# The Sylvans

## Detailed summary powered by AI

**16 February 2026**

***Motion: AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity.***

**Contents:**



# Transcript:

We will have two of you who volunteer and get respect for doing so, because it's fairly last minute. We'll be able to tell by your preparation or not. The first person will speak for the motion. They will stand to my right and they'll speak for five minutes. Five minutes, and then the next speaker will come up and speak for five minutes as well. And then it will go to the floor for you guys to each come up and have your say and speak for three minutes. And then they will do a closing speech for three minutes each, I think, in the reverse order, so the first person who speaks then gets the last word. That's how to run it.

To remind you of the motion, the motion is that the US is no longer a European ally. Sorry, yes, ignore that, that comes later. To confuse you, that was a test of our brains. This one is: AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. Notice the two elements there: inequality and productivity. AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. Who would like to volunteer on either side of this? Do you have a preference? An earlier speaker, you proposition. Cool. What's your name? The proposer, thank you very much. Who would like to oppose the proposer in this? Oppose the motion? The opposer, yes, do come up as well. Thank you. Thank you. Everyone give a round of applause.

So I will time you and give you these signs for two minutes, one minute and finish to start with a little bit of wiggle room, but then I will start banging the table. You have five minutes. And then you guys have a think about what you want to say, whether what you want to weigh in with for three minutes when it comes to you after the opening speeches. Thank you, when you're ready, the proposer.

So I think there's a lot of general fear about AI and how people feel about it, and the reason I think it's actually going to widen inequality is because people don't see what's coming. I think

people who are early adopters and using the technology well, using it a lot, can completely see the enormous disruption that's about to hit our work and how fast it's moving. If you were following the AI movement right from the start, I mean, we can go back to when it was first beating Go. But if we look at the movement from OpenAI in 2021 to hit the headlines, it was actually pretty fair for people to say it's utterly rubbish at a lot of things. And people would look at the outputs and what was generated and sort of complain about hallucinations. "It's making things up. It's never going to replace my job." And that's where a lot of people left it.

The movement of that technology since 2021 to now is enormously fast. It can actually now code and run and complete a full application with only instructions. One person on my team has absolutely zero tech background. She has never worked with technology in her life. She built her own to-do system with Claude code that's functioning, working and doing everything that she needs it to do to run her actual to-do list on a weekend, literally just instructing it. You can now create and run financial models better than a CFO on Excel using Claude. The jobs that we think are safe and that we are able to just carry on doing are going to completely be overtaken by the technology in a way that people are not expecting.

And we have some people actively using it quite a lot, and some people that are completely staying away from the technology, and for me, the inequality is going to come from the differentiation between someone who uses AI in their job and increases their productivity by 10 or 20 times, versus someone who's too scared to use the technology and is actually going to get priced out of work because they will not be hired. People who are adopting the technology, using it well, improving how they work, are going to be miles ahead of anyone who's not using it. Our whole way of working is changing fundamentally, and I think most of the population is not prepared for that, and I think that's really scary.

We've just had OpenAI pay and buy the first one-person business for a billion dollars that happened this week. So one person built a company that another business paid $1 billion for, and it was a one-man band. So the inequality is going to come from people who really embrace the technology and understand it's fundamentally changing how we work in every single industry, versus people who are completely ignoring it, not embracing it and not working with it.

I'll give you examples. We do not hire anyone in our business who does not use AI. So if you do not put on your CV that you use AI, that you incorporate it in your work and give us examples of how you incorporate it, we do not hire you. Now, we are an early-stage startup, so that's how we work. But I see all businesses going that way. There was a new technology that was launched last week, and it literally dipped the share prices of most of the wealth management companies by 15% because this is more disruptive than the Industrial Revolution. This is a completely new way of working, and most people are unprepared for that.

So we will see people capture the value of that, and loads of people being left behind. And what I'm really worried about is what is going to happen to the workforce. Because if we all just have a 20-minute work week, what is life going to look like? I'm not joking. I think the fundamental way of how we work is going to change enormously. And I have heard too many people being

super sceptical of the technology, and I think they are walking into a massive, massive black hole where they are going to struggle to be employed, because they do not look at what difference it makes to someone using the tech versus someone who doesn't. I don't even think that addresses economic inequalities, but I think it will create it, and that's what I think most people are not prepared for.

Good evening. I totally agree with the proposition. I do believe that AI will change the way we do things every day, significantly, fundamentally, and we cannot probably even imagine how it's going to be. However, the point where I disagree is whether it's a bad or a good thing. Yes, I agree that there is inequality between people who use AI currently and those who don't use AI. But you could have said the same about people who were early adopters of computers, of the internet in the 90s. There were also people who were first to jump on that, who were first to start programming, to start to use that in their life, people, for example, who built the first e-commerce platforms and stuff like this. That is true, but we cannot argue that the internet was a bad thing for inequality. There are issues with the internet, we can discuss them, it's a topic for a whole other debate. But what it in the end also did is really democratised access to a lot of things for people all around the world, and I think in the way how the internet changed it, I do think AI will change it as well.

I think another fear that I think I need to address is that people often worry about a singularity event. I think we should not discuss it in this debate, because it's just going to be speculation from each side trying to argue how a singularity, or the event when AI can just self-improve continuously, will look like. It's like how cows would be talking about humans, that would be the same kind of discussion.

I do believe that inequality risks are real. I think it's a challenge, and as industrialisation was a challenge, the adoption of AI is going to be a challenge, and we need to prepare for this. However, what I do believe is that we're still on the path where we can adjust our decisions, adjust our policies and the gains from the productivity that AI will bring to us are going to be incredible. The proposition spoke of the examples of how one person can now build a to-do app for themselves in a weekend, how you can do projects, the significant, big projects that you would never imagine before. It just transforms how we do things and transforms how quickly we can deliver things in a way we now don't need to worry about doing meticulous details, but rather try to think about the grand design, about what things can be better from the human perspective, from a more emotional perspective, rather than from a technical perspective.

AI is not yet there that we can just write it and forget a really significant technological challenge, but it democratises IT. Once again, it allows a bigger part of the population to actually achieve some projects that they've been wanting to do for the longest time.

I think another risk worth mentioning that comes up a lot is capital concentration. People would argue that three companies now control most of the market, that Nvidia controls most of the chip market. However, if you look a few years ago, DeepSeek came on the scene and disrupted a lot of the industry and changed the way the models are built. When you have a concentration of

wealth and a lot of value that you can make, there's always competition, there are always some new companies coming in, Nvidia as well. Look at IBM in the 70s. It was the biggest company ever. No one thought it would ever fail. It's still a big company, but definitely not as big as it was back then. And right now, already Google, Microsoft, they offer their alternatives to Nvidia, which are as good as theirs.

I think that capital concentration is not an issue. The bigger risk is job unemployment. However, here I will argue the same thing I have mentioned here before, is that fighting inequality, in the end, is tied to growth. We are currently living in a system where we have a high level of debt, and the way we work with that debt is we borrow money. Now our economy grows and we pay money, which means purchasing power is less, and we have a system where we have fewer and fewer workers supporting a larger and larger pensioned population. AI is specifically good at solving this problem. AI allows one worker to produce more, and I think this is also an answer to fighting inequality. I have run out of time. Thank you.

Thank you, and now it's your time to contribute. So just before we begin, as a reminder, three minutes each to speak. If you're new to speaking, we encourage you to come up and just say something. You only speak for three minutes. You can just ask a question, or you can be very forthright. You can announce your support for either side, whatever you like, basically, as long as it's roughly pertinent. So who would like to volunteer? The speaker? And then anyone else? We'll get three. The speaker, then an earlier speaker and then we'll go from there. Welcome to the stage, the speaker. Thank you.

Thank you everybody. So a few points that I've thought about listening to the speakers. When we talk about inequality, you've got to look at it globally. It's not just us or in the West. Now, smartphones actually have helped reduce inequality on some dimensions globally. There's a tech divide, right, between the global North and the global South. So AI in smartphones actually may help the global South and may actually reduce inequality.

Where are we on the inequality scale now? DeepSeek was mentioned. Up until recently, it was thought that US tech on AI was roughly 10% ahead of Chinese tech. Now the signals we're getting is that actually Chinese AI is catching up. They're ahead in robotics. So it's interesting to note that the inequality scale may be with the Chinese at the top having the most advantages, then the US lower down slightly, then Europe and then the rest of the global South. I think that's quite an interesting scale.

Now, I think you mentioned Claude that we're talking about. Yes, Claude, yeah. So that is a very unique piece of software, actually a big advance, which is why OpenAI paid a billion dollars for this one person to develop AI. Actually, you can install it on your phone now, and it will interact with lots of apps. So that's quite a big advance. So that's an outlier. Most people will well, there's going to be a difference between at work and at home, right? So most people who are using AI at work, if we're talking about the labour market, they're going to be using it as part of platforms that your business will subscribe to, and most third parties that the business subscribes to will have AI as an added capability.

So the sort of things that an individual or a small startup may use AI for may not apply across the board. There are huge security concerns. A small startup may not notice those concerns, but as you scale out to big businesses, then you've got to be very, very careful. So I mean, I'm just throwing lots of points out there that it may not be a clear-cut picture as we imagine. And technology has always changed, and labour has always had to learn new technology. And this may be another step. Labour is going to have to learn this new technology. So although it seems as though it may increase inequality, it actually may help in some regards.

This is a question about how... Just for formulaic consistency, can you ask it from there, but speak at the audience, but not to your questionnaire? If that's not too awkward.

How does this affect academia? Because you can go online and put in some salient questions, depending on how focused they are, and then ask it to produce a 4,000-word literature review and whoosh, it comes out. And honestly, with a tiny bit of tweaking, you could totally deceive the academic world. So I wanted to ask about that. And I was thinking about an analogy being using a calculator in a way where the calculator does the tedious work, perhaps, and if you were a maths person, that would allow you to do more interesting, cerebral work. But I've spoken to different professors, and they're really stuck, and they feel really stuck. They can't always distinguish it. And somebody could take months to write something, and someone could take five minutes. That's my question.

Can I get any more volunteers to speak? Yeah, we'll get a few so I don't have to... What's your name, sir? The speaker. Do come up. And what's your name again? The next speaker. The speaker, yeah, okay, the speaker, then the next speaker and then we'll go on from there.

Just two discrete points I want to make. So the first one is in relation to the environment. I think someone probably has some statistics and numbers here. I don't, because we all know that as the environment gets worse and more disasters take place, inequality increases. Global warming, I don't think I actually really need to go over these points. It's fairly trite, unless anyone doesn't believe in it. That might be for a different day. But we all know that with the increase in data centres, that uses more energy, and more energy being used means there are more emissions. I'm sure these things are getting more efficient over time. That's what I understand from what OpenAI and other people say. But if the environment gets worse, that will inevitably result in more inequality. So that's one point.

The second point is in relation to productivity, just from the lens of my profession, which is law. I do use AI a reasonable amount. I wouldn't use it for research, for reasons I'll get into in a moment, but sometimes for really tedious things. Like I had to reformat a document, and it was so bad that I ended up getting Copilot to write some code to basically put everything in the right format because it was so massive, and that was amazing. That saved loads of people time, and that was fantastic. So that increased productivity.

However, there are massive issues in the courts at the moment, where claimants, defendants, litigants in person and lawyers, solicitors and barristers are using ChatGPT mostly to help prepare their cases. And it does two things: it adds loads of awful shit cases, and it adds fake cases to any submissions. It has resulted in a lot of people getting in trouble for referring to fake cases when they're legal professionals, because it's made up cases. Thank you. And that's causing a lot of problems with the court system, because it's taking more judicial time in a system which is already very underfunded and very slow. And then secondly, it's impacting productivity, because it means that when solicitors are instructed, they end up having more work to do just combing through absolute nonsense.

Okay, so I'm going to back the motion that yes, AI will increase inequality more than it will help productivity. However, I will say that might not necessarily be a bad thing if it does help a lot of the poorest people in society. And just to put it out there to annoy everybody: when in human history has inequality ever been seen as unnatural? Very recently, yes, in Western societies, but for most of human history, inequality was seen not just as a natural part of the world, but almost theological, that the Pharaoh was ordained by Heaven. So inequality, for me, is part of life. I don't particularly like it, but if AI can help improve inequality, that's a wonderful thing.

But to return to a point about the job market. I work in the theatres, in what we might call manual labour, where we check tickets on the door, sell the ice cream and then do a bit of cleaning after the show. I still can't see how that's going to be replaced by AI, because it's very much person to person. The real danger is that you'll be able to make more money from doing the simple cleaning job than you will from academia, because AI will be seen as the thing that can do academia. And the real danger from AI is also that these decisions will be made for society, but are ultimately stupid. Case in point, would you hand Keir Starmer an AI chatbot and say, "Get that to run the country?" No. But if you're a humble cleaner, you turn up to work, you do your cleaning, and AI is not going to take your job, and you might be a millionaire for it. The danger of AI is not that it will increase inequality, but it is possible that it will just make life worse for us in a myriad of other ways, not least the amount of investment that's gone into AI just feels like a bubble that's waiting to be popped. We'll wait and see on that, but I do forward the motion in a very unconventional way.

Anyone else like to volunteer to speak on this topic? The speaker? Anyone else? A following speaker. The speaker, then the following speaker and the next speaker, yeah and then the one after that. Good, well, bursting out of the woodwork. Let's remember the order: the speaker first.

We've had a lot of questions raised by many speakers as to what will happen if and we don't know enough about and so on. And so that is basically my position. I have a lot of experience in how technology and innovation work through the economic system, and that's what's lacking, I'm afraid, in these debates. We don't have many people, I haven't heard anybody yet, who can tell us what role all these things play. If you don't have any innovation, well, then your economy just sidelines. So the development and the raising of living standards is always largely, but not even feebly, the result of people seeing and carrying out innovations of one sort or another.

The innovations may be simple or they may be very complicated. I think the AI business is pretty complicated. The more complicated it is, probably you have to say you know less about what will happen. But the good part of it is that without innovation, you will not develop. Economies will not grow, and people will not get wealthier. At the moment, most of the Western nations are hardly growing at all. I've had a look today over the major nations and economic growth, they trickle in at about 1%. I've said in these rooms many times, you can only measure economic growth if you have a decent and accurate inflation measure, and I've pointed out many times here, the government has created the thing called the Consumer Price Index, which I believe is lagging the real inflation by 1% or 2% all the time. So if you're only getting 1% growth, ladies and gentlemen, you're likely getting contraction going on.

Now, it's difficult to see, but people are saying that your children will be worse off than you, and that's the sort of measure that will happen. I think all we can say about this AI business is that it's innovation, and that's what you desperately need at the moment. You don't know enough as to how it's going to develop and what problems it will produce. I don't know, and I think I know a lot more about it than anybody else here, as far as I can see. Thank you. I should probably abstain, in fact, because I think it's too complicated.

Thank you. Large shoes to fill. I think was it the first of those speakers next? Did I say then the second, then the third? Yes, good. Good order, and the order continues. Proposition, opposition, you can stand in front if you stand. Probably the best thing.

Okay, so will AI widen inequality more than it increases productivity? It's going to be a tough call. I think personally, I think AI is the greatest thing since sliced bread. I had a medical procedure last week. The doctors were telling me stuff, the nurses were giving me numbers. I was putting it into ChatGPT, and it was telling me what was going on, and telling me what to ask. Fantastic.

In the workplace, though, generally, we are finding that AI is taking up a lot of administrative jobs. I mean, the gentleman talking about law and it referring to false cases, this is the problem. This is the problem, that AI doesn't know some of the nuances. It's getting better all the time, but I think that AI will eventually take some of the humdrum stuff, the administrative stuff, out of our lives. But we are going to need people to check and supervise. There's a way that the human mind works. It works in a certain way which can spot things, which, okay, maybe AI can overcome it all, but I'm hopeful that it can't.

Just to get my notes. Obviously, a long time ago, we had industrialisation. That was seen as a big threat to people and economies, but we worked through it, we adapted, we found new things for those people to do. Those people worked the machines, and we will work AI. AI will only do things that probably a human asked it to do.

So I am quite hopeful that it will not result in inequality. I think the president makes a really good point about universal basic income. If we find that we end up with a billion Elon Musks or whatever, then obviously governments will have to introduce taxation in order to be able to

recognise that those companies that are being ultra-profitable take that wealth and put it amongst the serfs. And we will all spend our time playing tennis and swimming. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, fellow Sylvans, aliens and others, I do feel that I've landed on some kind of planet where aliens are speaking. I didn't understand any of the technical jargon, so I don't know what they're talking about. But what I am interested in is comparisons. I mentioned aliens. Is it science fiction or is it a soap opera? A bit like the royal family, perhaps? Or is it Newton's third law: to every action, there's an opposite and equal reaction.

Who's going to put the bread on the table? Is it going to be a robot? Are Delia Smith and Gordon Ramsay going to be out of a job because they get a robot to do it? Or are they going to keep on cooking? Because all we need is drinking and food, isn't it? We don't want all this control business. They can play a game of football or something. It seems to me a bit like a football manager or coach talking to his team about how to play a better game of football, when at the end of the day, it's the footballers who play the game, not the coach. And that's why there's a high turnover of managers and coaches. It just seems like fantasy language to me.

I thought AI was artificial intelligence. It seems to me very artificial and not very human. So who's going to control this? I don't think governments are going to control it. It's got to be at the grassroots. We've got to follow this conception that I've talked about, Newton's third law. So as people become more technical and sophisticated, the rest of us will probably start growing our own food and creating communities that are self-sufficient and human, not relying on those comics from the LSE and other people such as that who seem to want to manipulate and control what ordinary people do with a language that we don't perhaps understand.

One interesting thing that I picked up from the BBC, I think Sweden in their schools has gone back to reading. So the basic skills, the basic humanity is there. Are we going to let these people dictate to us like a football coach or like a soap opera director? So I think don't just believe that you've got two options tonight. You've got a third option: follow the speaker and abstain.

Thank you. A lot of interesting thoughts, and it's difficult to answer a question that has many different outcomes that sometimes contradict each other. Does it improve equality on one end? Does it cause a detriment in equality on another end? I think, as it was said earlier, it is getting rid of a lot of technical tasks. So I don't need to code anything myself. I can just give a prompt in two lines. I did it at my work last week. I plead guilty, and it actually gave me a code in VBA that analyses my data, and here I have my outcome. And I think it is almost analogous to low-level coding for the ones who are used to it. It can be very technical, to the point of allocating information to a particular hardware. Or it can be high-level. You can have a function that you can use that is more intelligible for us. If you put a prompt in, it is more intelligible for us than going into the whole detail of it. AI is a very intuitive machine. It is taking data, which is analogous to experience, and it gives you an estimate and a probability.

Now, that said, I gave a lecture on AI in the pharmaceutical industry last week, so I'm a bit prepared against my will. In terms of health, the increase in equality that AI is going to enable is massive. You have an acceleration of drug discovery and clinical trials. Hopefully by 2035, the health institutions want to get rid of animal testing, because we will have digital twins and models that will enable us to bypass these steps. We can say it's a good thing, right? It will allow personalised medicine and making sure that, based on your biomarkers, you get the best treatment for your own benefit-risk balance. There is very good diagnosis as well. Being able to target the audience that needs the treatment for marketing campaigns, AI can do that or spot common patterns that are not yet intelligent.

Ultimately, it is also giving wider access to this AI source and wider access to empowering people, giving them more control, and being able to, not necessarily code, but give you the deal to make so that it's having a particular function for you. I think the question is a false dichotomy, in my belief, because when you gain productivity, the question is, how are you going to use the value that comes out of it? And you can choose a plan to invest into the NHS for example and lower the time needed for surgery, the waiting time which is, I believe, eight months in average. So you decrease inequality between people who get access to the NHS or people who have private healthcare. It can be an investment into formation for jobs, for job transition. Ultimately, and I'll finish here, in history, when you get more resources, it allows more social rights. And we have seen this. So we need to ask ourselves what we should preserve in our own human skills and what drives us forward to our excellence as a human species. And I think if we answer this question, everything derives from it without having a false dichotomy. Thank you.

I might say a few words, if that's okay. And then I think, just because I've got to leave after this, the proposer, if that's okay, I can just do a contribution. And then if you're here, I was going to do a contribution, if that's okay. And then, yeah, then I might have to leave after that. So anyway, I am in the beginning of a process to apply for a PhD in economics on either national debt resolutions or on AI and how it will reshape the landscape. So this has been instructive to me. I want to make two points. One is depressing, and one is more lighthearted.

So I'll start with the depressing one. Think about what the powerful people in the past have wanted of the lesser people, right? Go back in time into Middle Ages Europe and the kings needed the peasants to do the work, to bring in the food, to generate gold and fight their wars. More perniciously, they then soon after had slaves who they coerced to this end. Then you go forward to the earlier part of the 20th century. You had someone like Henry Ford, a hugely powerful business owner and generator of wealth, but he still needed workers in his factory and still also wanted to pay them the famous five pounds or $5 a day, which then was a lot because of inflation. An earlier speaker, that was a lot then. And that allowed them to, in turn, afford a Ford car, which they could pay for, and that benefited him.

But what about the AI overlords? Let's assume in this paradigm that they have control, rather than the AI itself having control. You've got a couple of people in control of this big AI infrastructure now that can do intellectual tasks, and it can also generate robots that can do the physical tasks. And as such, they will be able to do everything they want. They'll be able to get

anything they want from these robots and from the software far better than any of us. So they won't need us. So unlike the kings who needed their peasants, the slave owners who needed their slaves and Henry Ford who needed his workers, these new masters will not need us. In fact, we will be in the way. So this could lead to them eradicating us. It's not crazy to think we're in the way. They've got total power. We might be perceived as a threat to them, and they might annihilate us. So that's a huge sense of inequality that could emerge from this.

But I will now switch to the lighter side, which is that often we raise a problem with AI, but paradoxically, we don't realise that what seems like the downside could, in fact, be the solution. So if AI is smart enough to replace our lawyers, an earlier speaker, if it's smart enough to replace our mathematicians and physicists, then it can solve the problems that seem to emerge from it. Like a previous speaker, what would we do if we were left without work? People often ask this: will we be like WALL-E, where we're overweight and addicted to TV? Or will we have to find some way to motivate ourselves? Will we find something that's fulfilling? How will we do it if AI is smart enough to replace the workforce? Well, we'll just ask AI how to help them integrate to use AI. So the problems it creates, ironically, can be self-solving. Anyway, hopefully a fun note to end on. That's me. So yes, actually, we've got to end by eight. The proposer, we've got time. Okay, then do please come up, the proposer. Thank you.

This is why AI can't rule right now. It's actually really quite interesting, because—okay, it's not come up as I want to. Yes, it has. I run a comedy club, right? And the other month, a young person told me that my flyer wasn't right. It was too busy. So this is the flyer here on the left, right? So I put into Gemini, my AI bot of choice, to compose a leaflet for me, and it came out with this, right? And this is the one I use. Unfortunately, it was supposed to transfer it to Canva, and it didn't. Twenty-four hours later, it still wasn't, so I had to manually do it, but at least I had it there and everything else.

But one of the things I decided to do today, if the computer would allow me—I nearly dropped it earlier, so hold on, let's find it. I decided to write my speech for tonight using an AI, and there's something I'm going to say. Because I must admit, I do agree with the proposer that I hadn't thought about whether you use AI or not. I thought about it much wider than that. And so therefore my AI thing was: "That is a provocative and increasingly popular take amongst economists. You essentially argue that AI might make the pie bigger, but it will slice so unevenly that the social cost outweighs economic growth." And by the way, let's not just stick at slavery. Let's look at serfdom. What happened in this country, right? Because, in my day in the 50s and 60s, working-class people weren't expected to reach any further. You stayed in your place.

Anyway, to break this down, the debate normally centres on whether AI acts as a human complement or human substitute, right? And I think that's what the main thing is. I think of it as a human complement. Because another thing that a friend has said to me when I was promoting for this show, is that even though I use AI, she says that when you then put it on, say, TikTok or whatever, their AI bot picks up that it's been AI-generated, so it just passes it by. So you still have to humanise it for you. So in fact, it may help you, but it can also create more work.

Anyway, the argument for widening inequality will centre on the winner-takes-all economy through several mechanisms: capital versus labour, the hollowing out of the middle, skill-biased technology, right? The argument for productivity gains is scientific breakthrough, democratisation of expertise. But one of the things, and I think this is what's really important, and I'm so glad I Googled this, it says here: "AI might actually reduce inequality by giving lower-skilled workers the tools to perform at a higher level," which is what I thought about it in the first place, just about upskilling.

But it seems that it's white-collar jobs that have been lost. It didn't matter when it was low-skilled workers in the 80s. But why, you know, us in this room, that's what all of us like to think of ourselves. Anyway, I just say this quickly: giving lower-skilled workers the tools to perform at a higher level. That means a junior coder could do that. So I'm now going to do my own website by putting in enough for my AI to do it for me.

Quick point of order, if you need to run, we can put it out.

Oh no, no, I'll see it out. I'll see it over the line. Don't worry. And the vote as well.

Yes. So that's all we have time for. And with your gracious leave, time for me as well.

Sorry, I was just gonna say, if anyone else wants to go, we should take...

Oh, do we? Oh, okay, I guess we can go. I wonder, though, that compresses the next debate. Doesn't matter. Okay, all right, that's my preference, but I'm not in charge. Would anyone else like to speak or contribute? Oh, maybe biologically to me, three, two. Okay, so we're gonna go to our summary speeches, if that's okay. The president, are you raising your hand to speak? All right. The opposer, are you ready to go? So we'll give a three-minute summary speech. The person who proposes has the burden, so we give them the last word as a way of giving a sense of equity. So the opposer will now, as the opposition, speak and summarise first. Thank you.

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. I won't be able to reply to cover all of the points, but I'll try to reply to them. Once again, it seems like everyone agreed that AI is definitely going to change the way we do everything, and it is going to be an acquired skill people will have to learn how to use. To the point about the law, it's part of the process, and it's not just in the law, in everything, encoding as well. Still, it can make errors, and finding those errors is still part of the job of the humans, and it's a skill that we need to learn how to operate with those things.

What are the risks being talked about here? A lot come down, as the president correctly pointed out, to governance and how we're going to deal with this changing world. I'm not arguing here that we definitely figured it out, that we're 100% on the correct path. But what I'm trying to argue is that when we faced challenges in the past as humanity, regarding governance, when we faced a lot of problems, we managed to solve them. Maybe not painlessly, maybe not without some hard processes, but we figure out and understand how we distribute the resources that are given to us. And AI is just one of those resources that is given to us.

As I mentioned previously, capital concentration is usually solved through the adjustment of governance and competition. The job loss—when Excel came on the scene, when spreadsheets appeared as a solution, a lot of people were worried that accounting was going to disappear as a job, but it didn't. It actually bloomed, because it meant that you had access to easier, cheaper analysis, better quality analysis and that only increased the number of accountants. Similar things can happen to the jobs that we are now worried are going to disappear.

I'll come back once again to the point that we are definitely going to get growth from AI; it's going to add a lot of value. And the question is not whether AI itself is going to raise inequality, but whether our policies are going to raise inequality. I think with the right approaches, the value that's going to be distributed from that can actually help solve inequality. Once again, we're coming into a lot of crises right now with debt, with social welfare. It's a crisis in our economy, and AI might actually be the answer to that, rather than a problem. That's my final point. Thank you.

Thanks for all the contributions. I actually think this is a really interesting debate and probably could go on for hours. I think there are really good points raised on how AI will reduce inequality in certain aspects, because we all have access to our own lawyers, our own AI GPs. You can ask Gemini about your health, and as an earlier speaker said, it gives you a really good answer. It is excellent. That's brilliant.

But where I think the real concern is, and where I think we're not paying attention, is the fact that the latest version of OpenAI's Codex was pretty much done by AI. So what are they doing? Fundamentally, AI can now write end-to-end software and replace the whole job. What's the smartest job for them to start with? How do we not see the impact this will have on every single person's day job?

Yes, there are huge flaws in it, because people do not know how to use it. If you are using it in the right way, understanding the weaknesses, understanding that technology actually will tell you what you want to hear, which is fundamentally what it's about, language prediction and understanding that there are ways to work around those flaws, ways to sort of orchestrate it so it works for you—that is going to create an inequality in people in terms of who actually gets ahead and who doesn't.

And when we talk about the people who will get rich off the back of this, they currently don't share their riches with people who need it in the first place. In fact, the minute we tell anyone with higher income or wealth that there's going to be more tax, they run a mile and threaten to leave the country. So I don't see rich people supporting this, but I see lots of people using the technology, taking advantage of it, creating a bigger gap.

And I think society-wise, we have a massive challenge coming. Because why would anyone now hire junior software engineers when you can literally get AI to do that? What are the

incentives for businesses? Why will they continue to hire accountants soon when you can actually use Claude? I can't even use Excel, and trust me, I'm useless with it. I've done full modelling on Claude as well. I've just done it with instruction. So the tech is more intuitive than any other technology we've had before. You literally instruct it by language. This is going to cause significant job losses, which will create massive inequality, and I think we are unprepared for that.

Thank you everyone. Thank you for your contributions. So we're now going to have a vote to get a sense of the room and where we all lie. So as a reminder, the motion is: AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. So if you are in support or you hold to the proposition, please raise your hand.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8... Can you explain the opposite? Sorry, there's no double negative in the question. Can you repeat it? I did read it through twice and many times tonight. AI... let me know. If so, anyone else... AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. So it will make the inequality problem worse than it helps regarding productivity; that's the motion. There are two different competing, interrelated things. It will exacerbate it. It will basically make things worse. Yeah, it will. While it helps some things, it makes things worse. Yes. Okay, we go again. Raise your hand if you're on the proposition of this.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. 12 in favour. Four... who is on the opposite side, who's against the motion? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. 7 against. And who, as per the rallying cry by earlier speakers, abstains, yet to be decided, the open-minded, maybe OpenAI mind? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Moral victory, yeah.

So yeah, the group favours, the vote is for pessimism and that it will make things worse regarding inequality. So calls for celebration. Thank you.

## Analysis of the outcome powered by AI

## The Sylvans

**Motion:** AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity.
**Date:** 16 February 2026

The debate centred on the motion that AI will widen inequality more than it increases productivity. Ultimately, the motion carried. The discussion revealed a room deeply divided between technological optimism and economic pessimism, with a significant portion of the audience feeling too uncertain to take a definitive stance.

The proposition opened the debate by highlighting the terrifying speed of AI advancement. They argued that tools like Claude are already capable of replacing complex white-collar jobs such as financial modelling and software engineering. The core argument was that society will soon bifurcate into two groups: a small elite who leverage AI to achieve unprecedented productivity and a vast majority who are left unemployable. The proposition warned of a "black hole" of joblessness and dismissed the idea that the wealthy would willingly redistribute their AI-generated wealth.

In response, the opposition framed AI as a democratising force akin to the internet or the Industrial Revolution. As the second speaker, they acknowledged the short-term disruption but argued that AI will eventually lower barriers to entry for complex tasks. They countered the fear of capital concentration by pointing to increased competition among tech giants and argued that AI-driven productivity is exactly what a stagnant, debt-laden economy needs to support an ageing population.

The audience contributions reflected a wide array of perspectives and significantly influenced the room's mood. Supporters of the motion pointed to immediate, real-world problems. A legal professional highlighted how AI is currently reducing productivity in the courts by generating fake case law which forces lawyers to waste time verifying submissions. Others raised environmental concerns regarding the immense energy required for data centres and warned that future AI overlords might find human labour entirely obsolete.

Conversely, audience members leaning towards the opposition shared personal anecdotes of AI's benefits. These included a patient using AI to decipher complex medical jargon and a worker using it to write code effortlessly. A pharmaceutical expert argued that AI will radically reduce health inequalities through faster drug discovery and personalised medicine. Furthermore, some attendees suggested that AI might actually help the global South leapfrog technological barriers and empower lower-skilled workers to perform at higher levels. Several older attendees and sceptics urged abstention, citing the sheer unpredictability of the technology and a desire to focus on grassroots human connection rather than tech-driven soap operas.

As the penultimate speaker, the opposition summarised their stance by reiterating that humanity has successfully navigated massive technological shifts before. They argued that any resulting inequality would be a failure of government policy rather than a direct fault of AI and that the massive productivity gains could be taxed and reinvested into public services like the NHS. The proposition, speaking last, effectively sealed the debate by grounding their summary in immediate economic realities. They challenged the opposition's reliance on theoretical good governance by pointing out that the wealthy routinely avoid taxation and will not share the spoils of an AI-driven economy. They reiterated that when AI can write its own code end-to-end, the incentive for businesses to hire human staff vanishes completely.

The motion carried because the proposition successfully anchored their arguments in the tangible and immediate fears of white-collar job displacement and elite wealth hoarding. While

the opposition and sympathetic audience members presented strong theoretical and historical cases for long-term societal adaptation, the proposition's cynical but realistic view of human greed resonated more powerfully. The practical examples of AI currently causing administrative chaos and the visceral fear of human obsolescence ultimately drove the room to endorse the pessimistic outlook over the promise of a utopian, highly productive future.