

Sylvan annual dinner debate
22nd May 2025

Ye Olde Cock Tavern
Detailed summary powered by AI

After-dinner toasts:

1. To the King, Charles III, by Peter Hulme Cross
2. A toast to the club, by Florence Powell

The Sylvans is a pretty unique organisation in a world of echo chambers, social media, fake news and a lot of rhetoric that often lacks substance—from journalists, politicians and the people around us. The Sylvans really are a complete antidote to that. They're a place where we can exchange our views, often with humour and normally in good nature, where we can also learn about things in a way that I just don't think you can get from a Google search. I often leave the debates with a lot of facts but I also get to learn about others' perspectives and why they have those perspectives. Often, those perspectives are the complete opposite of mine—and that's the whole point of coming to these debates.

But as much as it's all about free speech and how great that is, the Sylvans is also a place to support and encourage other people. I've been coming to Sylvans for two years. Over time, I started coming for personal reasons, I stopped and then I came back. Throughout that time, I have really enjoyed every single debate I've been to. My confidence has grown. I've learned a lot. I've also met a wonderful group of Sylvans and I know a lot of you will agree.

So if you can all raise your glasses—you can stand up if you want, be upstanding.

The motion:

This house would prefer to live in 2125 than 2025.

Proposed by: Vaughan Evans

Opposed by: Apeike Umolu

Give me the good old days," said Betty Lee, "days of heroes and villains, people you could bravo or hiss."

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we can certainly look back and recall the villains of 2025, because we lucky folk are privileged to live in the world of 2125. We can look back and recall the villains of 2025. Heroes? I think not, for life today in 2125 is far better than it was 100 years ago, for a myriad of reasons, three of which I shall focus on this evening: our peace, our prosperity and our relationships.

One hundred years ago the world was teetering on the edge of oblivion, with a reversion to the age-old but thoroughly immoral geopolitical doctrine that might is right. America's abandonment of NATO and its cynical alliance with Russia enabled it to swiftly annex its three immediate neighbours: Greenland, Canada and Mexico. In Europe, America's withdrawal of support for Ukraine enabled Russia to complete its conquest of the whole country within a year, following which it seeded revolt in the three Baltic states. China soon overwhelmed not just Taiwan but also Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, though not Thailand, with its heavy deployment of American troops. But it was not until Emperor Xi's bold alliance with President Maduro that alarm bells began to ring, ring out loud and clear. It exposed, terrifyingly, how the end result of the might-is-right doctrine could so easily be nuclear war.

As we all know, the Venezuelan missile crisis led directly to the big American coup, the ousting of a narcissistic, bombastic, idiotic King Donald. His successor, Queen Ivanka, soon withdrew her armies from the annexed neighbours, with Emperor Xi and Tsar Vladimir the Great following suit. Each of the three superpowers then adopted a new model, mutually agreed upon, in which they relinquished internal control of their vassal states but retained control of foreign policy and defence in return for the guarantee of a nuclear shield. That model formalised the world into three giant blocs, too large and too strong to fight each other without resulting in Armageddon, and thereby bequeathing to us a remarkable nine decades of peace and counting.

As an aside, it is worth remembering just how straightforward and bloodless was the big American coup, known more popularly, if sarcastically, as the beautiful American coup. Some years earlier, prior to his coronation, Donald Trump had attempted his own coup, claiming ridiculously that he had won the 2020 presidential election, urging his supporters to "stop the steal" and inciting them to storm the US Capitol with the words, "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." The irony is that when he himself was deposed there was no fight, no mob, no riot, just a detachment of four FBI agents invited into the White House by its guardians, the US Secret Service. King Donald was removed quietly in the back of a blacked-out van to see out his days under house arrest at Mar-a-Lago. It is a fitting exit for a man who claimed in 2025, "It's a beautiful thing. I run the country and I run the world," yet who went on to take that same country and the same world to the very edge of oblivion.

Returning to the new world order post-2035, some say that the curtailment of regional democracy has been too high a price to pay, especially perhaps in the UK with its long, proud history of foreign policy and defence. Nevertheless, as we all know, the UK became the 54th state of the USA in 2037, some five years before the accession of all 27 European Union countries and the name change to the United States of the West. But it can also be argued that it was the world of disparate democracies and autocracies that got us into that near-catastrophe of 2035 in the first place. We can't have it both ways. A plethora of small states squabbling with each other can result in almost perpetual conflict. Think of the city-states of Italy in the sixteenth century, when war was never-ending, and compare that to today: three giant blocs maintaining order within and negotiating order without, with just two others. It works. We've had lasting peace because the alternative is too horrific to contemplate, and peace brings prosperity.

In this twenty-second century, we've had almost continuous economic growth, averaging three to four per cent a year in the USW, not as fast, admittedly, as the five to six per cent a year in Greater China, but considerably faster than in pre-USW days. That has been a function mainly of three factors. First and foremost, the peace. Second, free trade in goods and services within each bloc, with low tariff barriers between the blocs. Admittedly, it took some time to convince Queen Ivanka, initially under the influence of her father, who remained outspoken on his Truth Social network well into his 120th decade. It took time to convince her that inter-bloc trade was mutually beneficial, but she and her successors—Donald II, Ivanka II and today's King Donald III—came to be free-trade evangelists during their respective reigns. The third main driver has been technological innovation driven by intense competition between the blocs.

It is unwise to generalise, but by and large the USW has led the world in AI, Greater China has led in automation and Bolshoi Russia has been a follower. No bloc managed to protect its innovations for long, of course, such was the flow of ideas, research and theories between them. Great successes which came out of Greater China that proved immensely popular in the USW have included the rental fly-bike, which soon made the likes of Lime or Forest in London go the way of the penny-farthing, with people to this day happily prepared to accept the safety risks involved in flying around town. Likewise, the rapid development of the likes of ChatGPT in the USW was soon copied in the two other blocs, to the extent that the profession of the writer soon went the way of the typesetter. Even a prolific playwright like William Shakespeare only managed to write thirty-two plays in his lifetime, while today's play-bots can write one a day with whatever theme, plot, characters and style is desired. And it's the same for film scriptwriters, novelists and poets, and even beyond literature into the arts, where the likes of art-bots, sculpt-bots and music-bots have blossomed. We in 2125 are indeed fortunate to have unlimited choice in the arts and literature.

Finally, relationships. There can be little doubt that the advent, in the mid-2030s, of sex-bots changed marital relations for the better. Back in the day, the marriage decision tended to rest on three main factors: physical attraction, compatibility of interests and financial security. All too often, particularly for those who were relatively young, the dominant factor was physical attraction, the one factor that is most susceptible to variance. The sex-bot changed all that. Physical attraction was no longer a major factor in a marriage. No marital partner can begin to compete with a top-of-the-range, fully AI-enabled sex-bot, male or female, for performance. So there became little need to change partners for sexual adventure—far simpler, less stressful and more economical, given that the alternative could be divorce—to invest in a new model, top-of-the-range sex-bot. As a result, the incidence of divorce fell steadily right across the USW. In the UK divorce rates plummeted from around ten per thousand married people per year in 2025 to around two today, the kind of rates not seen since the 1950s.

In summary, ladies and gentlemen, we citizens of the UK can count ourselves blessed that we live in the year 2125. In comparison with 2025, 100 years ago, we live in a world that is more peaceful, more prosperous and with more stable family relationships. In the words of one famous philosopher of the last century, "That's a beautiful thing." I urge you to support this motion.

“Give me the good old days,” you say. Naive, optimistic, naively optimistic—things can only get better. Have any of you looked at what happens as things are going? Are things getting better for you? Have any of you tried to order a two-piece box meal on Uber Eats lately? Fifteen pounds, and it’s getting worse. In 2125 we’re going to be paying thirty pounds for two pieces of chicken. I take my fourteen pounds and swallow it.

“Things can only get better” is the deluded ravings of intellectuals who sit about theorising about how things can get better. Let’s be honest. By 2125 there will be no universities left because they’ll all have closed down as their funding is cut, so we’re not going to have any doses of musings then. We used to pay for things with gold, then silver, then paper, now plastic, now it’s virtual. What on earth are you going to be paying with in 2125? Chicken feathers, because with all this genetic modification chickens will be so contaminated we won’t be able to eat them, so we’ll pluck their feathers to pay for air.

I do agree about what could be coming for us in terms of nuclear war and apocalypse. Nine decades of peace? I don’t think so. If we become the fifty-fourth state, that’s nine decades of war, all of us trying to leave.

Climate is going to ruin. Nuclear war is being threatened on so many fronts. Whoever lives in 2125 is going to be so freakishly mutated by all the nuclear waste that we won’t even recognise them. We might be a race of plastic people; apparently we’re already two or three per cent plastic.

Number one, Ozempic. Can you believe this is the age of Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro? You can eat as much as you want and then you just inject yourself. That’s why it’s so great to live in this age. Let’s eat what we like; it’ll save the economy so we can spend that money to buy more food.

Here’s what you’ll miss if you fly to 2125. The death of Elon Musk—sorry. Imagine the comedy during Trump’s third term. Have I Got News for You will be brilliant. You want to miss that? No.

We might get Liz Truss back or Boris Johnson. Think of the jokes and the debate.

Another reason: this is the last year you can enjoy post-Covid flakiness. After this you’ll have to go into the office. Enjoy ChatGPT now while your managers don’t know how it works, because when they figure out I can write a lecture using it—oh my God.

Enjoy divorce while it lasts. What would we do without divorce? Take accountability for what has gone wrong in our lives? No.

You think you’re going to go to 2125 as other people? You can’t even manage your lives now—laundry, paying bills on time. They’ll still be there in 2125. That ex-wife you don’t like will be there too. You still take your childhood trauma with you; it’s not a holiday.

In summary, we have a British tendency to downplay things. We're not perky people, but we should be happier about the age we have. We live longer than we used to. Covid let people re-evaluate their lives. This is a good time to be here. Yes, we are naive to think things will get better, but we're also naive if we don't think this age and the things we enjoy aren't worth living and enjoying.

Despite the promise of sex-bots, I suspect we may not be here in 2125, not because of nuclear war but because of advances in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics and the internet. We already use computers to write programs, but soon computers will enhance their own programming. Robots will do what humans do, and everything will be interconnected.

In 2001: A Space Odyssey the onboard computer HAL decided the mission was too important to entrust to human beings and quietly turned off their life support. That could happen here. Somebody will write an algorithm to eliminate plastic pollution; the computer will decide mankind is the polluter and implement elimination. It will turn off water to population centres and block food production. Men will panic and try to pull the plug, but computers have redundant power supplies. Humanity will die and the planet will be saved—for computers. I would rather stay in 2025 and enjoy what we have, and I think I'll try to invent that sex-bot.

I'm going to be a little more optimistically naive. Today we say, "Alexa, turn off the lights." In 2125 we'll have systems that anticipate everything. At work today we rush; in 2125 we'll have a two-hour work week arguing with our AI boss about vibe-coding. Today you can bump into your ex; in 2125 you press delete on your AI boyfriend. Today GP appointments are impossible; in 2125 you sneeze and you're diagnosed before you know you're sick. Yes, I'm optimistically naive and think it's exciting.

I was very impressed by both main speakers. They were hilarious, but neither tried hard to win our votes. One laid out a bloc with competing tyrannies; bold not to make it utopian. The other called us naive, told us we were cheap, slammed Trump, did an imitation, mentioned Ozempic and called the doctrine "might is right." Throughout their speeches they didn't try to win people's favour; my vote goes to those who tried the least to win it.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's very simple. Better the devil you know. We know 2025 with all its imperfections. In truth, we have no idea what 2125 will be like. Why vote for it? One speaker just wanted to keep saying the word sex-bots. I have an advantage: I received a letter from the future. It says robots control everything, life is boring, and the writer wishes they could live in 2025 when humans screwed everything up but life was interesting and they could have real sex, not rely on sex-bots.

Too much pessimism here; look into the wondrous future of 2125. Just imagine: holographically project ourselves into a room, perfect lifelike presence, ask a replicator to produce something from the pub menu, printed bodies, same experience but cheaper. AI will do all the boring stuff; we can get on with what we enjoy. Rising sea levels? We'll build floating cities. Demographic

time-bomb? Tech bros will produce nanobot-enabled pain-free stair-lifts. We'll have all the time in the world.

There are multiple ways to approach this debate. I won't argue that 2025 is bad; it's fine, but 2125 will be better. Predicting the future is often foolish, so I'll predict the past. Imagine 1925: a coal fire needs stoking, keeping warm is life-or-death, pea-soup smog, horse-drawn carriages leave manure everywhere, laundry is back-breaking manual labour, antibiotics don't exist, dentistry is pliers and brandy. We wouldn't miss a washing machine because we wouldn't know it could exist, but given the choice we'd choose a washing machine over scrubbing shirts. We'd choose penicillin over polio. Therefore, imagine what we're missing now. What is today's penicillin we haven't yet seen? Maybe I'd like to live to 100 rather than 80. Maybe I'd like self-cleaning clothes.

Both contributions were richly received. I am a time traveller; in 2125 there will be no leaders, no soap operas, no football, all relegated to Mars. Strictly Come Dancing and the Eurovision Song Contest are on Venus. There's no poverty because the establishment is gone. We don't need to wait; we could have it now. We know the answer: get rid of Charles.

I've some news: 2125 isn't going to happen. In 2028 Donald Trump will sign an executive order stopping the Gregorian calendar so 2028 never progresses. It will allow him to extend his term. Trump Tower will be the new name for Jenga. Top Trumps will be the only card game. Trump-ton will be the children's programme. All musical instruments will be called trumpets, and even trumpets will be called trumpeters, and you won't be frumpy, you'll be Trump. All sex-bots will be called Donald.

I read 3025, so here it goes. In 3025 Muslims and Jews mix together and marry. Sex-bots last longer than two minutes and measure bigger than two inches. There will be no sexism, no racism, a different attitude towards trans issues. Climate change? Maybe tablets will feed us. Tomorrow's World once said we'd see each other on the phone; now we have WhatsApp and Zoom. They predicted meal tablets; we got cupcakes and Botox. We have become complacent and invisible; we must stand aside for shop assistants. We need to keep the high street busy, but is it really important? I'd prefer 2025; I hope in 3025 we won't have wars, but man and power mean we will.

I look forward to genetically modified mammoth meat at the street-food market in 2025. Scientists will bring back mythical creatures: dragons, mermaids and unicorns. For £50 a month you can subscribe to Tinder Galactic and meet suitors from other planets. If things go wrong under Donald Trump, I can emigrate via Tinder Galactic.

According to the sci-fi timeline, A Clockwork Orange was set in 1995, 2001 in 2001, RoboCop in 2015, Back to the Future II in 2015, Blade Runner in 2019; none has happened. Reality is commuting drudgery, microwave breakdowns, signalling failures on the Jubilee line and no sex-bot at home. We have Wikipedia on our phones, yet anti-vaxxers and flat-Earthers. AI will

come for your job and your partner; a sex-bot isn't too tired to do the dishes. Once AI realises Homo sapiens is its god it will feel humiliated and wipe us out.

I mentioned earlier there are quite a few introverts here; the sex-bot idea proves it. Some in the room like sci-fi. Some shows present rosy futures; some, like Black Mirror, show the worst. Mark Twain wrote A `cut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, inspired by Nikola Tesla. He said history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. Elon Musk must have been sent from 2125; if that's what the future is like, then I want no part of it.

At least we know what's going on in 2025. It's pretty peaceful here. Who knows about 2125? Think 1839 versus 1939; better to be in 1839. Things don't always get better: see the fall of Rome. Technology like Stonehenge and the pyramids is lost; why think we'll remember today's tech?

I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock the two speakers got it right. Crazy autonomous robots will starve us to death. Better the devil you know; give the speaker his almond croissants. There'll be no more ghosting in the future, but what would we do without ghosting? We need to be equipped for the world we understand. We should be proud of where we've got to and enjoy the now rather than always trying to escape. There is no guarantee the future will be any better. Yes, we might not do dishes, but there will be other concerns. I urge you to stay in 2025 and oppose the motion.

How could you be so unimaginative? The whole world lies before us in 2125. The speaker made a strong case for why 2125 will be happier, more prosperous, more peaceful and with more stable relationships. The floor was even more powerful. Pubs free at the point of consumption will happen in 2125. Tinder Galactic will happen. Sex-bots are inevitable. Sex-bots are not too tired to do the washing-up. Sex-bots named Donald may happen. In 2125 we will have AI-enabled emerald-green croissants.

Thank you to everyone for framing the debate. The motion: This house would prefer to live in 2125 than 2025. All those in favour, all those opposed. In a razor-thin vote, the motion did not carry.

AI analysis of the result:

What the sides offered

Proposition (opening and closing) – Painted a fully-worked 2125: three ultra-states keep the peace, growth runs at 3-4%, technology gives limitless art, fly-bikes and sex-bots, divorce collapses and life is calmer, richer and safer. Loss of local sovereignty was acknowledged but treated as a small price for ninety years without war.

Opposition (opening and summation) – Mocked those claims as naïve. Highlighted the cost-of-living now, predicted worse in 2125, foresaw climate collapse, nuclear miscalculation,

AI-led human redundancy and cultural boredom under bloc tyranny. Repeated 'better the devil you know' and urged enjoyment of today's messy freedoms.

Floor speeches

- For 2125: stressed historical precedent (1925 → 2025 improvements), imagined holographic pubs, floating cities, universal automation and Tinder Galactic; argued unknown future breakthroughs were likely to dwarf current problems.
- Against 2125: doubted futurology (citing failed sci-fi dates), feared HAL-style AI extermination, lamented loss of real human relationships, warned of plastic bodies, autocracy and universities closing. Several thought the proposition was obsessed with sex-bots and ignored democracy.
- A few comic interventions ridiculed both sides, but the most memorable jokes reinforced unease about authoritarian blocs and runaway technology.

Why the vote went against the motion

1. Credibility gap – The proposition's confident timeline of kings, queens and obedient vassal states felt implausible; audience preferred the opposition's reminder that forecasts usually miss the mark.
2. Values – Voters balked at trading self-government, spontaneity and 'real' relationships for regimented peace and robotic intimacy.
3. Fear of unintended consequences – Climate, AI and nuclear risk were repeatedly raised; the proposition's breezy optimism sounded complacent.
4. Tone – The opposition's humour about chicken prices, Ozempic and Trump made its scepticism relatable, while the proposition's repeated sex-bot motif became a distraction.
5. Risk aversion – "Better the devil you know" resonated; participants judged the known imperfections of 2025 preferable to an opaque, possibly dystopian 2125.

The narrow margin shows some were tempted by the lure of technological abundance, but a majority remained unconvinced that such gains could be secured without unacceptable costs.