislature for the entire UK, holding power over all matters, whilst devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland handle specific local matters such as education, health and justice.

Due to the decentralisation of power from Westminster to the devolved assemblies, it can be argued that the UK is a quasi-federal state, as power is shared between a central authority and other constituent assemblies but with a strong bias toward the central government. Westminster is bicameral, meaning that it has two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons is the elected lower chamber of Westminster with 650 seats representing the 650 constituencies that the UK is divided into, with each constituency encompassing roughly 70,000 electors. Each general election (which must happen every five years unless called earlier), constituents vote for an MP (Member of Parliament) to represent their constituency in the House of Commons, using the majoritarian First Past the Post electoral system: a winner-takes-all system in which the candidate with the most votes wins outright. The party with the majority of seats can then form a government. The House of Commons is responsible for making laws, approving taxation and holding the government accountable for their actions. For a bill to become a law, it must be agreed upon by the majority of the Commons, with MPs voting representatively on behalf of their constituents as well as their party. Every Wednesday at noon, Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) take place in the Commons, in which the Prime Minister and their cabinet are effectively grilled by MPs about government policies and decisions. The Speaker of the House of Commons, currently Sir Lindsay Hoyle, is responsible for chairing debates in the Commons, ensuring that rules are followed whilst remaining politically neutral. The Speaker does not take part in debates or vote, unless there is a tie in which case they would have the deciding vote. As the House of Commons is democratically elected, unlike the unelected House of Lords, it holds a democratic mandate with which it can override the Lords, making it the primary chamber and ultimate legislative authority of Parliament.

The House of Lords is the unelected upper chamber of Westminster, with over 800 seats. Although the Lords is referred to as the 'Upper Chamber', its authority is considerably less than that of the House of Commons. The composition of the Lords includes 26 Lords Spiritual (Bishops from the Church of England), 92 hereditary peers and the rest are life peers. The number of hereditary peers, people who inherit their peerage, was reduced to 92 in 1999 under then Prime Minister Tony Blair's House of Lords Act. The current Labour government has proposed reforms to remove hereditary peers from the chamber altogether. Life peers are usually appointed for their skills and specialism, such as former Prime Ministers including David Cameron and Theresa May, who now sit as life peers. The Lords' primary function is to review, scrutinise and propose amendments to bills suggested by the Commons; a bill must pass through both Houses of Parliament before becoming a law. Often this scrutiny can lead to parliamentary 'ping-pong' between the Houses as legislation is reviewed, such as the End of Life Bill which has seen over 1,000 amendments proposed in the Lords alone. The Lords can delay legislation but not block it, and the Salisbury Convention ensures that the Lords cannot oppose, delay or block legislation that was promised in the governing party's manifesto. The Lords' scrutinising function is crucial for ensuring that laws are as specific and objective as possible to avoid potential ambiguity or misuse.

The UK constitution is uncodified, meaning that it has evolved over centuries rather than being written in one single document. Much of the constitution is written down in major acts of Parliament, such as the Magna Carta of 1215, the Bill of Rights in 1689 and the Human Rights Act of 1998, as well as common law: laws developed by judges in courts. As a result of the UK constitution being uncodified it is also unentrenched, meaning that it is not fully judiciable. Judges do not have legal standards against which they can declare actions of other bodies as unconstitutional. Whilst this lack of entrenchment can mean that important parts of the constitution (such as the Human Rights Act) lack protection from arbitrary rule and are vulnerable to change, it also allows for flexibility, which has been seen in the devolution of power to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in 1997 as well as the creation of a Supreme Court in 2009.

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the UK, created to hear appeals on significant legal and constitutional matters. The Court ensures laws and government actions are applied correctly and remains independent of Parliament and the government, upholding the rule of law.

It is important to note the role of the monarchy in the UK's political system. The monarch, King Charles III, is the UK's Head of State, possessing the ability to appoint the Prime Minister and dissolve or prorogue (suspend) Parliament. In practice, these powers lie with the Prime Minister and Parliament to respect democratic procedure in the UK. The monarch also has the power to veto legislation passing through Parliament, but this power is effectively dormant as it has not been used since 1707. Moreover, the Prime Minister meets the monarch weekly at Their Majesty's residence to be consulted, advised and warned. These meetings are private, with no notes taken. The monarchy plays a stabilising constitutional role and acts as a symbolic safeguard within the UK's system of parliamentary democracy. The symbolic traditional power of the monarch prevents too much power being concentrated in one person or institution. No British Prime Minister can establish themselves as a figure above politics and the legal system, as the dormant power of Crown veto on legislation could be re-awoken.

In conclusion, the UK's Parliament functions within a unique constitutional framework where ultimate power lies with Westminster. Although devolution, judicial independence and constitutional conventions add layers of complexity, parliamentary supremacy is still the key aspect of British politics. The way the House of Commons, House of Lords, judiciary, and monarchy interact helps maintain both democratic accountability and stability in the system.

Part II: The American System
Tom

It all is based on the framework of the United States Constitution adopted in 1787. The Constitution established a structure with federalism and a separation of powers. These principles were put in place to prevent tyranny and to allow for individuals to have rights while also enabling effective governance.

What is federalism? It is a system which divides power between the federal government (the government of the whole nation) and the states. The federal government has powers over the military, tax imports and exports, immigration, foreign affairs and minting money. The shared powers include taxation, law making, building roads, law enforcement and setting up courts. Powers the states have are police and fire departments, public health and safety, gun control and establishing local government.

The constitution does not just divide powers between the states and the federal government. It also divides power horizontally among three branches of government: the executive, legislative and judicial. This separation of powers ensures that no single branch can dominate the government, preventing tyranny and a consolidation of power. Each branch has distinct responsibilities and the ability to check the others.
The Executive Branch is headed by the President, who is currently Donald Trump. The President serves as both the head of state and the head of the government. The President is responsible for enforcing the laws passed by Congress, commanding the armed forces and conducting foreign policy. To do this the President is supported by the Vice President (currently JD Vance), the Cabinet and heads of federal agencies.

The Legislative Branch refers to the US Congress, which is a bicameral legislature containing both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is the lower house with 435 members. The Senate is the upper house with 100 representatives, two from each of the 50 states. While members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms and are all re-elected at the same time, Senators serve staggered six-year terms, with only one-third of the Senate up for election every two years. Congress has a number of responsibilities. These include making and amending laws, voting on Presidential appointments (people nominated by the President to take on certain jobs, such as heads of federal agencies or judges on the Supreme Court), the formal power to declare war and investigating the work of government or federal departments.

The Judicial Branch is the federal court system. The highest court in the US is the Supreme Court. The role of the Supreme Court is to interpret the constitution and make decisions on the rule of law. There are nine Supreme Court judges. There are also other federal courts established by Congress, such as the United States district courts that try most federal cases and courts of appeal to review decisions from district courts that have been appealed against. Supreme Court Justices and Federal Judges are nominated by the President and approved by Congress. They serve until retirement or death. In theory, Congress can impeach and remove a Justice or Federal Judge from office, but this has only happened once.

Changing the United States Constitution is intentionally difficult as it is codified (set out in a single document) and entrenched (difficult to change). First, an amendment must be approved by two-thirds of both houses of the United States Congress. Then, three-quarters of the states must agree to it. This high requirement means that any change needs very strong support across the country, not just from one political party or region. The process is made deliberately hard so the Constitution stays stable and is not changed too easily or too quickly.

Following the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012, President Obama attempted to change gun laws. The difficulty of changing laws and the structure of the American system made it hard for him to implement new gun control measures. Even though the President can propose policies and encourage Congress to act, he cannot pass laws on his own. Any major gun reform had to be approved by both houses of Congress, where there was strong political disagreement and opposition. In addition, debates over the constitution, especially the Second Amendment, made gun policy highly controversial. Because the system requires both broad support and cooperation between branches, it was difficult to pass significant federal gun legislation during his presidency.

In conclusion, the American political system is defined by the Constitution's careful distribution of power. The system of federalism divides authority between national and state governments and the separation of powers divides authority among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Though complex and sometimes slow, this structure reflects the constitutional commitment to balancing effective government with the protection of liberty.

Part III: Comparing the Two
Tabi

Few countries are as closely linked as the United Kingdom and the United States, yet their political systems are built on fundamentally different ideas about how power should be organised, limited and exercised. While both states emphasise democracy, representation and the rule of law, the principles underpinning their governments diverge significantly. The UK system is rooted in Parliamentary sovereignty, meaning that Parliament ultimately holds the highest authority and can alter the literal constitution through ordinary legislation. In contrast, the United States is built upon Constitutional supremacy, where the written Constitution stands above all other government institutions and strictly limits the actions of government.

The difference reveals a broader philosophical divide: the British system prioritises flexibility and political accountability through Parliament, while the American system emphasises constitutional stability and checks on power. These contrasting priorities are reflected in the structure of their legislatures, executives, supreme courts and distribution of power.

Legislature
A key distinction between the two systems lies in the relationship between the legislature and the executive. In the United Kingdom, the executive is drawn directly from Parliament. The Prime Minister and Cabinet must be members of Parliament, which creates a fusion of powers between the legislative and executive branches. When a governing party holds a parliamentary majority, it usually has significant control over the legislative agenda. During the Brexit crisis, for example, the withdrawal agreement negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May was rejected by the Commons three times, highlighting Parliament's ability to block government policy. However, following the decisive victory of Boris Johnson in December 2019, the government was able to pass the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 relatively quickly, demonstrating how a strong parliamentary majority can allow legislation to move through Westminster with remarkable speed.

In contrast, the United States operates under a strict separation of powers, where the executive and legislature are independent. Members of Congress cannot simultaneously serve within the executive branch; cabinet members and department heads cannot be congressmen. This ensures that each branch acts as a check on the others, but it can also lead to political deadlock. For example, divided government in Washington has frequently resulted in government shutdowns, such as the 2018-2019 disagreements between Congress and the President over federal spending, and more recently in October to November 2025, again between Congress and the administration over the budget.

While the British system tends to prioritise legislative efficiency through majority government, the American system prioritises institutional independence and checks on executive authority, even at the cost of slower policy-making.

The Executive
The leadership structure of the two countries further illustrates their contrasting approaches to power. The Prime Minister's authority is closely tied to support from both their party and Parliament. The UK saw three Prime Ministers in 2022 alone as Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak successively left or assumed office due to political

pressure and party leadership contests. This illustrates how the parliamentary system allows for relatively rapid leadership change without requiring a general election, which, compared to the United States, can potentially raise questions about the legitimacy of leaders who 'inherit' larger majorities from their predecessors.

By contrast, the President of the United States is elected separately from Congress and serves a fixed four-year term. The independence this brings means that the President cannot be removed from office through ordinary political disagreement but only through the extreme process of impeachment. As a result, the American presidency tends to have greater stability but considerably less flexibility. Even when facing intense political controversy, such as the impeachments of Donald Trump in 2019 and 2021, removal from office still remained extremely difficult due to the constitutional requirements for conviction in the Senate.

Overall, the British executive is more politically dependent on parliamentary confidence, while the American presidency is structurally independent and constitutionally protected.

The Supreme Courts

The courts tell very different stories on the two sides of the Atlantic, particularly regarding the role and power of each judicial branch. In the United States, the Supreme Court plays a central role in interpreting the codified and entrenched constitution. Through this it subsequently shapes public policy through judicial review, striking down laws that it determines have gone against the constitution (or its interpretation of the constitution). This power has allowed it to make extremely consequential decisions affecting American society, such as Roe v. Wade on abortion rights. The decision to overturn Roe v. Wade illustrates how the US system allows a small number of unelected justices to reshape social policy, raising questions about the balance between judicial power, democracy and the protection of human rights. These rulings demonstrate the immense influence the Court holds over social and political issues in America.

The UK Supreme Court, however, plays a much more restrained role. Because Parliament remains sovereign, the court cannot invalidate legislation in the same way. Instead, it focuses on interpreting laws and ensuring government actions comply with legal principles. In more recent years, the UK's Supreme Court has operated largely behind the scenes, influencing the inner workings of politics through decisions such as the ruling on the deportation of illegal immigrants to Rwanda and the declaration that Boris Johnson's attempt to suspend Parliament in 2019 was unlawful.

Conclusion

The political systems of the United Kingdom and the United States reveal two contrasting visions of democratic governance. One built on the flexibility and accountability of parliamentary sovereignty; the other on the stability and rigidity of constitutional supremacy. Understanding these differences is not merely an academic exercise. In an era of political turbulence on both sides of the Atlantic, the structures through which power is organised, contested and constrained matter more than ever.



Is Keir Starmer the right Labour Prime Minister, or should someone else step into his shoes?

Amiren Mann | LVIth

Labour won a landslide. So why does it feel like the wheels are already coming off? In a pointed and unflinching piece of political analysis, Amirenn Mann examines whether Keir Starmer has the leadership to see his party through, or whether the clock on his tenure is already ticking down.

Keir Starmer, Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party, has recently come under increased pressure and scrutiny throughout the country over how effectively his leadership and party is running the country, alongside dealing with the many salient issues he claims are due to the '14 years of Tory leadership': an answer continuously used whenever he comes under any form of scrutiny. It is an answer the people of this country are continuously tired of. People often use the expression 'building your bones off of someone else's back,' and the Prime Minister is no exception to this, passing the buck of blame for any misfortune or complaint onto his favourite scapegoat: the Conservative Party and their 14 years of leadership. The 'bones' he uses to prop up his own party, such as the failures of the Conservative government (for example, Brexit or the handling of the pandemic) and their subsequent 'poor' leadership, are the very bones that will break his own back.

The Prime Minister is quick to scrutinise the past Conservative leadership, which is admirable in its own way, considering that under his own current leadership the number of Labour rebels is rapidly increasing. Not to mention the fact that they are growing bolder and bolder, even going publicly to criticise the party. Clive Lewis ('Not up to the job,' when speaking about Starmer) and Graham Stringer ('last chance saloon') are speaking the minds of many in the British public: in their view, the Prime Minister has one chance to make it right. The fact that these are people within the Prime Minister's own party, openly stating that his leadership popularity has taken a nosedive and that he is skating on thin ice, tells its own story.

Starmer is on a slippery slope and is coming increasingly under the threat of his leadership being challenged by his own party and being replaced with a new, shinier leader who fully embodies the direction in which Labour wants to continue. Someone popular within the party and the public. Someone like Andy Burnham, dubbed the 'King of the North.' The New Statesman explains in clear terms that the way in which Labour leadership works is that if the party wants to change the leader, 'a contest must be triggered with challengers nominated by 20 percent of the MPs' (80 MPs). To the average person, 80 Labour MPs does not seem like an easy challenge; it has previously been described as 'formidable.' However, the way in which the Labour Party has been running has changed massively. Labour MPs are not always completely devoted and loyal to voting the way in which the party wants, irrespective of the whips, and have become independent thinkers, putting what they personally believe is in their best interest instead of what they have been told to vote.

This means that if Labour MPs are voting what they believe is right, such as voting against and defeating their own welfare bill, or the fact that '116 MPs publicly defied Number 10 to nominate Lucy Powell' for the role of deputy within the party, it is of no surprise that this places Starmer in a position of considerable exposure and vulnerability. It would not be hard to challenge his position as leader. Already, Labour supporters and sources have identified the fact that people are looking for alternate leadership, with Andy Burnham emerging as a popular potential candidate. Unfortunately for Keir Starmer, this is terrible news, as Andy Burnham is 'the most popular politician in the country,' according to a senior Labour source. Starmer, meanwhile, is widely described as an uncharismatic, too-central politician, dubbed by the opposition as a 'caretaker Prime Minister.' If the Prime Minister even makes it as far as the next Labour leadership contest, irrespective of the next general election, he needs to react accordingly to the threats he faces from within his own ranks, or he will be removed as leader of his party and, subsequently, as Prime Minister.

His leadership is crumbling, his reputation is failing, and his past poor judgement calls have meant that Labour is in a turbulent time, coming under criticism and increasing scrutiny from the public, past and present MPs, and even former endorsers of the party. One such example involves a woman called Andrea Egan. In the past, opposition to Keir Starmer have gone to considerable lengths to call him a poor leader with no charisma, describing the way in which he runs his party using terms like 'managerial' and 'cautious,' and claiming that he alienates both sides: too left-wing for critics and yet too central for Labour supporters. These criticisms take on a different dimension in light of the poor judgement Starmer displayed in the case of Andrea Egan.



Image by Paul Bloch from Pixabay

Back in 2022, Egan was expelled from the Labour Party for sharing articles from Socialist Appeal (a publication associated with mainstream Andy Burnham supporters), according to The Independent. However, this action has caused the Labour Party to lose a key ally and financial supporter. Andrea Egan has since become the new leader of UNISON, the UK's largest trade union, serving more than 1.3 million members, which had previously given the Labour Party 2.6 million pounds in donations. This decision has also caused a wave of backlash and loss of support from other contributors, such as Unite, the other largest trade union, which has openly discussed disaffiliating from the Labour Party. Both unions have become 'hostile to Starmer's leadership.'

Considering that the Labour Party was founded to help set up trade unions and protect working-class people, it is deeply troubling to see that the two largest trade unions in the UK have turned against the Prime Minister. Criticism over Keir Starmer's leadership is now no longer coming only from the opposition; the threat is much closer, with his own party members and allies turning against him. At some point, the Prime Minister needs to wake up and realise that the time has come for someone else to take over Labour's reins and the office of Prime Minister. To be fair to him, Keir Starmer has made some impressive progress with the Labour Party, and it is highly possible that without some elements of his leadership, Labour may not have won the 2024 general election. However, he does not have half the amount of support he previously had, as in the aftermath of the 2021 Hartlepool by-election, where he was able to persuade MPs to back him and produced a recovery. Turbulent times, such as dealing with an insurgent Reform and a fragile economy, are characterising the political landscape right now. While there are better candidates who would do a better job of confronting the threats facing the UK, it is time for Starmer to step aside and allow someone else to step into his shoes.

What can British politicians learn from Donald Trump's successful election campaign?

Fred | UVIth

Donald Trump did not just win an election. He dismantled every assumption about how modern political campaigns are supposed to work. Fred asks what British politicians should be taking notes on, and why Kamala Harris's campaign fell so catastrophically flat.

Donald Trump's election campaign was a storming success. He won both the popular vote and the majority of seats in the recent US presidential election, finishing with 312 Electoral College votes and 49.9% of the popular vote compared to Kamala Harris and the Democrats' 48.3%.

Although many bookmakers predicted a Trump win, many also predicted that Kamala Harris would win the popular vote. As we now know, this was not the case. This leads us to ask why Trump's campaign was so successful in gaining the support of the American population, what went wrong for Harris, and what British politicians can take from this presidential election into their own future campaigns.

The first key area of Trump's successful campaign was his ability to swing the vote in his direction after missing out on the presidency in 2021. In order to achieve this, Donald J. Trump set out a number of key promises. These included ending the Ukraine War before inauguration day, carrying out what he described as the largest deportation in American history to counteract the migration problem, and ending federal taxes on tips. Throughout his campaign, Trump knew exactly where he wanted to gain votes from, particularly among demographics where he had lost votes in the 2020 election. For the first time on record, the majority of Latino men voted for Trump and the Republicans, including in two Latino-majority counties in Texas. This ability to swing a population that was considerably against him in 2020 shows that he had set out a clear plan for who and how he was going to build his winning majority. His controversial policies also demonstrate that he was acutely aware he did not need the whole country to vote for him.

Another key reason for the success of Trump's campaign is his extremely impressive and convincing public speaking ability. His ability to rally and deliver a speech is second to none; he is comfortably able to influence attendees at his events through his speaking ability and charisma, which makes people warm to him. Trump knows that if he can get people to like him, they will vote for him. He further bolstered his popularity through collaborations with various influencers, gaining support from their fan bases. Golfers such as Bryson DeChambeau, streamers such as Adin Ross, and prominent figures such as Elon Musk attended his rallies and were seen publicly in his company. This proved to be a fantastically effective tactic for spreading his appeal across wide ranges of people and different social groups, as people are often drawn to those who show interest in what they do. Trump put himself out there across a wide range of activities, signalling versatility and genuine interest, so that people who share those hobbies, such as golf fans, came to like him and ultimately voted for him.

For many observers, one key moment in his campaign stood above all others: when he was shot in the ear during a rally in the critical swing state of Pennsylvania. Surviving the shot itself showed extraordinary character. When he stood up, surrounded by security, and raised his fist into the air, he showed fearlessness and a commanding sense of power. This moment undoubtedly gained him support not just in that vital swing state but across the nation, as he presented himself as precisely the kind of figure people might want as their leader.

On the other hand, it is important to note the extremely poor campaign which Kamala Harris ran. In her defence, she was brought in by Biden at what appeared to be fairly short notice. However, her campaign went significantly wrong in a number of respects. Unlike Trump, she never appeared to aim her campaign at any particular demographic, leaving her with less than 50% of the popular vote. Harris's promises were never particularly convincing and tended to focus on smaller-scale issues rather than large, emotive ones, which is likely a key cause of her downfall. Promises such as banning price gouging on groceries and expanding child credit carry very little emotive motivation and are not particularly inspiring. Her campaign lacked the conviction and energy that Trump's possessed, and this, frankly, led to her defeat.
So, what can UK politicians take from these campaigns? The key to Trump's success can be traced above all to his immense popularity. Despite the significant role played by both campaigners' promises, it was the personalities and popularity of the two figures that proved more decisive. Trump has undeniable charisma, which has led to huge popularity across the states. Some British politicians, such as Nigel Farage, similarly use their character to gain votes by engaging the public and making people feel included.

This ability to interact with people and make them feel welcome is crucial in gaining popularity and, therefore, votes. It is equally important for politicians to identify carefully the specific demographics from which they need to pick up votes. Although this happens to some degree already, with Labour tending to attract the working class and the Conservatives the more prosperous end of the electorate, both parties could learn from more deliberately targeting specific demographics with tailored policies. Finally, the US presidential race has shown that there is almost no substitute for emotive and powerful public speaking. Trump's outstanding ability to deliver a speech, coupled with his presentation of himself as a figure of strength, led to what now seems like his almost inevitable success.



Image by Nils Wende from Pixabay

Political amnesia and the media's role in perpetuating it: democracy without memory is dangerous

Georgina | UVIth

A news story lasts seven days. A political mistake lasts less. In one of the most thought-provoking pieces in this edition, Georgina examines how the modern media machine is not just failing to inform us, but actively training us to forget, and why that is one of the most serious threats to democracy today.

On average, a new story typically stays in the headlines for about seven days before the public moves on to the next crisis. In a world of fast fashion, hyper-consumption and 24-hour news cycles, we are constantly bombarded by a media that provides unprecedented global connections. Further, the media has become so divisive and politically motivated that politics have become stratified, and the world has consequently seen the rise of political extremism in America and parts of Europe, on both ends of the spectrum. The media incentivises binary identification, flattening ideological nuance into moral allegiance. For instance, you are either pro-Trump or anti-Trump; if you are not one, you have no choice but to be the other. Politics has become so black and white that it has lost nuance. As a result, the public has become so presumptive that productive conversation and progression are hindered. The media facilitates this in two ways: through the sheer overwhelming volume of headlines, which leads the public to dissociate due to an inability to process them, and through the politicisation of the media itself.

The world has seen the rising commonality of hyper-normalisation and collective dissociation. In short, people are seeing that government systems and institutions are broken. As a result, for reasons including a lack of effective leadership and an inability to imagine disrupting the status quo, people carry on with their lives as normal despite systemic dysfunction, living with the heavy load of fear, dread, denial, anger and dissociation.

Noam Chomsky has written on the idea of political amnesia, referring to the phenomenon where individuals forget significant political events that have shaped society. The New York Times podcast The Daily discussed this notion, emphasising how the public does not recognise or remember the faults of Trump's first term, forgetting key aspects of that period such as governance, policy and quality of life, instead focusing only on the positive aspects of his current campaign. Equally, we are seeing political amnesia first-hand in attitudes toward the Middle East, where the world is forgetting the consequences and the costs of regime change in Iraq, when the US presided over the death of Saddam Hussein. This is not to argue that Western intervention is never appropriate; the parallel being drawn is between the manner in which intervention is carried out, rather than the principle of intervention itself.

As humans, our brains are incapable of coping with the sheer volume of information that the modern world produces. The world has instant contact, and while most argue that this has allowed for greater awareness and connection, its consequences are twofold. It leads to political dissociation, which can then be exploited by individual actors for personal gain. Arguably, this dissociation is one of the biggest threats in politics today, as it is self-perpetuating and can only be corrected through independent media and receptive discussion.

The danger is not ignorance but political exhaustion, brought on by the media and furthered by biased sources as audiences turn to news outlets that affirm their existing views and identity. We end up assimilating so much of our political beliefs through what we read. Through news stations like Fox News, The Daily Wire, The Atlantic and The Guardian, where political stance plays a huge role in shaping bias, audiences self-select ideologically motivated outlets. This reinforces existing views rather than prompting reflection. Memory becomes partisan, divisive politics are enabled, point of view is lost, and political extremism flourishes, leading to democratic vulnerability.



Image from Pixabay

Has Nigel Farage been the most successful politician of the 21st century?

Alfie, Tabi, and Tom | LVIth

He has never been Prime Minister. He has been elected to Parliament just once. And yet Nigel Farage may have done more to reshape British politics than anyone else of his generation. Jake makes a bold but carefully argued case for why, by any serious measure of political success, Farage stands above them all.

Over the last 20 years there have been numerous successful politicians who have had their own influences and impact on UK politics, from vastly different ends of the political spectrum. However, Farage stands ahead of all others. Success in politics is a broad term, but the main measures can be narrowed down to three criteria. Firstly, significantly influencing major pieces of legislation is one important measure, as it describes one of the main aims of politicians: to affect governmental policy in order to represent their constituents and their own views. If they are able to do this, success has undoubtedly been achieved. Furthermore, obtaining and shifting the vote of the electorate, as well as properly representing the people, is an essential measure of success. If you are unable to obtain the support of voters and represent them effectively, you are not a truly successful politician. Finally, one must challenge beliefs and views and pose alternatives to the status quo. This is a more nuanced point, as not all successful politicians have done this. However, in the future, with so much political, social and economic turmoil, there may be a requirement for more radical alternative politics. Being able to create room in the electorate for such politics is therefore another measure of great success. These are all things Farage has done, and done to a greater extent than others, which is why he has been the most successful UK politician of the 21st century.

One should acknowledge that Farage's success has been matched in certain respects by many successful politicians over the past 25 years, including the likes of Tony Blair and Jeremy Corbyn. Blair had a long run as Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, holding a huge majority in the 2001 general election of 167 seats, which depicts his underlying success in terms of obtaining the vote of the electorate. Furthermore, throughout his time as Prime Minister he produced many effective pieces of legislation. However, in 2003 he made the controversial decision to join the invasion of Iraq, an act that was not popular with the public and represented a failure to act in the interests of the whole electorate. This failure in true representation undermines his overall success.

Jeremy Corbyn can also be seen as a significant political figure due to his ability to shift the Overton window (the range of policies considered acceptable in mainstream politics) as a left-wing radical, whilst maintaining popularity among his supporters. His policies were considerably more extreme than traditional Labour positions, yet he was still able to maintain popularity among party members. However, Corbyn was unable to successfully influence major policy and was eventually ousted as party leader in 2020. This demonstrates that he is not truly a successful politician by the criteria set out above, having failed to influence legislation, which is the primary aim of any politician.

Farage, meanwhile, has been able to greatly influence governmental policy, obtain a proportion of the electorate and represent those people effectively, whilst simultaneously shifting the Overton window and changing UK politics in a lasting way. Farage has held consistent views of right-wing populist politics, with strong beliefs in anti-immigration policy and national independence. He co-founded UKIP in 1993 and spent two decades aiming to influence UK politics, right up until the 2015 election where he had his first major breakthrough. In that success he cornered David Cameron into pledging to hold a referendum on EU membership in his 2015 manifesto, threatening to take the right-wing vote away from the Conservative Party. This referendum was a grave miscalculation by Cameron and an intelligent piece of political manoeuvring by Farage. Despite his extremely small vote share as UKIP leader, Farage was able to influence Brexit legislation, representing his voters and his own views on independence to a remarkable extent.

Furthermore, Farage's leadership of the Reform UK party in 2024 led to a vote share of 14.3%, depicting his enormous success in obtaining a large proportion of the vote for a right-wing populist party, which would typically be considered too extreme in modern British politics. Farage has successfully shifted the Overton window, demonstrating his ability to create space for more radical alternatives that achieve significant public support.

It is undeniable that Farage has achieved success across every meaningful measure of UK politics, whether influencing legislation or effectively representing his voters' views. He is a contentious figure and his role in bringing about Brexit is controversial, as is the case with most politicians who challenge the status quo. However, his skills as a politician are undoubtedly remarkable, and there are few figures in UK politics who could challenge him as an orator. Farage will certainly continue to build on this success and could potentially become the most consequential British politician of all time if he is able to reach the office of Prime Minister and legislate at the level of competence he has already demonstrated. That is something I have no doubt he is capable of.

According to recent polls, nearly half of American citizens believe that a civil war could happen in the next ten years. Do you agree?

Alfie, Tabi, and Tom | LVIth



America: a population of over 340 million, home to the world's most powerful currency, and, according to a growing body of evidence, a country that may be closer to tearing itself apart than at any point since 1861. Lucy sets out the case, and it is harder to dismiss than you might hope.

Population of over 340 million. Home to the most valuable currency. Some might say they 'have the cards.' America is considered a global superpower, but over 160 years on from the start of the previous American Civil War, nearly half of Americans suggest there are events foreshadowing a second wave of division and brutality. The American Civil War in 1861 erupted because of disputes over the moral issue of slavery, which divided the country and culminated in four years of violence and inequality.

Post 20th January 2025, political divisions in America have undoubtedly intensified, with more than 40 percent of Americans believing that having a strong leader for the country is more important than having a democracy. Well, democratic characteristics of a country are prone to slipping when entering into civil unrest. Of the 38 factors sparking a civil war, established by the Political Instability Task Force, two are at the forefront according to Barbara F. Walter in her TED talk on whether the US is headed to another Civil War: manifesting an anocracy (part democratic and part dictatorship), and secondly, when political parties start gaining members and support due to identity rather than political ideology.

Systemising people by race or gender can be a threat to democracy because smaller, volatile groups with narrower ideologies are often generated, lacking wider representation. In America, '65% of all respondents said political violence had increased since the start of 2021.' Many Americans eagerly listened to their President during his 2024 campaign when he responded to being shot at with 'Fight, fight, fight.' Although Trump was not president at the time, this sentiment further incited violent behaviour and deepened the segregation between Republicans and Democrats. A country's economy also wields considerable power in starting civil wars. In the 1860s, economic disparities stimulated civil disputes especially regarding slavery, and today the equivalent controversy is Trump's top topic: tariffs.

Of course, the inescapable topic of Trump's second presidency plays a major role in the minds of Americans when considering the prospect of a second Civil War. His personality consistently attracts tensions, and there is an argument to be made that he could be the catalyst for America descending into renewed internal conflict. Whilst a trade war was already clearly escalating between the US and China with the introduction of Trump's tariffs, there are also profound effects those tariffs have on the American economy itself. On 2nd April, so-called 'Liberation Day,' Trump announced taxes charged on goods bought from other countries. His aim was to encourage US consumers to buy more American goods, reversing previous economic damage. Playing the role of the 'strong leader' that over 40% of the country believe is needed, he declared: 'My policies will never change.' With the exception, of course, that he then changed his mind: economic and political pressure became unendurable and Trump made a U-turn with a 90-day pause. He has arguably caused the most volatile period for financial markets since the Covid lockdowns of 2020. Former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers suggested this was 'the biggest self-inflicted wound we've put on our economy in history.' Simplified, in the short term tariffs would reduce GDP and wages considerably, leaving households worse off and possibly fuelling conditions that make people more vulnerable to extremists who want to burn the system down.

So if the road toward economic collapse is not enough to start a civil war, perhaps the particularly assertive approach Trump seems to take to politics echoes B.F. Walter's claims about the dangers of slipping in and out of democracy, adding to the threats of civil war. Invoking emergency legislation to push through tariffs was not the first uncomfortably undemocratic action the President has taken, nor was it the last. Some suggest he is consciously positioning himself as an elected dictator by declaring national emergencies to increase a competitive edge, protecting and strengthening national and economic security. The irony is that the effect of this, if it does not result in civil war, will require him to invoke many 'International Emergency' powers as the number of enemies grows. Actions like these cause America to slip toward an anocracy, a key tipping point before civil war.

Whilst Trump sits in his imposing chair in the White House, the US can either welcome increasing authoritarianism or push back against it. As both the economy and the conduct of its leader present risks of civil war in the coming years, the long-term picture is complicated by the constraints of the 22nd Amendment: the actions of any single president, however dramatic, are limited to two terms. The question, then, is whether constitutional guardrails can hold long enough to prevent things from reaching that point. So: can it really get as far as civil war before 2028?



Editor's intro

Some questions don't have clean answers. Some debates don't have sides you can simply pick and walk away from. This section exists precisely for those questions: the ones that sit with you, that come up in conversation and refuse to be resolved, that reveal something important about how you actually think when you're challenged.

The articles collected here range from the timeless to the urgent. Is atheism any less of an indoctrination than Christianity? Do we truly have free will, or are we just very complicated stones falling off ledges? How does artificial intelligence actually work beneath the marketing? Why does Classics still matter? Should we bring back the woolly mammoth? Should under-eighteens be allowed to vote? And, perhaps most uncomfortably for those of us reading this in a school like ours: are public schools morally justifiable?

These are not easy questions, and the writers here don't pretend they are. What they do is think carefully, argue honestly, and invite you to do the same. Whether you agree with them or not is, of course, entirely up to you.



Atheist culture and 'indoctrination'

James Roots | LVIth

When was the last time someone told you that believing in God was incompatible with believing in the Big Bang? James explains not only why that argument is wrong, but why it is a perfect example of something far more interesting: the quiet indoctrination of atheist culture itself.

Recently, having a conversation, I was presented with a question regarding my Christian faith. It went roughly as follows: 'Surely, given your belief in God, you don't believe in the Big Bang?' This struck me. My view is that this is a highly illogical idea, and I was surprised that it was even something worth mentioning. In my view, the Big Bang serves as an extraordinary piece of evidence supporting the Christian doctrine that God created the universe ex nihilo, out of nothing. At least, it is far from being a useful tool for the atheist to challenge the Christian.
Equally, this statement struck me even more because of how revealing it is of the nature of our western, atheist society, in which only 6% of adults are practising Christians. In terms of the broader picture of atheism versus Christianity, atheists' arguments often take the form of clichés.

The above statement is a classic example of this, with others being the 'problem of evil', or the mentioning of wars waged in the name of religion. I have sat through, or watched, several discussions where the atheist counterpart repeatedly fires these arguments at the Christian. What our society fails to recognise is that there are numerous, and often more evidenced, arguments that support Christianity. In my experience, they, unlike the traditional atheist arguments, simply have not enjoyed the same level of exposure to the wider public.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to work through the entire selection offered by the field of Christian apologetics. There are numerous books, articles, podcasts and videos that would explain such arguments much better than I could. However, I want to address how a society biased towards atheism creates a culture in which people are indoctrinated with atheist arguments that are based on outdated principles or incorrect theological interpretations, whilst failing to recognise the sheer volume of evidence that supports the case for Christianity.

I will provide two examples which demonstrate this, and through them, aim to redress atheist biases and introduce greater balance into the God debate.
A good example to start with is the statement about the Big Bang. It is often misused as an argument that misinterprets its own scientific context. A brief history: the Big Bang was first proposed by Belgian priest Georges Lemaitre in 1927, as a calculated consequence of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. Atheists rebuked the idea. Physicist Fred Hoyle was the first to label it the 'Big Bang' theory, as a mockery of what he considered the absurdity of the idea. It received widespread criticism amongst the professional scientific community, because it felt like something invented to justify a belief in God. Indeed, several German and Soviet scientists were expelled, imprisoned or even killed for working on the theory, because it heavily implied the existence of a creator God, or at least the fact of creation, which contradicted Nazi and Marxist doctrine regarding the infinite existence of the universe.

This is a fresh perspective on the Big Bang, and a complete one. Added detail of the history behind it evidently has the potential to reverse its theological implications. Yet atheist culture blocks such detail, leaving its followers with a biased and incomplete argument.
There is another good example. The historical validity of the Bible, and in particular the Gospels, is an inevitable roadblock for atheism, yet it is rarely known in our largely atheist wider society. For instance, were you aware of the following facts: there are multiple non-Biblical records of Jesus and the growth of the Early Church; there is no possible psychological phenomenon that could have caused the disciples to see Jesus rise from the dead unless he really did; and the Gospels have remained remarkably unchanged throughout their numerous translations over the last two thousand years. Ultimately, the Gospels stand up to both Christian and secular levels of historical scrutiny. There is far more to be said. There are entire books written on this subject. I repeat my point: a paragraph of evidence from the Gospels shines a whole new light on the argument. It invalidates the traditional scepticism regarding the translation quality or reliability of the Gospels.

What can I conclude from this? Firstly, that I have not even scratched the surface of the wealth of scientific, historical and philosophical evidence for God's existence. If you are interested, I highly recommend Lee Strobel's The Case for Christ as a starting point. But the main conclusion I want to draw is this: our atheist culture is only allowing clichéd, biased arguments into the popular eye. Extremely convincing Christian arguments and perspectives are not being exposed. This, unfortunately, is what leads to statements such as the one about the Big Bang, and I am sure that atheist readers will have learned much from only two brief examples of evidence provided. Therefore: when people tell me 'you've been indoctrinated into Christianity from birth,' I can, with far greater certainty, justice and evidence, repeat the same statement back to them about their atheism, and the culture in which they themselves have been brought up.

Christian culture and ‘indoctrination’

Coco Kinnersly | LVIth

James has made his case. Now Coco makes the other one. Having been present at the same conversation, she offers the atheist’s retort, and asks whether the leap from the Big Bang to the Christian God is really as short as it seems, and whether the Problem of Evil is really as clichéd as James suggests.

I would like to begin this article with the fact that I am not going to ridicule or disrespect the Christian faith; however, it seems necessary that I formulate the atheist’s retort. Having been involved in the same discussion, I became enlightened to the fact that the Big Bang Theory was in fact developed by Christian scientists and can be viewed as proof for the theist creator God that so many claim to know. And while I felt struck, asking myself: ‘Is this really it? Has God’s existence really been proved directly to my face?’, I also felt agitated. You see, while yes, the Big Bang Theory was developed and proved by Christians, what I find particularly worthy of criticism is the leap to the final conclusion of ‘God’.

It is ironic that such a revelation in the scientific world is immediately captured by Christianity to simply add to the depiction of the theist God. What is interesting is that if any God were to be proved by the Big Bang Theory, it would most likely be a deist, detached God, similar to Aristotle’s Prime Mover. So, is it really a question of atheist indoctrination of Christian-rooted information, or is it just a difference in opinion? A reclaiming of scientific discovery without Christian indoctrination, so to speak. While Lemaitre was met with much criticism following his 1927 discovery of red shift, reflecting the ever-expanding heat from the supposed explosion at the beginning of time, his theory is scientifically proven and credible. However, this alone does not prove the existence of God. To reach such a conclusion one must dig a little deeper. To the unsuspecting observer, Lemaitre’s discovery simply proved the existence of our universe, not what caused it. End of.

To reach the conclusion of ‘God’, it seems that the observer must already be searching for it. Having delved further into the religious aspect of this monumental scientific discovery, it is now apparent that the proof of God woven into the Big Bang Theory lies in the ‘singularity’. First formulated by Lemaitre and later developed by Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking, it is essentially the idea that, as earlier expressed, the universe must have come about ex nihilo. Lemaitre proposed that the universe emerged from the singularity, an incredibly dense and hot point of matter, while Penrose and Hawking proved that it should collapse back into it. This is where the argument splits one of two ways.

To reinforce my argument, I will use Ockham’s Razor. When posed with a question with two credible answers, Ockham’s Razor states that the simpler argument prevails. In this case, is it simpler to argue that a humanoid, omnibenevolent, omniscient, transcendent yet immanent deity existed before time itself, and consciously decided to create the universe out of the pure goodness of its heart? Or perhaps, that nothing existed and the sheer forces present in the matter spat out a ripe, hot ball of life: the singularity? It might not seem clear to the Christian; however, the simpler argument is the easier to accept using rational sense.

This leads me to the title of this article: Christian culture and indoctrination. Having adopted the phraseology from the previous article, I would like to address another so-called cliché argument for the criticism of Christianity. For a Christian to observe the Problem of Evil and deem it a cliché argument is, in my view, extraordinary. Today, the Problem of Evil is still the largest and most challenging question posed to the Christian faith. Yet Christianity has around 2.3 billion followers worldwide who are comfortable accepting that their loving God permits cancer in children, natural disasters, and perhaps the most troubling thing of all: keeping his truth a mystery. I know that Christians have a host of responses to this, including the Irenean and Augustinian theodicies and the human capacity to reason, as outlined by Aquinas. Despite this, I wonder: at what point does the number of explanations required begin to resemble the very indoctrination being criticised?

The issues arise when the atheist is essentially dismissed for holding any opinion that differs from the Christian. We are viewed as other, and obviously less worthy of life after death in Christian ideology. So while Christians are trying to reclaim their faith and push back against claims that they have been indoctrinated into it, by doing so they are making an equally significant claim: that atheists are indoctrinated into not believing. Since the life of Jesus, Christianity has essentially been the ruling norm in the western world. Is it not natural for people to spot holes in an argument, particularly holes that reflect a history of using the Christian faith to justify heinous crimes? The Nazi-German Church welcomed Nazi ideals; certain priests demanded payment to grant salvation; women’s rights to abortion and euthanasia are both dependent on ancient scripture. This is the indoctrination I criticise.

As an A-level student of Religious Studies, I have been exposed to the wide range of arguments which present the strengths of Christianity. My contention, however, remains. I have not yet found an argument which does not have significant flaws.



Answering the difficult question

Do you choose to read this article?

Fen Abraham | LVIth

If you push a stone off a ledge, it falls. Every single time, without exception. Fen asks: what if you are not so different from the stone? A tour through determinism, quantum physics, and neuroscience that will leave you genuinely unsure whether any decision you have ever made was actually yours.

If you were to push a stone off a ledge, it would fall. That is certain; the stone having nothing to support it would lead to it dropping. The cause has an effect. You could go back in time as many times as you want and, as long as you push the stone in the exact same way each time, it would have the same result. The more precisely you recreate the action, the more precisely the result would be recreated. One can assume that this would be the same for an interaction with a human. If you were to enter a room to have a conversation with a friend, a set of actions that you perform will have a certain reaction from your friend. You can repeat it as many times as you want and each time your friend will have the same reaction, as long as you recreate every action you perform each time, down to an atomic scale. This is called Laplace's Demon, named after Pierre-Simon Laplace, who argued that if a vast intellect knew the precise location and momentum of every atom in the universe, it could calculate the entire past and future.

This is an intuitive idea as shown in popular culture. In the Harry Potter books, characters go back in time, and as long as they don't change anything about what they witnessed when it was their present, the exact same events occur. So does your friend have free will? If their reaction to what you say to them is totally dependent on the arrangement of particles and molecules in their nervous system and the rest of their body, mixed in with the stimuli presented to them, is it really a decision? Can you make a choice if your choice is predetermined, whether you know it is or not?

This idea of one action always being caused by another is called Determinism. There are three main schools of thought. First, that free will and determinism are incompatible, and we do not live in a deterministic world. Second, that free will and determinism are compatible and actually rely on each other. Finally, that they are incompatible and there is no such thing as free will. Immanuel Kant believed in the first option, which is called Libertarianism. Kant thought that although the perceived world is determined, humans still have the ability to be free and that our decisions are actually our own. Kant would have claimed that if you were to go back in time and change nothing, humans would use their free will to potentially make different decisions.
David Hume was the most notable advocate for the second option, called compatibilism. To understand why he believed this, one must look at his definition of liberty. Hume said that liberty is the power to act according to one's own motivations and desires; therefore, external factors and the particles in your brain are simply contributing to your motivations and desires. Actions being random and without reason would not be freedom, as simply following a flip of a coin does not make something your decision at all. The third option, Hard Determinism, denies free will altogether. Notable proponents include Baruch Spinoza, who thought humans simply believed they were free because they were conscious of their actions but ignorant of the causes determining them. David Hume's theory is generally the most popular of the three. People could understand that everything was predetermined, but it must still be our own decisions, since we feel ourselves making them. As of 2020, 59% of the people in a survey by PhilPapers, asking 2,000 philosophers, believed in compatibilism. However, in 1927, Werner Heisenberg developed what is now known as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. This states that it is physically impossible to measure both the position and the momentum of a subatomic particle with absolute precision. The implications of this contradict Laplace's Demon, as not even the vast intellect could know the precise state of an electron. The universe has uncertainty to it; less of a perfectly precise mechanism than a combination of probabilities. This bodes well for the Libertarian. If the atoms in your friend's brain aren't necessarily on a fixed track, then the future cannot be totally guaranteed.
This still leaves the question of whether randomness actually gives us free will. If you are late to a meeting because an electron in your brain went one way instead of another, is that really your action? A random action cannot truly be your action, and to have free will it surely must be a conscious decision rather than the result of an uncountable number of coin flips.

Physics doesn't seem to have got us very far, so let us take a closer look at biology. A neuroscientist called Benjamin Libet conducted experiments in the 1980s that seemed to agree with Spinoza's radical views. He asked participants to flick their wrist whenever they felt an urge to, while he monitored their brain activity. The brain began to prepare to flick the wrist before the subject reported having the urge, nearly half a second before at that.
If we go back to our friend in the room with us, this experiment implies that by the time they have decided to laugh at your joke, their body was already preparing to do so even before they had fully processed the punchline. Somehow the body knows what is going to happen before your friend even knows. Our consciousness means we believe we are in charge, but we could be the equivalent of a child turning a toy steering wheel in the back of their parents' car.

Spinoza's analogy was that if the stone we pushed off the ledge earlier gained consciousness, it would believe it was falling because it wanted to. Is that all that we are? An overcomplicated stone? This is called Hard Determinism and its implications could be terrifying. Your friend did not choose to laugh at your joke; the criminal did not choose to rob that bank; and no one person is truly to blame for their own actions as they have no control over what they do or don't do. Does our legal system have to be dismantled? Should humans start being treated as biological machines? This could be one of the main reasons compatibilism remains so popular. Hume claims that we look for the wrong type of freedom. If we are free from cause and effect we become disconnected from ourselves. If your friend laughs not because of their feelings for you, their past, or their current mood, then are they acting at all? The contrary is far too harsh.

The reaction comes from within your friend. It is their internal programming that decides what they do, and is that internal programming not simply who they are? Just because their internal systems are following the laws of physics does not mean it is not them acting.
So next time you talk to your friend, I invite you to think about whether you believe they have free will. Which, at the end of the day, comes down to your idea of what free will actually is. They are a culmination of their past experiences, everybody they've ever met, and the biological and physical processes happening inside them.

Maybe our decisions are already as good as made, but we still get to experience the impacts of those very decisions. We might not truly have a choice in how we act, and you could put the greatest mistake of your life down to a quantum fluke. Whether everything is calculated or not, you are the one who gets to experience the regret of your worst decisions and the joy of your best. The only question is: are they yours?



How does AI work?

Teddy Brine | LVIth

Artificial intelligence is everywhere, and almost nobody understands what it actually is. Teddy cuts through the hype, the marketing, and the myth to explain how AI really works from the inside out, and why understanding it is no longer optional.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is often used by marketing teams to describe machines that can think for themselves or behave like humans. In reality, AI refers to systems that perform tasks requiring human cognitive abilities, such as recognising patterns, understanding language and making decisions. Those two descriptions may seem similar, but there is a clear distinction hidden between the lines: AI is not magic.

Despite all of the dramatic media coverage around AI, at its core, AI is just statistical pattern modelling. A model takes an input, applies a large number of mathematical operations and produces an output. That means if you provide the model with the same input it will produce the same output, given fixed parameters and deterministic inference settings, which is not common in practice. That is not similar to human behaviour, because a human would mostly give a different result to a complex problem over time, even if it is just minor changes in the response. These models are developed through a process known as training, in which the parameters of the equations powering the model are adjusted so that predictions become more accurate after more and more training, arguably similar to how synapses are developed in the human brain.

AI is rapidly developing and it is vitally important to stay on top of the latest developments, but it can be hard when companies abstract the fundamental ideas of AI to raise the level of entry. It is also important to understand the deeper layers of the broad term Artificial Intelligence, such as Machine Learning, Neural Networks and Large Language Models, along with their limitations.

From Rules to Learning

For most of the past century, programming has been based on explicit rules. A programmer writes precise instructions: if a condition is true, then perform a particular action. That is the fundamental idea behind programming. This works well for problems with well-defined inputs and outputs, especially when there is a clear mathematical process behind it, such as calculating the sum of a thousand numbers. This approach works well for most problems, but it has limits.

Consider facial recognition. It would be practically impossible to manually write instructions that account for every possible variation of a human face. A face looks different depending on lighting, camera angle, expression and countless other factors. Instead, we can use mathematical models capable of producing results close to what we want without requiring human-written rules for each case, since that is unrealistic. Rather than explicitly coding decisions directly, Machine Learning is a system that learns rules implicitly from datasets. Instead of telling the computer how to solve the problem, we provide large datasets, normally in the form of inputs paired with correct outputs, and allow the computer to infer patterns that connect them. Over time, the model adjusts the internal parameters of the equations behind it so that predictions become closer to the correct answer. In other words, the computer builds a function that connects inputs to outputs by gradually reducing its mistakes.

Models and Mathematics

The core of every AI system is a mathematical model. If we were to ignore all the surrounding complexities, a model can be represented as a single mathematical function: $y = f(x; \text{phi})$, where y is the output, x is the input, and phi represents the parameters. It looks somewhat similar to something you would see at GCSE mathematics, with the addition of adjustable parameters: numerical values that control how the input is transformed, often represented as high-dimensional vectors.

At the beginning of training, these parameters are usually random, meaning the model's predictions are usually quite inaccurate. To improve them, we need a way to measure how wrong the output is compared to the correct output. This measurement is called a loss function. This function compares the model's prediction to the correct answer and produces a numerical score that represents how wrong the model is. The larger the error, the higher the loss.

Training is the process of reducing this loss. The most common method is known as gradient descent. After each prediction, the model slightly adjusts its parameters in the direction that reduces the error. This process is repeated hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of times across a number of large datasets. As training goes on, the model converges towards a configuration of parameters that produces more accurate predictions. From a high-level perspective, AI systems learn by repeatedly correcting their own mistakes through mathematical optimisation. Fundamentally, the goal is not merely to memorise the training data, but rather to learn patterns that extend beyond the training dataset to new examples.

Neural Networks

Simple models can handle straightforward tasks, but more complex problems require more flexible systems. Neural Networks are one such system. A neural network is made up of many layers of interconnected units; each layer performs small mathematical operations. Individually, these units are relatively simple and inexpensive, but when put together they can represent highly complex patterns. Each layer transforms the inputted data slightly before passing it to the next layer. In a neural network built to detect single-digit handwritten numbers, for example, early layers may detect features such as general stroke direction or contrast against a background. Later layers combine these features to form increasingly confident predictions about the number. Deep learning refers to neural networks with many layers, and is the basis of the larger models discussed next.



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Despite their name, however, neural networks are not conscious or biologically accurate models of the brain. They are structured mathematical systems designed to approximate complicated functions which are difficult to explicitly specify or compute analytically. Their effectiveness comes partly from scale, but there are other factors. Modern networks may contain millions or even billions of parameters and units, allowing them to model intricate relationships within data.

Large Language Models

Large Language Models are neural networks trained specifically on text. A widely known example is the system underlying ChatGPT, released to the public in November 2022. Their training objective is surprisingly simple: to predict the next token in a sequence. A token may be a whole word, part of a word, or a piece of punctuation. These models repeatedly predict the next token based on the training of enormous text datasets. The model gradually learns statistical relationships between words, phrases and ideas based on literature written by humans, such as those found on Wikipedia.

A major development in this field was the transformer architecture, which introduced the idea of the attention mechanism. Attention allows the model to weigh how strongly different words in a sentence relate to one another. This helps the model maintain context across longer passages of text, improving the coherence and relevance of the output.

When generating an output, a Large Language Model does not retrieve a stored answer. Instead, it produces text one token at a time, each chosen based on probabilities learned during training. The output may sometimes appear thoughtful, but it is ultimately the result of statistical pattern prediction and recognition rather than genuine understanding.

Scale and Limitations
Over the past five years, the rapid progression of AI has been largely driven by growing scale. Larger proprietary datasets expose models to more varied patterns. Larger models, with more parameters, can represent more complex relationships, hence why models are becoming better at writing code for humans. At the same time, advances in hardware, particularly memory and graphics processing units (GPUs), allow billions of calculations to be performed in parallel. Research has shown that performance often improves predictably as models and datasets grow. This observation, sometimes referred to as scaling laws, explains why increasing computational resources can lead to significant gains in capability. So, the progress we make with AI is not only about having better ideas, but also about bigger scale.

However, when we plot the model error rates against the amount of computation used during training, the relationship often appears as a straight line on a logarithmic graph. Reducing error therefore requires exponentially more computation. Each improvement becomes increasingly challenging and expensive. This creates the impression of a boundary: not a fixed line that models are forbidden from crossing, but a practical one we cannot easily cross. This is called a compute-optimal frontier. Beyond a certain point, reducing error by a small fraction may require enormous increases in data, parameters and energy consumption. The improvements are real, but they come at a rising cost. Training modern large-scale models can require vast data centres running continuously for weeks. High computational demand increases financial costs, limits accessibility to companies with money to spare, and consumes significant electrical power, not to mention the growing concerns related to environmental impact and the volumes of water used to cool these computers. As models grow larger, questions arise about sustainability, and whether simply increasing scale is a viable long-term strategy.

Even if computational limits were removed, however, AI systems would remain fundamentally statistical. They do not possess consciousness, intention or true comprehension. A language model may generate a convincing explanation to your query, but it does not know that the explanation is correct. It predicts what is most likely to follow based on patterns in its training data. This can result in errors, including confident but incorrect responses, sometimes called hallucinations. Politically, models may reflect biases present in the data on which they are trained. Future research is focused on improving reliability, reducing bias, integrating multiple forms of data such as images and sound, and aligning AI behaviour with human values.

While systems may become more capable, their underlying mechanism, as of right now, remains optimisation over data, and is arguably the biggest bottleneck.

As a demonstration of current limitations: when asked ‘Should I walk or drive to the car wash to wash my car if the car wash is only 50 metres away?’, a major AI system in early 2026 responded simply: ‘Walk.’ The correct answer, of course, is to drive, since you need a car to go through a car wash.

Summary
Artificial intelligence works through mathematical modelling and optimisation rather than conscious thought. By replacing explicit rules with systems that learn from data, AI can handle tasks too complex to describe manually or logically. Neural networks allow these models to represent intricate patterns, and large-scale training enables them to achieve impressive performance to a significant extent.

However, beneath the surface, AI remains a process of adjusting parameters to minimise errors in models. Once you have a firm understanding of the principles, this removes much of the mystery surrounding the supposed magic of AI. As these systems develop, recognising both their power and their limitations will be essential for using them responsibly and effectively.

I urge you to use AI as much as you can. It can make you extraordinarily efficient in many areas of your life, allowing you to be more prominent in another. Those who understand it, and take advantage of it, will have much more leverage in the years ahead than others. However, capability must never be confused with judgement, so I leave you with a final thought, and a warning, from a time before Artificial Intelligence could ever remotely have been imagined:

‘A computer can never be held accountable, therefore a computer must never make a management decision.’ 1979 IBM Training Manual.



Why is Classics still important to study?

Cara Neill | LVIth

Dead languages. Crumbling ruins. Old men in togas. So why, once you start studying Classics, does it seem to turn up absolutely everywhere? Cara makes the case for one of the most quietly radical subjects on the curriculum, and it is harder to dismiss than you might expect.

Dead languages. Crumbling ruins. Old men in togas debating philosophy. For many people, that is roughly where their understanding of Classics begins and ends. In an age of rapidly evolving technology, artificial intelligence, and space exploration, studying the ancient world may seem quaint at best, and at worst completely irrelevant. Why spend time learning languages nobody speaks anymore, or reading texts written thousands of years ago?

Yet the strange thing about Classics is that once you start to study it, you begin noticing it everywhere.

The influence of Greece and Rome appears in more places than you may realise. Classical antiquity is the root of modern political systems, shaping the language of medicine and law, the structure of theatre and storytelling, and even the designs of major buildings. Far from being a relic of the past, the influence of the classical world subtly underpins significant parts of our own culture, whether we realise it or not.

Take democracy, for example. The very word comes from the Greek 'demos' (people) and 'kratos' (power), a concept first developed in Athens during the fifth century BC. The idea that citizens should have a say in the way their society is governed was revolutionary at the time, even though Athenian democracy excluded large parts of the population, including women and enslaved people. Even if the inception of these ideas has been reshaped and expanded over time, its legacy cannot be overstated. Where democracy was once something radical, today it is second nature, and though clearly more complicated than a group of Athenians arguing in an assembly, the actual principle remains strikingly familiar.

Roman political ideas are continuously prevalent in modern governments. With institutions such as senates and assemblies developed within the Roman Republic, their influence is still visible in governments today. The word 'senate', used in almost every country globally, comes directly from the Roman 'senatus', originally a council of elders who debated matters of state. Roman law also introduced ideas that provide the foundation of modern legal systems, from the codification of laws to legal rights and procedures. The speeches of the Roman orator Cicero in particular combined several rhetorical styles to create something new, proving how the art of persuasive and political oration was already flourishing two thousand years prior. Listening to modern political speeches, Cicero would recognise surprisingly recurrent techniques which he himself pioneered.

The influence of the classical world also appears in places you might not expect. It may be hidden in the language of your science textbook. Many scientific and medical terms are derived from Greek and Latin etymology. For example, cardiology comes from the Greek 'kardia', meaning heart; neurology derives from 'neuron', meaning nerve. Meanwhile, the legal world still happily incorporates Latin phrases such as 'habeas corpus', 'prima facie', and 'pro bono'. Even everyday academic words like curriculum, alumni, and et cetera come from Latin. Once you start studying these languages, it suddenly feels as though half of the English language has been secretly borrowed from the ancient Mediterranean world. Words you have looked at every day start to appear strangely familiar.

The physical legacy of classical civilisation is even harder to miss. Grand public buildings across Europe and North America are often modelled on Greek temples. Notable for tall columns and balanced symmetry, these designs are still borrowed by museums, courthouses and government buildings today. The famous Parthenon in Athens has influenced architecture for centuries. Some Roman structures have survived so long that they remain among the most recognisable landmarks on Earth. The Colosseum still towers over Rome nearly two thousand years after it was built, while the vast dome of the Pantheon continues to astonish contemporary architects. If modern engineers look at these buildings and wonder how they could have been constructed with classical means, it becomes very clear that the Romans were doing at least something right.

Then there are the stories. Greek mythology remains one of the richest storytelling traditions ever created, filled with heroes, monsters, gods and catastrophically bad decisions. From Odysseus wandering the seas for ten years, to Hercules facing seemingly impossible tasks: epic poetry traditionally attributed to Homer and Virgil does not merely inspire Disney classics, but shapes modern narrative itself. Modern novels such as The Song of Achilles, and films like Troy or the upcoming Odyssey, show that these stories are far from forgotten but ingrained within popular culture. Even people who have never opened a classical text will



Image by Engin Akyurt from Pixabay

probably recognise characters like Achilles, Hercules or Medusa. The Ancient Greeks were undoubtedly remarkable in creating stories which refuse to disappear.

Theatre also owes a remarkable debt to classical Greece. The tragedies first performed in Athens during the fifth century BC established many of the conventions still recognisable on stage today: choruses commenting on the action, stylised costumes and masks, and central themes of morality and human suffering. These plays were designed to provoke what the philosopher Aristotle famously described as 'catharsis': a powerful emotional release for the audience. Anyone who has ever cried at a tragic film or play has, in a sense, experienced something the Ancient Greeks would have understood perfectly.

Classics is not only about literature and architecture, however. It also helps us understand how people throughout history have dealt with power, conflict and rebellion. Classical myths and sources were often used as frameworks for interpreting, or agitating for, modern political change. Ancient narratives about sacrifice, heroism and resistance provide language and symbolism which later writers could adapt to their own circumstances. For example, Sophocles' Antigone has invited hundreds of adaptations which embody this idea, such as Seamus Heaney's The Burial at Thebes in 2004, written in response to America's invasion of Iraq. Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle further laid the foundations for philosophical debate about politics, ethics, and society, and these ideas continue to influence Western thought in almost every aspect. In other words, the political conflicts of the Greco-Roman civilisation have continued to echo throughout history in surprising ways, and will continue to do so.

And what makes Classics especially exciting is that there is still so much we don't know. Archaeologists and historians are constantly uncovering new evidence that reshapes our understanding of the ancient world. Recent discoveries, from lost Roman settlements to newly analysed papyri, continue to challenge previously established knowledge. Scripts such as Linear A, used by the Minoans in Crete, or the Cretan Hieroglyphics, remain undeciphered. Entirely new information about Greek civilisation is gradually being unlocked: a far cry from simply 'dead', as many may argue Classics is. So who knows what discoveries are waiting beneath the layers of history?

Moreover, for the Romans, the past was not something to ignore but something to learn from. They often repeated the phrase 'historia magistra vitae': history is the teacher of life. Studying Classics embodies this idea perfectly. It allows us to explore the origins of our political systems, recognise the roots of so many languages, and understand the stories that continue to shape our culture. So perhaps Classics is not quite as futile as it first appears. In fact, once you start noticing it, the ancient world is closer than you think. The ideas, stories, and buildings of Greece and Rome are still influencing how we think and live today, even if we rarely stop to notice. Studying Classics in depth reveals that although this world seems centuries behind us, in many ways we are still living in its shadow.

Should we bring back extinct animals?

Josh Groocock | LVth

Colossal Biosciences has already done it with the dire wolf. The woolly mammoth is next. Josh takes a step back from the excitement to ask the questions that matter: do we actually have the right to do this, and should we?

Over the last couple of years, there has been an increase in interest in reviving extinct species such as the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger), woolly mammoth and dodo. This is especially true in the case of the dire wolf, where Colossal Biosciences have revived three wolves that share the same DNA as long-extinct dire wolves, being the first truly successful de-extinction project in history. At this pivotal moment, it is perhaps necessary to take a step back and question the ethics of this process, and whether it should be considered as a future method of conservation.

To start, I must discuss the different forms of de-extinction and how they work. I believe there are mainly three different types: back-breeding, cloning and genome editing. Back-breeding is the controlled breeding of animals that contain genes from extinct species, in order to increase the percentage of those extinct genes. This would eventually create a facsimile of the extinct species, though it would not be a true de-extinction. It also takes a long time to achieve a very close match, as generations can take years to perfect. A current example of this process is the Taurus Project, which is attempting to bring back the Auroch, an extinct ancestor of all modern cattle.

Cloning is the process of creating genetically identical copies of a gene or organism through Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT). This works by taking the nucleus of a diploid cell (any cell with a full set of chromosomes) and inserting it into an egg cell that has had its nucleus removed. This creates an undifferentiated pluripotent stem cell (an artificial embryonic stem cell) which is implanted into a suitable maternal womb to be fertilised and develop as usual. This method was used in 2003 in an attempt to revive the Pyrenean Ibex, which sadly failed as the only successful clone died after two minutes of being born due to a lung deformation.

Genome editing is the process of changing the specific factors in a living species to match an extinct species' genome. Scientists first simulate the entire genomes of both the extinct and living organisms using DNA samples. They then compare the two genomes side by side and note the specific differences; these are the factors that are changed. Using Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) technology, scientists can



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remove and implant the DNA sequences needed to create a nucleus of the extinct species, which is implanted into an enucleated egg cell to be fertilised and to develop. This process was used by Colossal Biosciences to resurrect the dire wolf in 2024.

Now that I have explained the three main ways of achieving de-extinction, I will move on to the arguments for and against these processes.

My first argument is one of restorative justice: the belief that humans owe extinct animals a debt because they were responsible for their extinction. This pointedly excludes long-extinct species such as woolly mammoths and dire wolves, which went extinct not because of modern humans but because of climate change and prehistoric human activity. This argument is usually used to justify the restoration of recently extinct animals such as the thylacine or the gastric brooding frog. The question of the extinct animals' right to be restored is a divisive one, as it relies on the premise that animals have rights in the first place. Ronald Sandler, Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern University, believes that while individual animals can be harmed and wronged, species as a whole cannot. In an article on the subject, he argued that grey wolves, black rhinoceroses, and human beings can be harmed or wronged, whereas the species Canis lupus, Diceros bicornis and Homo sapiens cannot be wronged. Furthermore, he argues that because the original wrongdoers are no longer alive, the debt can no longer be paid by those who did it, and therefore there is no meaningful sense of restorative justice. This view is also possibly supported by famous philosophers such as Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, who argued respectively that animals do not have souls and thus cannot be wronged, and that humans are so different from animals in being rational beings that they alone possess rights.

The second argument is that of the ecological benefit of reviving extinct species. As seen by the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone, the return of key species into a community can have huge positive impacts on the environment. In that example, the wolves regulated the number of elk in Yellowstone, which allowed more trees to grow (as they had previously been eaten by the excess elk), which in turn reduced flood levels after heavy rainfall due to greater interception. Something similar could happen with the woolly mammoth.

Mammoths were a keystone species that lived in the northern hemisphere from around 6.2 million to 4,000 years ago. They had a giant impact on their environment, compacting the snow in ways that allowed grasses and trees to grow through it, creating a more savannah-like environment compared to the icy desert we have today. This would in turn absorb more carbon dioxide, reducing the impact of climate change. On the other hand, many conservationists believe that investing in de-extinction as a means of ecological conservation both diminishes the significance of extinction and could reduce funding directed towards saving species that are still alive and reducing carbon emissions.

My final point is that the process of de-extinction could be considered hubristic, or thought of as playing God. This relies on the concept that engineering genomes and species is the equivalent of sculpting the world to suit human desires, and that anything non-human is ours to control. This provides a religious argument against resurrecting extinct species, as it is an offence to play God. This could, however, be overcome by the idea that restoring these extinct species is a form of stewardship which was given to humanity by God.
In conclusion, while I have only provided a few arguments for and against de-extinction, it is clear that it will be a precarious argument for the future as more projects like Colossal Biosciences begin to succeed in their attempts. I personally believe that we should proceed, but for a more personal reason: I just really want to see a living woolly mammoth.



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Should under 18s be allowed to vote?

Leo Frangopoulos | LVth

Most societies settled on 18 as the voting age decades ago, and most societies haven't seriously questioned it since. Leo questions it, examining the competing claims of participation and competence, and arriving at a conclusion that may surprise you.

For the last few decades, most societies have accepted 18 years old as the standard voting threshold, yet in an ever-evolving world, this number has increasingly come into question. Some argue that a lower voting age would grant younger generations agency over their own future as more and more young people demand a say. Others point to maturity: are the youth ready to wield such power, or would a lack of life experience prove fatal? This of course begs the question: should we lower the voting age, or raise it?

A central principle of modern democracy is universal suffrage, yet this very ideal comes under threat when large numbers of politically affected citizens remain disenfranchised. Many under-18s in Britain today work and pay taxes, they can drive and even join the army, yet remain unable to vote. This is an inconsistency in responsibilities that many say a lower voting age would address. Proponents of a lower voting age also point to the idea that those subject to political decisions should have a say in them. For issues such as public debt, education and climate responsibility, all issues with large impacts on the young, under-18s arguably deserve agency over their futures and a legitimate claim to political representation. Moreover, research suggests that earlier voting forms habits that make individuals substantially more likely to remain politically engaged throughout adulthood. Lowering the voting age may not only increase inclusion but also foster long-term participation, strengthening democracy.

Despite this, critics of a lower voting age point to concerns regarding the developmental maturity of under-18s. Neuroscience suggests that executive function and risk analysis only fully mature during the early twenties, and with voting requiring a high degree of long-term reasoning, many argue that the adolescent brain is ill-equipped. Evidence also shows a considerably lower degree of political knowledge and general political awareness in under-18s compared to other age groups, leaving many unable to make a fully informed decision about their vote. This lack of a knowledge base to root their political standpoints in also leaves younger generations susceptible to external influences, including peers, social media and parents, potentially leaving them vulnerable to misinformation. Furthermore, while some young people do work and pay tax, they are the minority, and most lack the real-world experience to truly understand the full extent of the impacts of their vote. Political education can only go so far; it is experience that truly counts.

So while a lower voting age might result in a higher voter turnout, a raised voting age may improve the quality of those votes.

The core disagreement here is one between two competing models of democracy: one in which democratic legitimacy is sourced from turnout and participation, and the other from a competent and informed vote. Proponents of the participation model point to greater equality among citizens, favouring mass representation over a higher quality of decisions, ultimately resulting in a democracy in which more people can engage. However, in society's current form, this standpoint fails to address the possible political and societal fallout of entrusting such an important responsibility to those potentially ill-equipped to wield it, boosting democracy on paper, but not necessarily in practice.

So, what is the answer? While disenfranchising some, a raised voting age would ultimately lead to a healthier democracy and society in general, one in which votes are grounded in real-world experience and political and cognitive maturity. While educational reforms are possible to alleviate concerns over a lack of political knowledge, they will never comprehensively address the issue of cognitive immaturity and lack of experience without major changes to society itself. So, given present conditions, raising the voting age would not diminish democracy, but preserve the quality and stability upon which it relies.

Are public schools morally justifiable?

Jago Marton | UVIth

This is a question that is uncomfortable precisely because of where you are reading it. Jago argues that this discomfort is exactly why it needs to be asked, and that anyone who can't justify their own position shouldn't be surprised when others challenge it.

This is undoubtedly an uncomfortable question, but it is one that nonetheless needs to be asked and, in fact, needs to be addressed even more because it is uncomfortable for us as attendees and beneficiaries of public schools. This is because the very idea of the Purvis Society is supposed to be about questioning and rational discussion, but this serves no purpose at all if all we do is ask questions about the behaviour and practices of others rather than our own. Whatever your stance on this issue, we all gain from actively engaging with the question, as making sure we can actually rationally justify our own positions is crucial for our moral development both personally and more broadly as a society.

First, we have to ask ourselves what it is about public schools that we must justify. This is almost undoubtedly the fact that people who are fortunate enough to go to private school receive a much better quality of education than those who go to state schools. This is due to private schools spending more per pupil than state schools (13,700 pounds per pupil for private schools versus only 7,200 pounds per pupil in 2021, according to the IFS), which allows them to provide better quality education. It is not the difference in the quality of education in itself which is the issue. The issue is that this difference in education leads to private school students doing far better in public examinations than state school students and therefore going on to have far better career prospects. The difference in attainment in public examinations can be seen in 2025, where 49% of all grades achieved by pupils at public schools were an A or A*, compared to just 25% of grades achieved by state school students, almost half as many. It is important to return to the purpose of public examinations. They primarily exist as a way of sorting students by academic performance so that universities, employers and other institutions can allocate opportunities in what is intended to be a fair and meritocratic way. This is a myth, however, under our current system, as the reality is that instead of the top grades going to those who work the hardest or are the most talented, they go to those with the richest parents. Therefore, fundamentally, the existence of public schools is completely at odds with the idea of a meritocratic society and is, on that basis, morally unjustifiable.

It is important to consider the possible counter-arguments to this and the possible ways that public schools can be morally justified.

The first possible justification is the argument that parents should have freedom of choice in terms of where they send their child to school and how they spend their money. My response to this is that the choice to send your child to private school does not represent a choice to educate your child in a fundamentally different way, but instead solely represents the purchase of advantage. There is no fundamental difference in the educational approach of state and public schools, as both are subject to the same national curriculum and the same public examinations. Instead, the freedom to send your child to private school is solely the freedom to send your child to a better-resourced school. Whilst this is a completely understandable course of action for a parent, this does not make it morally justifiable. Additionally, freedom of choice can unquestionably be restricted if the exercise of that choice directly and negatively affects others or society as a whole, which I would argue applies to private education, as it negatively affects the opportunities afforded to those who are unable to attend private school. Additionally, the reduction in equality of opportunity certainly has a negative effect on society more broadly.

Another closely related justification is the argument that parents who have worked hard and perhaps lived frugally in order to afford private school fees should not be prevented from using their resources to provide what they believe to be the best education for their children. The problem with this argument is that it has the same difficulties as those outlined above: parents do not have an absolute right to give their children an unfair head start in life. Additionally, the idea that parents who send their children to private school have simply made more sacrifices than everyone else, going on fewer holidays or working longer hours, is simply not true in most cases. Put simply, private education is an immense luxury that is only available to the very wealthy, now more than ever, as over the last 20 years fees have skyrocketed. Yearly fees to attend Cranleigh as a boarder are now 57,000 pounds, which is almost double the pre-tax average income, which stands at 39,000 pounds.

A third and final broader possible justification for public schools is offered by the idea popularised by philosopher John Rawls in his book A Theory of Justice, in which he argued that something that creates inequality can be justified if it makes the worst-off people better off than they would otherwise be. So for public schools, it would have to be proven that their existence, whilst increasing inequality of opportunity, improves the raw quality of education of pupils at state schools and the overall welfare of society as a whole. This could be argued on the grounds that public schools offer bursaries and scholarships, which enable children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access a great education. Additionally, the existence of public schools could be said to alleviate pressure on the state sector, as it means that 7% of children do not have to be provided for by the state sector, freeing up resources, since parents who send their children to private schools still pay taxes which fund the state sector. It could also be said that private school students can use their education to go on and contribute immensely to society later in life.

I find these arguments quite limited, however. Firstly, the amount of bursaries public schools give out to genuinely disadvantaged pupils is very low, as fewer than 1% of students at private schools are on a full bursary. Instead, most bursaries and scholarships go to either wealthy middle-class families who are only slightly unable to fully afford the fees, or to families which send multiple children to the school. Secondly, whilst I acknowledge that in some ways the existence of private schools does provide practical relief to pressure on state schools, this is only marginal, given that fewer than 7% of students attend private schools. Additionally, the problem is not insurmountable, as the state could compensate for the rise in costs with a higher tax on the wealthy, who would now have considerably more disposable income with no school fees to pay. Furthermore, former public school buildings would be taken over by the state and therefore fill the gap. Lastly, the potential gains from private school students going on to give back to society and the economy are likely to be only very marginal, and are outweighed, in my view, by the effect on the labour market of having a genuinely meritocratic society and education system in which the actual best candidates are chosen.

Finally, there is the argument that public schools are morally justifiable because equality of opportunity is not achievable, and therefore abolishing public schools will not improve equality of opportunity, as inequality will persist. This can be argued on the basis that even if public schools are abolished, there will be other ways in which parental income will still impact the quality of education a child receives: the ability to pay for tutoring outside school, to buy a house in the catchment area of a good school, and to pay for educational materials. Additionally, it is true that educational inequality often starts before a child begins school, as the type of upbringing children receive at home has a massive impact on educational attainment, and the quality of that upbringing is often dictated by the income of their parents, which determines how much time parents can spend with their children and their access to books, cultural activities, and enrichment.

Just because abolishing public schools is not a silver bullet for solving inequality of opportunity does not mean that the right thing to do is to keep them. We must of course acknowledge that inequality of opportunity is in many ways a fact of life and fundamentally cannot be entirely eliminated. This does not mean, however, that we should accept all levels and forms of inequality of opportunity, especially those that we know we could easily remove. Abolishing private schools would most certainly increase equality of opportunity, as it would remove the most direct and obvious way in which wealth is translated into educational advantage. The marginal effects on educational outcome of being able to attend a slightly better state school because you can afford the house prices are very much smaller than the marginal advantage of attending a completely different school in which substantially more money is spent on your education. The same applies to the marginal effects of getting a tutor or being able to buy more textbooks.

Additionally, the public school system is the most visible sign of how the idea of meritocracy in the UK is a fiction, and therefore even the symbolism of abolishing public schools would do a great deal to restore people's belief that we truly live in a fair society.



Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune

Mr Saxel

In a departure from the usual style of Purvis talk, we visited Paris in the late 19th century in the company of Mr Saxel at the piano, and immersed ourselves in its bohemian world, inhabited by some of the greatest artists, poets and musicians in history. We explored how one symbolist poem (L'Après-midi d'un faune, by Stephane Mallarmé) inspired a young composer (Claude Debussy) to change the entire course of modern classical music, and how that single piece of music in turn inspired artists from all disciplines.

Along the way we encountered woodcuts by Edouard Manet, sculptures by Auguste Rodin, ancient vases housed in the Louvre depicting classical Greek mythology, a notorious ballet presented by Sergei Diaghilev with choreography by the greatest male ballet dancer of all time (Nijinsky), and we considered how works of Art resonate through the ages by listening to recordings and watching original film from over a century ago.

Mr Saxel performed the original version of the Debussy's Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faune on the piano, compared it to a fully orchestrated version, and led a discussion on how emotional expression is possible through the medium of a musical instrument. We discussed how a professional musician prepares, performs live and in the recording studio, and debated the roles of composer, performer, and audience whilst experiencing live music at extremely close quarters, with Mr Saxel inviting us to watch him play at extremely close quarters!



Worldviews and their collisions

Mr Backhouse



At the start of October, I very much enjoyed chairing a Purvis discussion on the topic of 'worldviews and their collisions'. Unavoidably, each of us experiences intellectual formation in a way that is shaped deeply and irreversibly by the values of our parents, peers, and surrounding culture. Most of us navigate the world using a mental map that is substantially determined by what we have learnt subconsciously to think, prioritise, and assign value to.

At the meeting, we scrutinised some of the foundational building blocks of our 'worldviews' (as some historians of ideas have called these mental maps) in contexts from inheritance tax to the advance of modern technology. Entertaining contributions from pupils variously suggested the implementation of a deliberately 'unfair' tax system, and relieving moral burdens on elderly people precisely by taxing their legacies at 100%. We then compared competing worldviews evident in two very different perspectives on modern technology and its welfare impacts. Wendell Berry's provocative 'Why I am not going to buy a computer' determines not to speak of computers with a respectful tone of voice unless and until 'somebody has used a computer to write work that is demonstrably better than Dante's, and when this "better" is demonstrably attributable to the use of a computer.' Roland G. Thomas, meanwhile, warns against falling into the trap of the Post Office's chief engineer, who, in 1878, slighted a futile and useless innovation from across the Atlantic: 'Americans have need of a telephone, but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys.'

Pupils came to see that big philosophical questions and practical challenges like the adoption of technologies that will enhance human welfare are heavily influenced by subjective moral judgements, and that assessing historical progress requires us to inhabit the moral modules of our predecessors in order to understand the vast gulf of difference between their imaginations and our own. In today's world, we are increasingly encouraged to let whimsical, emotional judgements of what 'feels' right crowd out more careful, intellectually courageous thought, and to explain genuine disagreements with others away as inevitable clashes with their ignorant bigotry.

Awareness of the cultural seedbed of our moral intuitions is therefore indispensable for serious thought and meaningful contribution to any diverse community. I was very encouraged by the scholars' willingness to entertain the existence of moral ideas very different from their own, and to consider the implications of these radical differences.

Trump's first year in office

Georgina - UVIth

For my Purvis talk, I decided to do an overview of Trump's first year in office. My aim was to reflect on Trump's first year in order to understand how much of an effect it has on global politics and world order today. I looked into his domestic and foreign policy, and contemplated the implications it had socially, economically and then the wider long term effects. We discussed a broad range of topics including both recent headlines such as Trump's invasion of Venezuela, the role the EU, NATO and UK might/ should play in possibly rivalling America, in relation to aspects such as international law, human rights and foreign aid. The role of ICE, the impact it has had not only in America, but how it might have fueled conversations surrounding immigration as a whole, Additionally, we also considered the political history of America taking a step back from the news, comparing the intentions of the constitution, the founding fathers and the principles of America to Trump's first year in office discussing whether his policies aligned with "American principles".

Overall, I really enjoyed the conservation that was brought out from this talk. I thought it was really interesting how we were able to challenge each other's perspectives with productive conversations.



Image by Horst Schwalm from Pixabay

The ethics of de-extinction

Monty Oates

When asked if I could do a Purvis talk my mind whirred with ideas, what could I do one on? Should it be related to my academics? Could I try to talk about conspiracy theories for over an hour, or should I base my talk closer to home? I eventually settled on de-extinction discussing both the ethics and problems with such a new and revolutionary technology.

I found quickly through private conversations that knowledge on this topic was limited. Most people's introduction had come in October 2024 in a brief wave of popularity after the successes with dire wolves became known to the public, since then, radio silence on all platforms. Finding materials was also tricky, since it was scarcely talked about there was very little to base contentions and arguments on, articles tended to focus on the 'playing god' aspect and anything professional focused more on the actual science of creating life. With these constraints in mind I formed my talk around teaching and explaining the premise, then offering contentions and arguments for and against to create educated discussion (largely found on podcasts and scientific magazines). Eventually splitting my presentation into 2 sides, how it relates to conservation and the natural world and how this technology could affect humanity, this created a clear path for discussion.

I found involvement in the talk to be far above expectations, everyone who came got thoroughly involved with the premises, set out and approached the given contentions with an open mindset. Questions were across the board inquisitive and well formulated, most people opted to centre arguments and inquisition on whether de-extinction affects conservation and what widespread use would mean for the environment. When following this thought train, everyone (myself included) did well in referring questions back to the overarching topic which allowed proper discussion and breakdown of different viewpoints.

The questions were seemingly endless, every time one question was answered, there seemed to be a sea of hands ready to batter my explanation. This was amazing to see as when writing the talk, I had some personal worry on whether this would be mentally stimulating for my peers, but was amazed at how willing everyone was to discuss such a complex and nuanced topic. Opinions also ranged across the board, with everyone seemingly having a different judgement, this led to lines of questioning and debating which could only be likened to the Oxbridge unions or PMQ's! This continued for over and an hour without slowing down, severely limiting allowed time for the second half of the talk. Generally involvement seemed to exponentially increase when explaining the effects on humans and how technology could be applied to us, by the time I had finished setting out the premises I could comfortably say that every single hand in the room was up, but with only time for one question, we sadly did not get sufficient time to hear all viewpoints.

Looking back on the talk I wouldn't change anything, the only annoyance came from a lack of time to discuss the question as seemingly 90 minutes was nowhere near enough time for sufficient breakdown of such a dense topic. I thoroughly enjoyed giving this talk to my peers and there is no doubt in my mind that discussion could have spanned entire weeks trying to break down given information, viewpoints and all questions and contentions available.



Image by Fernando Zhiminaicela from Pixabay

Has equality solved love or broken it?

Coco Beaumont – UVIth

For my Purvis talk, I wanted to explore a side of equality that is often overlooked, not its political or legal success, but its impact on relationships, love, and human connection. In particular, I examined how equality may have both improved and complicated the way men and women relate to one another.

To begin, I used a series of slides to outline the historical evolution of gender roles. I started with the role of men, which, for most of history, remained relatively consistent: men were expected to be providers, protectors, and figures of authority.

These themes: power, responsibility, and stoicism, persisted from ancient civilisations through to the Victorian era. However, the two World Wars marked a turning point, as they began to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and contributed to what is often described as a "crisis of masculinity." For the first time, the idea that men were inherently stoic and emotionally restrained was questioned.

I then explored the evolution of women's roles. For centuries, women were largely confined to the domestic sphere, particularly during the Victorian period, where they were expected to embody the ideal of the "angel in the house", pure, submissive, and devoted to family life.However, these limitations began to shift in the 20th century with the rise of feminism. The first wave, led by the suffragettes and suffragists, secured voting rights (partially in 1918 and fully in 1928), while the second wave focused on broader autonomy, including access to education, employment, reproductive rights, and financial independence.

This rapid transformation led to the modern day, where equality has, in many ways, been achieved. However, this raised the central question of my talk: if we are freer than ever, why does something feel unsettled? Why does freedom not always translate into fulfilment?
This provided a natural transition into the second half of my talk, which focused on open discussion and debate. I introduced a series of provocative questions, each designed to challenge assumptions and encourage different perspectives.

These included:

- "Are men obsolete in the age of female independence?"
- "We're freer than ever, so why are we so alone?"
- "If marriage is no longer necessary, does that make it pointless?"
- "Has equality killed romance?"

Each question sparked around fifteen minutes of discussion, and while conversations could easily have continued for much longer, I ensured a range of topics were covered. To support the debate, I included statistics on each slide, allowing participants to draw on evidence when forming their arguments. I also incorporated a contemporary perspective through a discussion of the Vogue article "Is Having a Boyfriend Embarrassing Now?", which prompted further debate around modern attitudes to relationships, social image, and independence.

To conclude, I left my audience with a final question to reflect on: "Can we solve these modern problems without undoing the progress of equality?"

Overall, I was struck by how engaged the audience was. Some took a more traditional view, arguing that marriage and stable relationships remain essential for both individuals and society. Others challenged the very relevance of gender itself, offering perspectives I had not previously considered.

I chose this topic because it is one I find genuinely fascinating and have explored independently for some time. The range of opinions shared during the discussion not only deepened my understanding, but also inspired me to develop these ideas further in my Dangerous Minds speech on the "Equality Paradox."

Medical ethics

Ava



I chose to do my purvis talk on medical ethics because I thought that there would be some interesting debates within this topic. I started the talk by explaining some basic principles of medical ethics, which are taught to medical students to help them base decisions off of.

These are: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. Autonomy is whether the patient is shown respect and the right to make decisions, non - maleficence is whether the action harms the patient, beneficence is whether it benefits the patient and justice is whether there are any consequences to the wider community.

Following this, we debated 3 hypothetical situations, in which there was not a clear answer and often where there is some conflict between the basic principles.

The first situation was about bioterrorism, where a flight attendant was brought into an ER with a temperature, believing it was chicken pox. However, after a few examinations, the doctors concluded it to be smallpox, which is deadly, extremely contagious and has no cure. He was likely given this by a bioterrorist, who was asymptomatic but everybody who he was in contact with would have contracted the disease. He has flown to 8 cities over the last week and so the CDC gave mandatory vaccines to all the workers in the hospital, patients in the ER, co-workers and people living in his apartment complex. They also shipped quantities of the vaccine to all the cities that he had travelled to and offered these to the people of these cities. All the people on the flight and their families were forced to have the vaccine. We discussed the ethics of vaccines, and forcing people to have vaccines, arguing both sides that it could help others and achieve herd immunity, so justice, but also autonomy in terms of patient decisions and side effects. We asked interesting questions about whether someone with religious reasons should be exempt from having the vaccine or whether vaccines of more common diseases such as measles should be compulsory to have, if it helps immunocompromised patients. I was also asked some questions about the smallpox vaccine itself, such as the origins, which originally came from injecting a dose of cowpox vaccine, which made people ill for a few days but then they made a full recovery.

The second hypothetical that we debated was imagining that you are a GP, a mother came into your office with her child, complaining of flu-like symptoms. After they enter the room, you ask the child to remove his shirt, after this you discover that he has a distinct pattern of bruises on his torso. After asking the mother where they came from, she says "cao gio" or coining, which is an ancient Vietnamese remedy for treating minor and common illnesses, like a cold. Coining is rubbing warm oil or gel on the skin, using a coin or another flat metal object. The mother explains that the purpose is to "raise out bad blood" and improve circulation and healing. As you touch the boy's back with a stethoscope, he would wince in pain. You then debate whether to call CPS.

Following this, we discussed when a physician should step in and stop a cultural practice, with some answers being when it begins to harm the child. In response to this, we thought about some medical procedures that can also be painful, such as removing a person's tonsils. Some arguments were that these were entirely different situations, but others were that ultimately both aims were to help. After this, I asked whether they would report the mother. Overall, most people said no but they would keep an eye on it.

The final situation that we debated was one surrounding difficulties with parental consent. In the situation, a bright, articulate 13 year old girl had a cancerous tumour in one eye which was growing very quickly. She needed surgery and the surgeons believed that she could need a blood transfusion during the surgery. Her parents made it very clear that they did not give their consent to any procedures involving giving their daughter blood products. Initially, the girl agreed, despite the physician explaining the risks. Later, when the girl was alone, she said that she was very scared of dying and asked the physician to do what is best. I asked what they would do if they were the physician and branching off of this we ended up discussing Gillick competency, which is a legal principle used in the UK to decide whether a person under the age of consent is mature, intelligent and understanding enough to consent to medical treatment.

I think that it was interesting to be able to debate these topics, because in daily life, it is not often something we openly discuss, yet there are lots of conflicting opinions, which I think are important to address.



Editor's intro

One of the things that makes the Purvis Society genuinely special is its reach. It is not a sixth form club or a niche interest group; it runs through the school from the IVth form upwards, meaning that the same spirit of curiosity and open debate that drives the older year groups is being cultivated in students who have only just arrived at Cranleigh.

In this section, a member of each year group has written a short reflection on their Purvis year: what they discussed, what surprised them, and what stayed with them. The topics range from Hobbes and Locke to Trump and the Strait of Hormuz, from the UK legal system to the future of NATO, from abortion to oil brokers, from dinner table debates to cross-year challenges. Taken together, they offer a picture of a society that is doing exactly what it is supposed to do.



IV Form: a first year of big questions

Reuben Somers

What is the best form of government? What did Hobbes really think about human nature? And what exactly happens inside a criminal court? The Fourth Form's first year of Purvis covered more ground than most people manage in several.

In the new Fourth Form's first year of Purvis Society, we had many debates and discussions. Some of my favourites took place on Fridays during lunch time, because we normally talked about current affairs. This usually featured my preferred subject, US politics. With lots of talks about the NHS, the UK budget and police stop and search, we did not just cover global issues; we also talked about how to improve our country and daily lives. This included preparing a presentation on what we thought was the best form of government, and our own take on it. For my group, we thought that a more community-based government under the umbrella of a national government would lead to the best quality of life for everyone.

On the other hand, during Scholars lessons we learnt about many different philosophers and their views on certain topics, such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau on human nature, and Kant, Bentham and Sartre on decision-making. More recently we have been looking into the UK legal system, focusing on criminal courts, and we have also been preparing for a trial of our own. The Fourth Form scholars have also had a debate with the Lower Sixth scholars, which allowed us to be exposed to some different ideas and deeper, bigger conversations.

Overall, in Purvis Society in the Fourth Form, we have had a year full of deep debates, large group discussions, and learning.

LV Form: a year that never left us in agreement

Josh Groocock

Maduro's arrest, British air bases, abortion, oil brokers, and a Gordon McKee intervention that the group collectively decided was irrelevant. The Lower Fifth's Purvis year was, in the best possible way, all over the place.

This year's Purvis sessions have featured insightful arguments, controversial opinions and fruitful debates all throughout. With the addition of some new members this year, the discussions were even more exciting and interesting than last year's. Here, I will share some of the specific debates that we have had over the last year.

Since President Trump was inaugurated last year, the political climate has been much more active and dramatic. This led to many intense debates around a variety of foreign and internal policies One notable session was centred around the arrest of Nicolas Maduro through Mission Absolute Resolve. The majority argued that the arrest was good overall, but that depended on how the power vacuum would be filled afterwards. The minority, led by Emmie Hepburn, argued that allowing Trump to do anything he wanted, including breaking international law, was fundamentally bad, as it could have led to him taking even more illegal actions.

Another notable argument was around the use of British air bases by American troops in the US-Iran war. Throughout this discussion we examined the many different opinions of the major British parties, and we particularly agreed with the opinion of Ed Davey, who strongly opposed the idea. Elliott Kitson was also keen to point out the opinion of Gordon McKee, the Labour MP for Glasgow South, which we all decided was irrelevant.

On the more philosophical side of our debates, we talked about the highly controversial topic of abortion. This debate was handled carefully and with a specific sincerity which was to be expected on such a topic. Throughout the session, many compelling arguments were presented by both Mr Rothwell and many of us, specifically Leo Frangopoulos and Zoe Steinhauer-Hogg, but the general consensus was that there should not need to be a doctor's approval up until twenty four weeks.

Another interesting session was around the morality of oil companies making billions of dollars from the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, rather than that money going to struggling families. After a whistle-stop tour of how oil brokers make money, we discussed whether it should be allowed. Henry Lawton made a good point that while it is not ideal, it is simply the way a capitalist system works, and that because such a system is broadly functional there is no need to change it.

This was supported by Emmie's point that even if some oil companies are making billions, many more are losing money, so it can balance out.

This is just a snippet of our year in Lower Fifth Purvis. Overall, the year has been eventful and exciting, filled with truly fascinating debates that have never left us all in agreement.



UV Form: questioning the present

Archie Driscoll

From ICE raids to NATO's future, from French religious policy to the very nature of reality, the Upper Fifth's Purvis year asked the kind of questions that do not leave you alone after the session ends.

From ethical dilemmas within British society to questioning your own reality, Purvis Society has been a whirlwind this year in the Upper Fifth. Throughout the year, many sessions have been centred around Trump's actions in the United States, including the actions of ICE and the war on Iran. However, Purvis is not just for politics. We have also discussed various topics such as religious policies in other countries, for example in France, where you are not allowed to express your religion in certain ways, such as wearing a large cross.

The most interesting topic this year has certainly been the debate around where NATO stands amongst all the chaos and wars Trump has caused. On the one hand, it is seen as obligatory for the members of NATO to aid the USA; however, it could also be seen as an act of war and lead to further escalations across the globe.

Overall, Purvis this year has been a challenge to the mind and a challenge to the very morals on which we base society today. It is always something to look forward to during your day. Purvis is always about questioning the present, not just going along with it.





VI Form: a year to be proud of

Coco Beaumont

Fifteen talks, nine of them student-led, six dinners, and one Christmas Quiz Extravaganza. The Sixth Form Purvis Society has had a full year. Coco Beaumont reflects on what made it worth showing up for.

From leading discussions with younger year groups, to listening to peers and teachers hold court on topics we had never thought to question, to the dinners that always seemed to run well over time, this has been a year the Sixth Form Purvis Society can look back on with genuine pride. Across the Michaelmas and Lent terms, the society held 15 talks in total, of which 9 were delivered by students themselves. That is no small thing. Topics ranged from fairness and disability, online privacy, free speech, and feminism, all the way to the role of science, history, the monarchy, Trump, and populism. The breadth alone says something about the appetite within the sixth form for ideas that go well beyond the syllabus.

Alongside the talks, 6 dinners were held throughout the year, covering everything from world views and medical ethics to poetry, music, and de-extinction. Dinners have always been one of the better parts of Purvis: smaller, more relaxed, and with the kind of conversations that tend to drift pleasantly off-topic by the second course. This year was no different. And then, of course, there was the Christmas Purvis Quiz Extravaganza, which deserves a mention in its own right.

What the numbers cannot quite capture, though, is the atmosphere. Purvis at its best is the rare kind of space where it is perfectly acceptable to hold an unpopular opinion, to be challenged on it, and to leave the room having either changed your mind or worked out more clearly why you hadn't. This year produced plenty of those moments, and the fact that the majority of the programme was student-led made them all the more worth having.

A very big thank you to Immy and Ava for their organisation and enthusiasm throughout the year, and to Mr Rothwell for making all of it possible.



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