

# The Sylvans

## Detailed summary powered by AI

27 April 2026

*Motion: the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation.*

### Contents:

1. Analysis of the outcome
2. Detailed transcript

### Analysis of the outcome powered by AI:

The debate over the motion "the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation" was characterised by its ad-hoc nature and the semantic wrestling required to connect a universally lauded concept (rights) with a universally lamented phenomenon (isolation). Ultimately the house resolved that correlation does not equal causation and the motion did not carry.

The proposition opened by establishing a causal chain between individual rights, economic prosperity and physical atomisation. The proposing speaker argued that as historical rights expanded, society grew wealthier and individuals gained the means to live independently. This removed the survival necessity of communal living. This thesis was bolstered by several floor speakers who noted that historical communities were often forced bonds rather than chosen ones. One speaker highlighted that freedom of movement and the ability to choose one's profession broke the restrictive obligations of the past but came at the cost of profound isolation. Another aligned the advancement of individual rights with the Western philosophy of individualism, arguing that an extreme focus on personal rights erodes the sense of duty to the community. This was echoed by comparisons to non-Western societies where fewer individual rights supposedly correlate with stronger communal reliance and local problem-solving.

However, the opposition steadily eroded the proposition's premise by fundamentally uncoupling individual rights from both individualism and isolation. The opposing speaker anchored their argument in emotion, humanity and the innate human desire to share experiences. They posited that rights empower people to join communities rather than withdraw from them.

The tide of the debate turned definitively on the floor as speakers began to audit what individual rights actually entail. One speaker effectively dismantled the motion by demonstrating that rights such as freedom of speech, property ownership and voting actively facilitate socialisation and

political engagement. This was sharply contrasted with the rigid pursuit of collectivism. Citing historical totalitarian regimes, the speaker argued that abandoning individualism for the collective good creates the ultimate isolation where citizens live in paranoia and fear of denunciation by their own families.

Further floor contributions highlighted that early societal structures often isolated and repressed minorities to maintain a religious or cultural status quo. In this light, the advancement of rights has actively reduced isolation by allowing marginalised groups to participate fully in society. Another speaker read a modern list of rights including healthcare access, gender identity recognition and equal pay, expressing bewilderment at how these could logically result in loneliness.

A decisive semantic shift occurred when the room began to differentiate between individual rights as a legal framework allowing harmonious group living and individualism as a philosophical desire to separate from the collective. Several speakers argued that while individualism and economic prosperity might lead to atomisation, human rights do not. The proliferation of smartphones, the rise of working from home, suburban sprawl and a cultural failure to teach relationship-building skills were heavily cited as the true culprits of modern loneliness. As one floor speaker neatly summarised, these trends represent correlation rather than causation. Society has grown richer and more technologically advanced at the same time it has gained rights but the rights themselves are a defence against tyranny rather than a driver of isolation. Another speaker neutralised the proposition by invoking personal responsibility, stating that rights merely give humans the freedom to make choices and isolation is the result of poor personal decisions.

In the closing speeches, the opposer abandoned intellectual technicalities to make a passionate appeal for compassion and humanity. The proposer attempted to salvage the motion by arguing that the very push for individual rights is a symptom of individualism and questioned whether humans actually make good choices with their modern freedoms. However, the intellectual heavy lifting done by the floor speakers had already reframed the debate. The house was unwilling to blame the legal and moral triumphs of human rights for the sociological side effects of wealth, technology and personal choice. Consequently, the motion did not carry.

## **Detailed transcript:**

So I'll be chairing the debate for the motion of the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation. I'll ask for two speakers to come up, one to propose the motion and one to oppose it. You'll each have five minutes to speak, and I'll start flashing you some cards to show how much time you've got left, and then a finished card. Then we'll open up to the floor with three minutes each, again, flashing cards. And then once we're finished on the floor, we'll go back to the main speakers, who will then have three minutes to wrap up their speeches. And then we will take the final vote. So I'll read the motion again, and then you can volunteer to

come up and speak. So the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation. Is there anyone that wants to propose that motion?

That was your idea.

It was my idea. No, well, I'm chair now, sir.

No, no, it's fine.

Did you volunteer? Did you volunteer to speak? Or chair?

I volunteered to chair, but I'm not going to speak on this one.

I will volunteer if no one else wants to do it. But is there? I will volunteer anyone else. And then, does anyone want to propose? Either of the speakers?

Individual rights, social isolation.

The advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation.

No idea about this? I need two minutes just to get my head around some kind of argument. The advancement of... Yeah, the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation.

Okay, because I'm really clueless about this one.

The proposing speaker is going to step in then.

I'll do it.

So, you can start. Yeah, all right.

Thank you, Mr Chair, fellow Sylvans and welcome guests. I have had no preparation on this. I saw this motion a few days ago, so it may be percolating around in the back of my head. I want to talk about isolation, and I do think it is a significant problem that we face in society today. We are atomised much more, I think, to an extent, than we were before. And you know, there's probably a number of different causes of that, and some of them are interlinking. You know, we can talk about technology. I'm sure the opposition might bring up things like smartphones or social media and other factors that can drive people to live in echo chambers.

You know, the whole point of the Sylvans tonight is being an anti-echo chamber. We're trying to bring people together and have a collision of minds and get people talking to each other, or at least hearing views directly from people who might not interact normally. So I think what we have as an example here is a little pocket of anti-echo chamber. I think there are quite a number of introverts who come to debates. Funnily enough, it is semi-social. We're here interacting with each other to a degree. It's structured, so introverts like me can handle it. That's a slight digression, but I think we're trying to play a role of getting people to interact. It's actually a struggle for debating clubs in London. You know, they started 300 years ago. The Cogers is an example of a club that's still around since those days.

There were hundreds of them. People came together because there was no way of exchanging information. Newspapers were either not there or they were brand new, and they would sit in the coffee houses and share information. And you know, that was hugely valuable to be able to talk to people, because you got information that way. Today, we have information available at the touch of a button anywhere. I'm from the US. So I talked a little bit about technology. I also want to talk about the physical shape of life today, which I think is different.

In the US, you have suburbia. Here you have the suburbs of London, where people have their own little tiny gardens, and they have their own little house. Now you have televisions, and you can sit at home, and you can interact with people, and you can communicate with people, and you don't have to speak to your neighbours as much as you did in the past. Or maybe the inclination is less. In the US, you have these fast, spread-out suburbs, and you have your own

half an acre or one acre of land, and you don't need to interact with anyone, anywhere. So I think there's an atomisation that has happened over time physically as well.

But if you think about it, why have we built those houses? Why have we built cities that way? It's because we want our own space. We want to be able to control our own things. And there's an individualistic streak. Every person is an island. You know, an English person's house is their castle. And I think that thinking has also gone to the US and sort of gone to the extreme. But I think some of that comes from here. It's partly British culture that has actually created that in the US. So I won't talk about the US too much, thank you, an earlier speaker, but I think there's something there that has actually driven that.

In the past, individual rights came in a long time ago. Well, not a long time ago. You know, voting rights were extended over time. Voting rights for women, etc. etc. Rights became extended, and we got more and more and more rights during that period as well. The average person's life standards became better and better and better. In general, society became wealthier, and that meant we had individual rights, and we had the means to do things for ourselves. We're not totally reliant on other people. We're not totally reliant on the communal sharing of sheep on the common in a village. We can have our own job, even if it's in a factory, and we can have our own house, and we can provide our own food. We can do things for ourselves.

So I think individual rights helped the economy grow. And I'm sure we'll hear a lot of economics from my friend here, the opposer, who loves his favourite topic. But those two things happened in concert, and I don't think we can separate them. So I think economics and individual rights drove economic growth, gave people the means to do things on their own, and that means it had a big part to play in why we have social isolation today. I think technology is sort of a hyper-accelarant of that and makes it more and more. Radio, television, those are the earlier versions of it that had a big impact back in the day. A smartphone is just vastly more powerful. But the fact that we have strong economies, we have better technology, it's all partially driven by those individual rights. We have a free market economy, which leads to economic growth, which means we can afford to build these technologies, which means that these individual rights have a significant role to play in our social isolation today.

The opposing speaker, are you ready, sir, please?

Mr Chair, Mr President, fellow Sylvans and others. This is somewhat of a surprising debate, given some of the other more interesting motions, but nevertheless, it gets at the heart of what we're all about: individual freedom of expression, teamwork, families. I can't remember his name, but the runner, who won the marathon yesterday, together with 59,000 other people, individuals coming together. I had a great experience at Stratford Unitarians yesterday. There was somebody who has experienced mental health problems, and she came to see our art on the Saturday, and she decided, she said, "What time is your service?" I said, "10:30." And she came, and she joined in, and she's smiling. I put some music on. It was "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Gonna Let It Shine." We had other music as well. And then she said, "Can I sing a song?" She didn't really know anybody there, and she sang "Amazing Grace." It wasn't to the level of Katherine Jenkins, but the fact that she could actually sing in front of complete strangers virtually and hold a tune, it meant so much to her. That's why individuals matter. And you don't have individuals solely on their own, but they join in.

Look at all the different sports there are now. Football, the most boring subject without a doubt, but without a goalkeeper, the striker isn't much good. Unless you keep them out of the net, the striker down the other end is not much good. So again, it's a team approach. Even politics. Let's get onto something boring like politics. You've got a lot of individuals using a lot of hot air trying to make serious points, but they only make serious points because they've got an audience to listen to. So individuals stand out, but they do need others to share. We're a sharing race, a social species, so social isolation cannot overcome individual effort.

What it does repress is pernicious establishments and big organisations and monarchies and other such pillars of the establishment who try to talk down to individuals who make a community and share their talents. Like our friend at our church yesterday, and people who come up for the first time, or who've been coming for years to debating and win. As in the case of my friend at Cogers, who has been coming for many years, and he won the Apple in Cogers. An individual who lives on his own, but he's very sociable. He can relate, because individuals do. We've got language. We've got smiles, body language. I'm not taken into this fantasy that we're controlled by the media. They like to think they control us, especially the BBC. I mean, how outrageous to think that the BBC have got any control over me. I won't have it. I finish. I rest my case.

Brilliant. Thank you, the opposing speaker, great to set us off. Anyone like to speak? The next speaker, and then you.

I really struggle with this motion, to be honest, because when I'm trying to think of what we're debating, I think I understand the reason is that we're saying because we're more independent, less dependent on others for things, we are more socially isolated. And I'm not really sure I buy that. So let me just give you my reasons why.

Because fundamentally, in human nature, one of the first things that we gain is attachment. You know, we attach to our parents. That's connection, and the heart of being human is connecting with others. It's around acceptance. It's around being accepted for who you are, what you do, what's important to you, your personality, your quirks, your flaws. All of that is the heart of acceptance. And the reason people are isolated is not because we don't have to rely on our neighbours to take our bins out or, you know, have someone in our community jump in and help us when we starve, because we can get things done pretty easily. I think it's because people don't realise or understand how much investment is needed to connect with people. You don't just make friends on the fly. It takes hours, and a big reason for the social isolation is perhaps because those are not skills that people develop or invest in themselves. Because they might be spending more time online, or they might be doing things and not realising what it takes to build a relationship.

So I think I understand where it's come from, but I wouldn't ever say that the advancement of individual rights, like not having extreme racism, like I grew up with in South Africa, or women having voting rights, or people not being discriminated against for choosing who they love, that is not what is causing social isolation. I think the fundamental issue is much bigger than that, and it might be because we're losing communities. We're losing places for people to learn, to meet and accept. But I don't think it's individual rights that cause any of that.

Teacher, your name?

The speaker. I'm against the motion in two parts. One, I'm going to go through the rights that we have which relate to us as individuals and how they improve our ability to socialise or are

ambivalent to them. And secondly, I'm going to talk about how the very opposite is true: the rigid pursuit of collectivism is the biggest threat to our ability to socialise.

Part one. Okay, what are our rights that help us as individuals? I think they're the right to own property. I have nothing to object to on that. Particularly the right to freedom of speech, vitally important. That affects me as an individual. It means I can say what I want within certain social constraints, as long as I don't hurt people. If I can't speak freely, I can't think freely and I can't create freely. And if I can't think or create freely, I can't have discussions with people. I can't create things which other people might enjoy or have ideas to bring other people together. The right to vote affects me as an individual. The right to vote gets me interested in politics and discussing political issues with my friends. We have a stable society, so we all talk about that. So that indirectly brings people together. The right to bear arms, you know, if you're in America, you can go to the NRA. You know that, in a way, brings people together. So that's a slightly flippant example of an individual right that improves people's ability to socialise. So I can't find a single individual right here that is ambivalent or a negative in the case of socialising.

Part two. The opposite is true. The rigid pursuit of collectivism, not individualism, threatens our socialising more. Read 'The Origins of Totalitarianism' by Hannah Arendt. She goes into detail about how the Third Reich and the Soviet Union became totalitarian states, and what motivated their people. They were driven by, firstly, racism. Secondly, an ideological pursuit of uniformity and a cause and a movement, and everyone sacrificed everything to the movement. People denounced their family members and their friends to secret police forces. And Hannah Arendt talks very chillingly about what happens to your relationships in a situation like that. If you say the wrong thing, you might be denounced by your friends to the secret police or by a family member. She said that in such a situation, you just can't have trustworthy family relationships or trustworthy friendships, and you become the most isolated of all in that situation. And that's in the alleged pursuit of abandoning our individualism to the collective good. I can't think of any more isolating experience than that, so I think the opposite is true, and that's what I have to say.

Hi there. My name is the speaker. So I believe that lots of the individual rights that have been gained over the years, as society has been trending in this direction, have actually created more of a community spirit in some ways, and have reduced isolation. When I'm thinking about the differences between centuries or decades ago even, there's kind of been a trend where you were just born into a culture, and you were just born into either a very rich heritage or you were born into a poor heritage. What these rights have changed is essentially moving the needle towards, and hopefully they continue to go in the direction where, everyone has a much closer, equal opportunity and a much more equal basic standard of living. And those are what allow people to have their own experiences and to eloquently discuss those experiences.

If you think about years ago when religion was taken far more seriously in England, if you had a thought that wasn't in line with the Catholic Church or the Church of England, depending on what decade I'm referring to, you would be an outcast. If you had something to say that the planets are different, or you wanted to have sexual relations with someone of a different gender, the church would just have none of it. So over time... I guess you could think of it as when we had fewer individual rights, a lot of those communities, a lot of those people, were isolated and essentially repressed because it was to keep the status quo. And now, as we get more and more rights, we're enabled. It's enabling us to have constructive conversations. It's enabling us

to think about how different thoughts and different points of view can live harmoniously among each other.

We do that through the law system by guaranteeing certain rights for everyone, and also by guaranteeing certain safety nets. So if you are in a situation, you do have something to help you out, whether it's the NHS, the police or some kind of safety net to ensure that you can keep improving this reality, and that you're not always relying on someone who is just there because you happen to be born in a certain location or a certain family. So it's kind of why I'm thinking that even though we have all these additional rights, we actually are keeping together, and society seems to be working.

Anyone else? Your name?

I'm going to agree with the motion that individual rights have made us more isolated. I mean, for me, the history of individual rights in the 20th century is really about one thing, which is freedom. This is freedom in the sense of freedom to work where you want. No longer do you have to work for a guild as it might have been in the Middle Ages. No longer do you have to do the job of your parents. No longer do you have to not work and get married, so suddenly women can work. These are undoubtedly positive things. But for me, it's clear that these freedoms, which are positive freedoms, do come with a price, which is, you're going to move away. You have the freedom to move wherever you want, to work wherever you want; you're going to be in a new place. I've experienced that. Any of you who've been immigrants have experienced it or moving to another country, not knowing anyone there. It's a thrill, but it is pathetically isolating, and that's something you can actually feel and experience today.

There's also freedom from things, from a narrow life, sort of like a life where you have an obligation to be with certain people. Let's not forget the vast amount of human history was spent in small bands of hunter-gatherers. This wasn't a great thing. If you didn't get along with the group that you were in, there was no escape. This was your social circle, but it was one that was forced upon you. And for much of human history, that's been the case. Talking about the Middle Ages, you had your religious obligations, you had your family obligations. You had to stay with your parents. You had to help your parents on a farm, help them when they're old. Again, this is a positive. Now there is a negative, which, as I've said, is you move away from these things which are normally granted to you. So it is a kind of double-edged sword, and it has come with isolation.

But that doesn't mean it needs to be the future. I mean, last weekend, I went to a Meetup, a sort of walk-and-talk group in Hyde Park, and a whole bunch of people gathered together who only knew about it because of the internet, which is another great freedom. And I felt like, okay, this sort of thing is happening a lot nowadays. I don't know if you've heard of these kinds of things where people are gathering together just to talk, just to socialise, and I think people are realising that actually, yeah, the freedom has come at a price, and that is a bit of a negative, but it doesn't mean the future has to be like that. We can find a pretty good balance, I think.

Anybody else? Sorry, I'll just take down here. Then your name?

The speaker.

So I'm not too sure our first speakers covered the topic well, so it gave me a bit of confidence just to come up and speak. So one thing I was thinking about is when we think about rights, we often think about the West. So we think about women being able to vote, freedom of speech and different things like that. But when we look at the West, we see that people have become more

isolated in the West. And if you look at the opposite of that, where we see countries such as those in Africa and Asia, where there might not be as many rights, you can see there's much more community within those groups. And I think it's because oftentimes in the West, we trust our governments, right? When we think about change... whereas in other countries, if you want to see change, you would come together as a community to bring about those changes. But in the West, when we think about change, we think, 'I'll vote for this party.' The same thing happens again. 'I'll vote for this party.' We just jump around from party to party, and nothing's ever really solved or really changed. It's the same thing.

And I was thinking about the time that we're living in at the moment, where there are groups of people that are completely frustrated with what's happening in the country. And again, instead of people coming together as a community and thinking, 'What can we actually do to change or to see a transformation?', it's 'Let's vote for another party.' So I do think that the rights are good. Obviously the rights are a good thing. But it's this kind of idea that we have where we're constantly just giving power to politicians in order to see change. Whereas in different communities or countries where maybe they didn't have as many rights for individual people, those individual people would come together and try to make a change within the community themselves.

Anyone else? Did you want to come up and speak? What is your name?

Okay, it's my first time doing this. Bear with me. Bear with my brain. Yeah, what immediately came to me was about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how much individualism has met within that framework. Where, for example, physiological needs essential for survival, including food, water, shelter, sleep and warmth. How much have we all excelled towards those needs within an individual way, and how much have people not? And how that huge gap appears and leads to the inevitability of social isolation. Safety needs, financial stability, security, freedom from fear or harm. Well, in the individualisation of our communities, whatever social structures you know, how much safety is actually around, and how do people measure that when they're in a supposedly individualised way?

Social needs, love and belonging. Well, I'd say, to what cost has individualisation deprived us of love and belonging? And belonging is the opposite to social isolation, and I'd say that polarity leaves a lot of gaps, where people have learned this. Today, for example, I was in a shoe shop, and this lady started talking to me about these Skechers shoes, and she said, 'I'm only talking to you because I don't have many people to talk to.' And it was like a little nutshell of social isolation. Esteem. How much are we all feeling or developing self-esteem in our journeys, and how many people that are isolated don't? Self-actualisation is the top of Maslow's pyramid. It is the place where we fulfil all our potential. We have to question: is our potential being fulfilled by individualism?

So I'm standing here not because I agree with it, but just because I'm kind of in the middle. I've had to do mental gymnastics to try and connect these two concepts together. But the other speakers have given me some ideas, and it reminds me of individualism. This reminds me of one of the core root philosophies of the Right. This reminds me of Ayn Rand, where morality is an individual's right to pursue his or her own happiness, and fulfilment is the definition of morality. And it's a fundamental principle of the American Right. And I'm just trying to extrapolate, like I'm saying, I'm doing mental gymnastics. But what it does lead to is that we do not have any responsibility towards the community.

So this also links to what the earlier speaker has said. There is in Asian and African culture a responsibility to the community, but if we look at the right of the American, there is no responsibility to the community, and that leads to consequences such as no taxation. The idea that we shouldn't pay taxes, the only monies that we should give to our government is for military defence and security. And so that then leads on to no welfare system. So the consequences of not caring about the community mean that there aren't any resources to take care of the community. There's no welfare, and just the movement then in that direction leads to the kind of society which doesn't sound very desirable. Like, we don't want a society where there isn't universal healthcare.

And then it also leads to no investment, except for private investment, no consideration for stakeholder capitalism, so no investment on the part of the business into the community. Because it's not the moral duty of private shareholders to invest in the community. So what I'm thinking is that the core philosophy of individualism leads to atomisation, or not caring about the community, which then in turn leads to us not caring about each other, and in turn, leads to loneliness. So if I had to construct an argument, which I've just done, like I said, then that's kind of where I'd go.

Yes, to the next speaker.

There's a few things which I think you might not describe purely as individual rights, but which I think are related to rights where it could have exacerbated social isolation. One is the choice to work from home, or the culture of working from home. Since COVID, this has had a big impact on young people, particularly graduates, I think. Because I did a grad scheme 10 years ago, and that was really great. I was in the office every day, got lots of interaction. But now the same grad scheme, everyone is being inducted online, and I hear lots of people who are graduates complaining that there's no support and no social side to working.

And then the other thing is technology, obviously, which is a huge driver, I think, for isolation. Because I think it's now become, particularly amongst young people, the first port of call to entertain ourselves. Like, instead of in the past, you might have phoned your friends or went and arranged new tasks, but now the first thing is, okay, go on social media or go and watch TV or a film or anything like that. So there's not a natural inclination to be social. It's more like, let's reach for our phones as the first thing to do.

And then the choice that advancements in society and technology have brought, I think, is hard for some people to navigate. In London and big cities, you can do a million things, but compared to 50 years ago, where maybe you just went to the local community centre and there was a Friday night dance or a get-together. It's great for the people who can navigate that choice. But then some people don't know how to put themselves out there to take advantage of all the opportunities of a big city or of modern life.

And then there's also this thing about older people. Because I think one of the biggest problems amongst older people in this country is social isolation, and we don't, as a society in the West, tend to care very well for older people. And I think that is also a result of working people having more choice, moving away from their parents and actually just leaving them in care homes, and that creates social isolation.

Anybody else? I think we saw your hand.

You can go next. I'm the speaker.

Thank you. Well, I'll be very, very brief. Firstly, it's lovely to see everyone here, all these beautiful, shiny, happy, friendly faces. I'm going to be voting against the motion, because I think the motion negates entirely our own personal responsibility to make good decisions with the freedoms and the rights that we've inherited from better men and women of the past. My sense is that we all may have the right to live poorly or stab ourselves in the leg with a screwdriver or whatever we want to do, but that doesn't mean that it's the right thing to do. In fact, by having all these rights, all it does is give us more weapons in our armoury to make free decisions with, and it's up to us to make correct decisions. So I don't believe that it's even coherent to say that the pursuit of individual rights would lead to any particular outcome, because the fact is, all that can ever make a difference is the decisions that we, each as individuals, make in response to the rights that we've been given. So that's why I'll be voting against the motion.

Mr Chair, when I first went to Australia many years ago, I arrived in Sydney, and what struck me about Sydney was how the buildings around the harbour were all very close together, and really quite small. Around The Rocks, where you come into Botany Bay, and Paddington, which is full of little terraced houses with beautiful lattice balconies and so on. But they're all very close together. Yet as you expand out, the houses get bigger, of course, but all on their own block of land. And the ideal in Australia is to have your own house on your own block of land. And it's not actually the house that's important, it's having the block of land. Very often people in Australia knock down the house that's already there and build another one on the block of land. And their ideal is to have a car and a boat in the driveway.

It struck me that the early people who came, they were all living very close together in small houses, probably quite dependent upon one another. But as the society grew more prosperous, it expanded out into bigger blocks of land and larger houses. It's very striking. And here, of course, in London, I live in a street in a terraced house. While I've been there, the lady in the terraced house next door to me, who had been there for 60 years, used to quite often ring our bell just to say hello and just because she wanted somebody to talk to. Nobody else does that. And although I know who lives in the houses immediately around and I know their names, as far as I'm concerned, they could be on a different world and a different planet. They live different lives. And although we say hello and 'how are you' and this sort of thing, that's as far as it goes. So it seems to me that as the society has become more prosperous, we have become more isolated. We don't, as it were, ring a neighbour's bell any longer. Coming here on the tube tonight, I was sitting down, and of course, everybody around me had their phones out. I was the only person who actually took out a book and started to read it. I thought, gosh, I must be rather passé, because here I am reading a book, and everybody else has got their noses glued to their phones, which is, again, a marker of prosperity. People can afford the phones, they can afford to pay the charges and so on. Books are much cheaper, actually, and much more preferable as far as I'm concerned. So I think really it's a mixture of technology and prosperity that has changed us, not our individual rights.

I'll go to you, and then the next speaker can go. The speaker. Yeah, I just wanted to make a very good, very quick point. I feel like we've slightly conflated two different topics. So on the one hand, we've been talking a lot about individualism, but the motion is about individual rights, and I think individualism is different from individual rights. Put your hands up if you see a distinction between those two things. Okay. So the way I see individualism is the philosophy that it's about living away from the community, and it's all about you and your own life and your personal

space. And that can quite clearly lead to isolation. It's intentional isolation because you want to be alone. Wealth, prosperity encourages individualism. But individual rights, for me, actually increase community and reduce isolation. The very point of having rights is when you're in a group setting. If you're in a world where you were the only person, would you need any rights? I don't think so. So rights are actually about creating a set of rules so that we can all live happily together, creating more communal spirit. So I guess that means I'm against... Does that mean I'm opposing or for the motion? I've gotten confused, but I think that individual rights actually reduce isolation, so I think I'm with you.

Before I start, I just want to add that I've got a message for the opposing speaker. He'll be very pleased to know that King Charles has arrived safely in the United States. Anyway, just a reminder that the motion is the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation. The advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation. So I've had a quick look, as one does, and I've had a look at rights over the last 100 years. And new rights over the last 100 years are: we have access to healthcare free at the point of use, the right to Social Security. There have been the rights of disabled people, there's the legal recognition of gender identity and we can control our personal data. Then much older things like women have had voting rights since 1928, a big year. That we have freedoms from racial discrimination, we have equal pay and sex discrimination protections. We have gay, lesbian etc. relationship and marriage rights and we have protection from unfair dismissal and the minimum wage.

So I'm struggling a little bit to understand how any of those rights actually have resulted in social isolation. So I agree with the earlier speaker. When this motion was announced, I thought, God, I don't know what this is about really. I don't know what it's about. But obviously, listening to people, you learn a little bit more. And then when you ask ChatGPT for a list of stuff, it comes up with a bunch of stuff. So that's a great thing. That's another right we have. But yeah, I think it's a very difficult motion because, based on what I've heard this evening, and people's different interpretations of the motion, given that I've been very prescriptive about looking at it and coming up with ideas, I am going to suggest that people abstain from this motion. Unusually for the opposing speaker, he would not like that, but in this instance, sitting in the chair, my proposal is that, because it's unclear, you have to abstain. Thank you.

Anyone else, otherwise we'll go to the wrap-up speeches.

Okay, so initially, one might think I would be for the motion, because there are ways in which our newfound rights can cause some social isolation. For example, as a disabled person, I might impose upon other employees in the company that I work for to respect my rights to the point of intruding on their workplace banter. For full clarity, I'm a trade union representative, and it's my job to get involved if certain banter has offended people. It's a social right. It can break down workplace banter, which can lead to social isolation.

However, correlation is not causation. To give a slightly more controversial example, people have noticed in recent decades that Britain has become a very racially diverse country. They've also noticed there's a lot more rudeness about the city and litter and people don't dress as nicely as in the past. Correlation is not causation. The immigrants didn't cause that. It was one social phenomenon happening at the same time as another social phenomenon. And actually, I would say we should be against the motion, because these two things are happening at the same time: we have more social rights and we have social isolation. Why do we have these? The fact is, our society has gotten bigger. It's gotten richer, there are several million more of us than

there were in good old Queen Victoria's day, the good old child labour era. And our society has evolved to meet the new challenges of the industrial and then the IT world.

For example, the social isolation we have has been caused by our prosperity. It's been noted that we did use to live in very tiny communities or hunter-gatherer bands, and we were not socially isolated, but that was not always fun. However, the same forces that have given us this prosperity also mean there have been people willing to fight for our social rights. It's correlation. It's happening at the same time, but it's not causation. The social rights did not cause that social isolation. I would argue that the rights that we fought for are actually one of our best barriers against the potential for tyranny in the modern world. Because absolutely, we are more socially isolated than we've ever been in human history, but we have fought for the rights that can protect us from the tyrants that would take away our freedoms. Thank you.

Right. Well, thank you to all the floor speakers. We'll now go back to our speakers up here. So the opposing speaker first, as the opposer, you've got three minutes.

Chair, President, fellow Sylvans and others. It's been a very interesting and in-depth debate, but I don't want you to pursue the intellectual argument. Human rights isn't about a lawyer's charter. It's more basic than that. I want you to vote from your heart. We feel rights. The earlier speaker, I was particularly moved by what she said, because let's put ourselves in those situations in Gaza, in South Sudan. But there's still human compassion. There is how they are surviving. Number one about the rights, whether they've got the rights to Palestine or not, or the Human Rights charter. You feel it. You feel you are a person. And that's what I want to appeal to tonight, that people matter. Compassion matters.

Now I'm going to take you down one of an earlier speaker's usual routes. I want to talk about falling in love, and I've fallen in love more times than I've won debates. You don't come to Cogers, so you don't know. So I want to appeal tonight to feel this motion and vote overwhelmingly against the motion. Don't abstain, don't opt out. Now the control element, and there is control. We know, I've talked about the control in this country by the establishment, but there is a global control by those individuals who think they are above us. You know who they are, the tech bros and the billionaires and all these people. I mean, there's a question mark whether they are human or not. Do they come from another planet? We might find that out in the second debate when we talk about the Greens and the Reform Party. But let's not pre-empt that. I want you to search your heart and vote against this motion tonight, overwhelmingly for humanity and compassion. Thank you.

Finish us off.

Thank you, Mr Chair. To the opposing speaker, thank you for that as well. And I can feel the passion, and you know, we can have emotion, and that is absolutely fine, but we actually also have a motion, and we need to look at the motion, and everyone needs to show emotion on that motion, and that is the advancement of individual rights. Advancement is actually really important. Has it led to our social isolation? Very interesting arc of the debate tonight. We came out there, it's a very woolly topic. None of us prepared for this. Neither of us prepared for this. And we all had to define it as the speakers went through. It's a classic Sylvans debate, and we'll see which way the house lands at the end, when we see the vote of all of you listening. We heard some things, you know, positive emotions about individual rights. We all love individual rights. So we can have that love for individual rights. Remember, though, we're living in the West, we're living in the UK. The UK is, if you look in Europe, the most individualistic. We

heard a little bit about the US as well. They're the extension of us. It's an extreme version of us. But you know, Europeans would say, 'Oh, the Brits, they think of us like Americans,' like we think of Americans as the extreme version of individual rights. So let me just finish that point. We have this really positive feeling towards individual rights. Social isolation, very negative. So equating those two, it's cognitive dissonance. It's very hard to say those two are actually linked. But we have heard some people come up and say that. We've heard the speaker come up and say, 'You know what, look at countries that are not in the West, not in these sort of extreme, individualistic, capitalistic societies. They have different social structures. They look after their elderly. They may still be living closer together because they're not as wealthy as we are,' and all those different factors. So you generally have to think about that. Now, an earlier speaker made a very good point. Is it individualism, or is it individual rights? When I look at this motion, I see 'the advancement of individual rights'. That's valuing and pushing forward individual rights; to me, that is a symptom of individualism, and that's what we're talking about tonight. We're talking about the individualism in this country. It's up to you to decide how you take the motion, but that's, I think, how it was intended. An earlier speaker wrote it, not me.

But then how are these things linked as well? So if you have individualism, going back to the Magna Carta, the Earls or the Barons wanted to be independent from the King. It's ingrained in our society, and it has extended and extended and extended, and that drive has also helped us become richer, and that enables us to have all this ability to do whatever we want, and we can do whatever we want. An earlier speaker points out we have to make good decisions. The question is, and this is where we have to be maybe a little more negative in emotion, do we believe that people make the right decisions when they have individual rights? As a whole? Some of us do. Unfortunately, I think too many of us don't. So I think there's a real link between individualism and social isolation.

Thank you, to the proposing speaker. So I think that turned out to be a pretty good debate in the end, and so now we go to the vote. So I'll read out the motion again. So the advancement of individual rights has caused our social isolation. So if you're for the motion, put your hand up. Hold on, sorry, keep the hands up.

Yeah, and if you're against the motion? And any abstentions?

Abstentions. Never miss.

They do sometimes.

Yes, seven. So by a vote of 16 against, nine for and seven abstentions, the motion did not pass.