

The Sylvans

Detailed summary powered by AI

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Motion: the greater threat from AI is not job loss but loss of purpose.

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1. Analysis of the outcome

The motion fell by nine votes to three with two abstentions, and it fell from two directions at once. To win, the proposition needed the room to accept two claims: that AI threatens our sense of purpose, and that this threat outranks the threat to jobs. Some speakers accepted the first and rejected the second, insisting that the economic shock comes first. Others rejected the first outright, treating AI as a tool and purpose as something people supply for themselves. Both roads led to a vote against, and few speakers stood on the ground the motion had marked out.

The proposition's case: deskilling, uniqueness, purpose

The opening speech was strongest on deskilling. Its anecdotes were concrete and easy to recognise: students deferring to software, adults defeated by 10 per cent of a number, a colleague reaching for a calculator to multiply by 1,000. Later speakers built on that material. Three of the nine floor speeches returned to the idea that AI dulls the mind, which is more support than most openings in a rapid debate receive.

The weaker link was the bridge from deskilling to purpose. The speech moved from what we are losing, to the need to identify what makes us unique, to purpose as the result of that identification. That is a call to reflection more than an argument about threats, and it left the comparison with job loss largely unmade.

The opening also called the jobs crisis a given. That handed the room a premise the second floor speaker used directly: if job loss is certain and close, it is hard to rank it second. A comparative motion asks the proposition to show why one harm is larger, and conceding the other harm's inevitability in the first minute made that harder.

The opposition's case: history, liberation, agency

The opposer took an unusual line for this motion. Rather than arguing that job losses were the greater danger, they argued that neither was a threat worth the name. Job losses would repeat the industrial revolution and release people from work nobody would choose. Purpose lost along with a dead-end job was a symptom of a social weakness, not a harm done by AI. The line that summed it up, that purpose comes from us, gave the room a way to vote against without signing up to the gloom of the job-loss camp.

The risk in that position was coherence. A speech that welcomed job losses and denied any threat to purpose was exposed to anyone who took job losses seriously. In practice the floor speakers who did so attacked the motion rather than the opposer, and the two strands of opposition never had to be reconciled. The vote counted them together.

What the opposition did well was make its optimism concrete. The usher at *Les Misérables*, the debating society found through a chatbot and the job advert for a chair on the moon gave the room pictures to hold, where the proposition offered principles. The proposition's own material stayed largely abstract until the seventh floor speech supplied examples of its own.

The ebb and flow of the floor in the AI job losses debate

Nine speakers took the floor, and their contributions sorted into three disputes rather than two sides. Only two of them, the seventh and the ninth, ended up clearly for the motion.

First battleground: bills before meaning

The second and third floor speakers made the most direct case against the motion. Purpose, on their account, is a luxury for people who can pay the mortgage, and AI job losses were coming first: concentrated in a few corporations, aimed at the best-paid work and unplanned for by government. This was the opposite of the opposer's optimism, yet it pointed the same way in the vote. The later speech on lobbying reinforced it, presenting the loss of jobs and of purpose as products of political capture rather than of the technology itself.

Second battleground: is a job a purpose at all?

Three speakers questioned the motion's premise from different angles. The first floor speaker traced lost purpose to decades of social and political change. A speaker with a career in publishing pointed to a long historical pattern of technology removing drudgery. And the speaker who works on AI noted that most people work for money and find meaning elsewhere. None of them needed to rank the two threats. By loosening the link between job and purpose, they made the motion's comparison feel like a category error, and the opposer's closing picked up exactly that thread.

Third battleground: what AI does to the mind

The motion's supporters found their footing here, and the decisive material for their side came from the floor rather than from the opening. The seventh speaker gave the proposition a structure it had lacked: three sources of purpose, reason, friendship and art, each under specific pressure from AI. A study, a podcast and a claim about song lyrics made the threat concrete in a way the opening's appeal to human uniqueness had not.

The sixth speaker's account of an algorithm narrowing a circle of friends supported the same picture, as did the last speaker's examples of GP triage and Google Maps. This was the format doing what it is for. The case for the motion was sharper after the floor than before it, and it was a floor speaker who sharpened it.

Even here the support was qualified. The sixth speaker, among the most worried about the mind, told the room that employers would go on supplying purpose. Their fear was for critical thinking, which is not quite what the motion named. The strongest case for the proposition turned out to be a case about cognition and connection, and the motion asked about purpose.

What drove the result in the AI job losses debate

Two things decided the vote. The first was the shape of the motion. A comparative claim needs the room to accept a ranking, and the speeches mostly offered either the opposite ranking or none at all. Speakers who feared job losses voted against it, and so did speakers who feared neither.

The second was the closing exchange. The opposer's reply worked with the room's own material: the speaker who said we are too close to judge, the company a debating society offers, the jobs that ask little of the people doing them. It recast purpose that depends on a job as a weakness AI might expose rather than create.

The proposer's closing, built on Hobbes, heteronomy and Maslow, made a coherent case that purpose is a human need once survival is secure. It did not answer the floor's economic case, and it did not show why AI, rather than abundance itself, was the danger to that purpose. The seventh speaker's three-part argument, the best material the proposition had, went largely unused in the

final speech.

What the AI job losses debate concluded

The room did not dismiss purpose. Several of the most memorable contributions were about exactly the things the proposition feared losing: the ability to think for oneself, friendships that ask something of us, art made by a person. What the house would not accept was that AI's gravest threat lay there rather than in the pay packet, or that AI was the threat at all.

Nobody in the room argued that people can do without a reason to get up in the morning. The house simply doubted that the machines were the ones taking it away.

2. Detailed transcript

The motion, and losing the fundamentals

The motion is: the greater threat from AI is not job loss but loss of purpose.

I'm going to talk in an intuitive way. All right. So we know that there is a job crisis coming. That's a given, right? AI is taking over simple tasks: tasks that are repetitive, tasks that can be documented, with normalised data accessible. And because we have such data pipelines, AI will be able to do tasks more and more effectively, to the point where humans are going to be outperformed by AI. This was already the case. It's not new. It was already the case 15 years ago.

15 years ago, I remember reading an article: AI is able to detect cancer on an X-ray, on a radiograph, better than radiologists themselves. I think the success rate was 75 per cent for radiologists. For an AI, it was 85, and then it went up to 90 per cent. I'm sure it's even higher than that now. So this job transition and this job market evolution, we already know about it, and we are adapting to it now. What I am talking about here is what our jobs will look like, what our activities more globally will look like in the future.

One of my professors told me that with AI and with software, when engineering students are asked why they gave a certain answer, they say, "Oh, it's because the software says so." And this wasn't even a joke. It made him very sad, and by echo, it made me very sad as well. We are losing more and more the fundamentals of what allowed us to do simple calculus when we are in a supermarket. My mother is teaching in banking. She told me some people do not know how to do 10 per cent of a number. Myself, when I worked at a university, I had a colleague who had to multiply a certain number by 1,000 on the calculator. I was looking at her for five seconds, five full seconds, seeing if she was choking. She wasn't.

Being human, and knowing who we are

So I think the main worry that we should have is what we want to know, and, going back to the talk I gave before, what is our excellence? What part of the everyday tasks should we leave to robots, to AI, and what do we want to reserve for ourselves? Ultimately, what is our trajectory? What is our ideal for humanity? This is basically it.

I heard a lot of people saying that nurses are most likely going to rise higher and higher in the job market. The reason for that is that there is something AI and robots will not be able to do, which is being human themselves, and this is very important. What will make you still have a partner who is human, instead of an AI that can read your desires, anticipate them and give them to you in a way that is far more effective in terms of sensual pleasure and solace, telling you what you like to hear, saying that you're the best, and so on? Ultimately everybody can access this, but the problem is that it is not genuine. There is not this heart, this core, this origin of expression that we still cannot identify.

We are humans. There's something unique about us, and we need to cherish it. But in order to cherish it, we need to identify it first. So this identification, knowing what we are at core, what makes us unique, is what allows us to define what our purpose is. And this is what we really need to think about, because this is not just a midlife crisis thing. We need to be able to know where we go, and, to take an Asian tenet, to know where we go, we need to know who we are.

The opposition: AI job losses as a release

I just want to read the room for a moment. How many people are on the opposing side now? Anyone? Nobody. One, two. So only two people, right? Three. So it's my job to convince you not to worry about the loss of purpose from AI.

As my right honourable Sylvan colleague says, we are living through a transformational time, when we know there's a jobs disruption coming on a massive scale. In 20 years at least, a lot of the jobs that people do today will not be done by human beings, and thank goodness too, because so many jobs today are better done by AI than by humans. Anyone who has gone anywhere near the magical world of HR and management knows that a lot of the intelligence that is running our world right now is very artificial.

A lot of the jobs that we do are done because they need to be done by a human. We do not have the technology to do them, and people would not do them for fun. I doubt you could count in this room the number of people who are toilet cleaners or prison officers for fun, but they will give their labour for a certain amount of money. The job loss is not an issue. Thank goodness that AI will come along and take away a lot of jobs, because, as we saw about 200-odd years ago, it can free up human labour for the new generation of jobs that are coming.

For those who aren't big history buffs, I'm talking about when industrial machines came in, and a lot of farm labourers were very scared about their jobs being taken away by these newfangled machines. There wasn't mass unemployment. There wasn't even as much famine as there could have been. There were famines still, but ultimately we have more jobs than ever before. We have more human beings than ever before, and almost nobody works in agriculture. The same is probably going to happen again with AI, and that's not a bad thing.

A job that fills a hole in a life

The problem is, are we going to lose our sense of purpose? Which brings me to one of the dark truths about modern life, and that is that so many people use their job as a means to get a sense of purpose, in a life in which they would otherwise have no sense of direction, no sense of capability and no one to talk to. I'm not going to describe any individuals that I personally have met, but this job, which was not a great job, and which they didn't fully enjoy, filled a hole in their life. It gave them somewhere to go. It gave them people to talk to, and they didn't do it well. But it meant that they could do something in exchange for a certain amount of money.

And if AI takes away the jobs, a lot of people are going to find themselves without this structure. To which I say, good. Because if you are relying on a dead-end job to fulfil a purpose in your life, to get you in touch with people, to get you out of bed in the morning, why wouldn't you want AI to take that away from you? Go out and see the wonders of this world. Come to a Sylvans meeting. Come to its sister society, The Cogers. Join another debating society. Go to the London Library. Go to tourist attractions like Shakespeare's Globe.

The world is full of wonders. A freelancer never relies on the work to come to them. They must go to it. The work of the future is going to be very different from what we're used to. I'm going to give an example which is safe. Say there's somebody who's worked as an usher at Les Misérables for 20 years. They know what the job is now, where you just check tickets and sell ice cream. If AI takes that away, their job might actually become more interesting, and more problem-solving.

The sense of purpose will come from being freed up from the dead-end jobs which grind us down and give monotony to our lives, freeing us up to become artists, writers, commanding the AI to write, but it still has to come from us, or joining civic organisations, joining debating societies. The sense of purpose doesn't come from AI. It doesn't come from the jobs. It comes from us. AI is not the great threat to our jobs or to our sense of purpose. AI is a tool. Are you ready to use it?

An older story: trades, Brexit and influencers

What I'm going to concentrate on is the purpose, not the AI. Because let's put it this way: mass manufacturing, Y2K, all these other things that they've said over the years, that's why people lose jobs, right? Sense of purpose. People, and young people in this country, used to have a sense of purpose of where they were going to be and what they wanted. You were going to get married, have however many children, you're going to have a good job, and you're going to go up the promotion ladder, right? And then life happened. I shouldn't say life happened. I'm going to say the Tories happened. Thatcher, right?

She wanted to get rid of the trade unions, and with her doing that, slowly, and maybe it was happening anyway, the manufacturing industry in this country went. We hardly get homemade clothes, right? Even these top designers, they're getting their clothes made abroad, right? How many people go to Primark to get their clothes? You understand me, right?

So the sense of purpose is, if you tell people me, me, me. I remember going to a school, and this was say 10, 15 years ago, and the young girl there wanted to be a WAG. She was 14, 15, and her idea of what she wanted to be was to be a WAG, right? So therefore, if people do not have a sense of purpose of getting a trade, a lot of young people now are encouraged to go to university, right? And so they're thinking, "But I don't want that debt." But see, that comes from the adults. And I'm saying the adults because most of us are adults now. But the prior adults, and that includes me, have caused the problem we're in, right? From Brexit to not protesting enough, allowing the government to keep us under their thumb, right?

And if people don't have a sense of purpose in themselves as being fully contributing adults to society, right? So now you get up, you go to work, or you have your own business, right? If you want to be a person of leisure, if you've got a rich granddaddy or mum, you know. And we used to have this class system where the rich didn't have to work, but their estates don't make money, so they've come onto the job market. So that's partly why unemployment has gone up.

But what people want for life is totally different, right? Because even I googled the other day about being a Black woman influencer who's in her 60s, and I've got a full list of what I need to do. It's a lot of hard work. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is, people want to be influencers and haven't got a sense of their own personal thing. AI has got nothing to do with it. It's been happening for a long time, right? So stop blaming AI. AI is here, right? AI is not making us lose our sense of purpose.

Why the AI job losses come first

Good evening, Sylvans. To state that the loss of purpose is a greater problem than losing our jobs is to infer that we've solved the economic challenges that matter before the lack of purpose actually impacts us as a society. I do agree that if AI takes your sense of self, your sense of worth and your sense of purpose, and erodes that, and you're unable to fill that void with something else,

something that could be towards human flourishing, that is a problem.

I think the problem that we have to face first is that our society loses its jobs in the current economic model, where we've got frontier models that are run by five or six companies that are fundamentally taking the most valuable jobs. That is what they are doing. They've got subdivisions inside these AI companies that focus on certain industries, to particularly focus on taking those jobs. They are taking the highest-value jobs first. That's what they're trying to do. Yes, they've got a whole bunch of low-end automation stuff that happens, but that's because it's really low-hanging fruit. The real focus of what those AI companies are doing is trying to come up with a system where your AI model can effectively replicate everything that happens in a full economy, and that will displace all of us from our jobs.

And right now, if all of the benefit of that productivity goes to a few mega-corporations, we're in trouble as the everyday man. The reality is our governments haven't yet set up reasonable think tanks, reasonable policies and reasonable solutions to this. I think it's absolutely terrifying, for me personally. All of us losing our jobs at the same time with no viable alternative: that's catastrophic. To think that these mega-corporations that sit between the US and China are going to do anything to support us here in the UK, I think that's folly. We've got to come up with our own solutions to what happens when these things are able to displace us from our jobs.

How are you going to pay your mortgage? We're just assuming that we get UBI from the government, that you're not allowed to be a landlord any more and make a return. What about all of the pension assets that sit in private real estate? It's a financial catastrophe waiting to happen. And to worry about our loss of purpose is to worry about the second-order effect. We first have to make sure we're able to fend for ourselves and feed ourselves and live our life today, and that, under our current economic system, is based on where your job is. It is trading your time for some menial reward that allows you to perhaps pursue some other purpose outside of work. But the reality is, the job loss that's coming first is the first and biggest problem we've got to face. Thank you.

Maslow turned on its head

Right, so I totally agree. I think we're buggered. Historically, for ages, people's sense of purpose has been aligned with their job. While you were talking, I was thinking of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where we have self-actualisation at the top, where everyone's developed and got great jobs and homes are secure. Down at the bottom, they're fumbling around for food and water and security and warmth. I think that Maslow's hierarchy of needs could well be turned on its head. Now we may well end up, as my friend says, with certain corporations in control of everything, and that can't be good.

I say that, but I will caveat that, because I think the only hope is that they realise, and governments realise, that unless people have purpose, you don't have any tax revenues coming in, unless you tax those companies to the hilt. There's got to be a balance somewhere along the line. But I'm really worried, because we're all affected by AI today. We go into shops and we're affected by AI. We go and see doctors, for a medical appointment, and we're affected by AI. I had mole mapping done on my body last week. They put me in front of a camera, and AI looked at the moles on my body and told the consultant which ones to look at. Like that.

There's going to have to be a balance. If there isn't a balance, then Elon is going to become the world's first trillionaire, in all likelihood. We need a purpose. Everybody needs a purpose. Otherwise, we'll be fighting on the streets and tearing each other apart. And we need a society which is better than that. Thank you.

Too close to see it: Newton, publishing and the Luddites

Mr Chairman, I think we're probably too close to this problem to try and work out what's going to happen. So I'm going to take you back to how I see society has developed, a bit like I did in my first contribution here tonight. What we are getting with civilisation since the Stone Age, basically, is that more things are available to learn from the past. Writing in particular sets things down. So I did a degree in physics over 60 years ago. I didn't have to work it all out from Newton onwards myself. I was picking up and learning from books and lecturers what had already been discovered.

That's a big difference from the food-gathering economy, which is where we all started, more than 50,000 years ago. It's not really clear exactly when we started, but we were around 50,000 years ago, when most of your time you were gathering food, and then some of the time you got hungry. It's a bit difficult to get a purpose out of all of that, really.

So I got my two degrees, and I also edited a university newspaper, which I thought was the most important qualification I got. I got a top job in publishing. First of all I launched new publications, so I think there is a purpose. I worked not far from where we are now. I won't go into what I was doing there. That was rather complicated, but obviously an exciting time of my life, and plenty of purpose.

We don't really know what AI is going to do, because we're too close to it. We know we've got a computer revolution. The computer revolution means masses of things can be done for us. Again, you're taking out the drudgery, and you're leaving other things that arise in its place. That is what AI is doing, but we don't really know exactly how things will pan out. I don't agree that jobs will be lost. We've had the Luddites in the past, and people didn't actually lose their jobs with nothing at all they could do. So I see these trends going on. The opportunities will probably be more exciting, and more purpose will be served.

A tool, and the bills it pays

So I'm just trying to think about this motion. I think I'm going to agree with the last speaker, who said he doesn't see a threat. I'm not sure it is the threat that it's made out to be. I see it as a technology. It provides tools, and part of my work involves enabling AI, and it's actually creating more work than not. Businesses do believe it. They've got this mythical idea that it will magically solve problems, and they'll be able to replace everyone with it. But once they get into the nitty-gritty of it, data quality and governance, and I don't want to bore you with compliance and stuff like that, all the back end has to be perfect, to a much greater degree than it already is, for it to work. So I just see it as a tool.

And then also, historically, who's going to buy goods and services? Let's face it, most of the time, if we're not working for businesses, and the purpose of that business is to make money, then we're entrepreneurs, and we're trying to make money. That's what we always do. So I see that this tool is not going to be a threat to jobs. I think it's going to open up opportunities. So that's one angle on

the motion.

Then there's the idea the motion seems to suggest, that purpose is related to our jobs. It has been mentioned that jobs give us our purpose. Okay, I can go with that halfway, but I don't believe that jobs equally give us our purpose. Most of the time we are there because we need to pay our bills, and we know that we're exchanging our labour for a salary or a wage or whatever, and then we find purpose elsewhere. So I'm not sure that the link between purpose and job loss is as strong as is being mentioned. That's all I have to say.

Bubbles, algorithms and critical thinking

Yes, I personally am more terrified of the loss of intelligence and critical thinking. I can say for myself that that's the reason I started coming to these debates, well, this is the second time, because I found myself increasingly living in a bubble, mostly fed through social media, which is controlled by an AI algorithm. I felt that even in my circle, with my friends, we would often talk about the same things without really any solution, without going anywhere. It was all the same conversations, which were good conversations, but I did feel like there was a unification of minds going on, and so I'm very concerned about that.

I think purpose will always be given to us. It will be fed to us through the jobs, because corporations need us to work one way or another. Even after AI overtakes many, many jobs, they will still need us, for whatever reason. Because, like you said, if we don't have the money to buy, how can they keep expanding? So I am concerned about that, not so much that we will lose the purpose, because, like I said, I believe it will keep being fed to us. For example, if you do a good job, you can get a pay raise. You can become a manager. Then you have a purpose, because now you can feed your family. And all these things are not necessarily things that everyone would want to do, but it's something that feels safe. It feels like a purpose because it feels achievable.

And so, if we have our individuality now, I am worried that we could lose that individuality, that critical thinking and, honestly, the power to question the world that might come to us. Thank you.

Reason, friendship and art

So, how do we find purpose? I propose three areas: reason, friendships and art, and these are all things that AI will come and devour. On the intelligence front, just to build off what you said, a preliminary MIT study found that people who used AI were seen, through brain scans, to have decreased brain activity. We will become dumber. IQ levels have already been in decline, and this will just exacerbate that.

Friendships. Mark Zuckerberg was on a podcast, and he said that humans have the capacity to have about 15 strong relationships, and we have on average three. He says AI is going to come and fill in the gap. It's horrible to think about, but it's already happening. Anecdotally, I know friends who now ask ChatGPT very intimate things, things that you would go to your friends about, things where your friends would say, you really have to sort yourself out. But because AI is super sycophantic, it's going to feed you what you want, and there you go. There's a friendship.

What is friendship if not exposing the most vulnerable parts of ourselves to each other? 30 per cent of ChatGPT activity is actually used for non-work-related things, things like asking it how do I get rid of mould in my apartment, or am I being crazy with my boyfriend?

And then art. I don't know about you, but I would rather read a really lousy book written by a person than a really good book written by AI. All the music coming out of Nashville, all the lyrics are written by AI. So even though it sounds good, and it hits that part of our brain, it's not real. So how can we trust that all of the art coming out after 2024 is not AI-generated? And if our friendships, the arts and the way we think are being fed to us through this algorithm, we're going to start thinking like the algorithm. And then how do we actually know that we're orienting ourselves towards what we actually think is true, good and beautiful? That's what's at stake, I think.

Lobbying and the whip

So I agree with you. What you're saying about the job loss, I think it's really horrible. People are definitely seeing that it's tangible right now. And I want to speak about it through a lens of politics. In terms of the government, people know that corporations lobby the government. Take 2024, prior to the general election. Electricity companies, energy companies lobby the government. They made winning policies for the 2024 general election, and that will keep coming. Lobbyists don't really represent the people and their interests.

For example, AI companies employ lobbyists, lobby the government, make those policies. Therefore, the government will be lenient on AI and not reflect the population's interest in maybe cracking down on AI. We are all scared of AI in this room, somewhat, right? And there's corporations. They'll have disproportionate influence on government due to their money, power and connections, and they will lobby the government to have those policies. And MPs will be forced to stick with the party line due to the whip system that we have in place today. The government will say, okay, you have to go along. We've been lobbying. We've been paid this amount of money. You have to go along with this. You have to support these AI companies.

And unfortunately, the government won't recognise the general will, the general fear that people have towards AI. And therefore, I think we lose jobs, and purpose, due to corporations and AI companies constantly lobbying the government to back things. I think corruption is not limited to British politics at all, and that's really scary to someone growing up in the UK. Thank you very much.

Echo chambers, GP triage and Google Maps

So I'm not a Luddite. I think the internet was a wonderful invention. It has definitely made our lives better. Social media, I think, has generally made life worse. It has made people more divided. It's put more people in echo chambers, and it's also been used as a tool of manipulation. And I think that AI is not going to make people's lives better. Look at technology advancing over the last 30 years. 30 years ago, people didn't even have mobile phones. Now there's been progress from having mobile phones to having social media to having smartphones, and now there's AI and ChatGPT. But you find the quality of life generally in the UK has actually been in decline.

People have had more difficulty getting access to things like public services, getting a GP or hospital appointment. Homelessness has increased. Housing issues have been worse. More crime, more corruption in politics and so forth. So even though we've got all this wonderful technology, and things have become more advanced, you've actually seen the quality of life decline. And I think, specifically with AI, what it's going to do is basically empower these big tech corporations, and corporations generally, by cutting down on labour costs, and it's going to be at the expense of

the general public.

The other thing I wanted to say is that in things like GP practices, they use AI for triaging. So you'd have to do it online and say, "Okay, I'm depressed," or "I'm stressed," and then the AI will pretend to be human and say, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Okay, tell me more about the symptoms." But the thing is, 80 per cent of communication is actually non-verbal. Sometimes it's not necessarily what the patient is telling you. It's their non-verbal cues, which a lot of the time AI is not going to be able to pick up.

And I just wanted to agree with what the lady here said, that using more advanced technology is actually going to make people more dumb. It's already happening now.

We have things like Google Maps, whereas before we had Google Maps, if you wanted to go from A to B, you'd look at a map and think, okay, I want to get to, I don't know, Charing Cross. I have to go here. I have to go here. And you have to try and figure it out. And by doing that, it's actually making your mind more agile, whereas you're going to lose all that. And if you continue that, you're not using your mind properly. It's going to increase the risk of things like mental health issues, but also things like dementia in the future as well. So I'm going to agree with the motion. I think it generally has lost its purpose, and it's going to make jobs more obsolete as well. Okay, thank you.

Closing for the opposition: a weakness in society

I think if there's a consensus, it is that it's bad for people to lose their sense of purpose, and loss of jobs can make that situation worse. But what I'd clarify is, yes, it can be bad to lose your sense of purpose, but I myself am not blaming AI. I don't see it as a threat. It is just a very novel technology, and it is then up to us human beings to decide what we want to do with it. So the problem is, are we not operating within a paradigm? We're so close to the situation now. We can't see 20 years down the line what the changes will be.

For example, imagine a world in which nobody would even contemplate taking up a desk job in an office as a career, because AI does it for us. We are at least a few years away from that, because the AI is not ready. We actually have people who have to double-check the AI. But imagine a future in which every job that we do involves us being in person and actually solving some kind of problem. Imagine, if you will, 20 years down the line, a job description for lead chair of the Sylvans Debating Society: must be able to attend on regular Mondays, whether in Fleet Street or on the moon; must be able to charm the crowd, greet new people, make them feel welcome. All of which AI can superficially do, but we do get more positive feedback from a human being.

With the coming job losses, there will be people who lose their sense of purpose when they lose the job, and I'm saying, okay, that's not good. But that is showing a weakness that our society has right now: that so many people build their sense of purpose on these very replaceable jobs, which do not bring their full human intelligence to the fore. It is not the AI that is to blame, is what I'm saying. It may actually help us in future. We're not going to take refuge in repetitive jobs, as it were, for our meaning and purpose, when we feel so alone because we're not talking to human beings.

How can AI actually help us? A very easy example today is if you ask AI, can you recommend any good debating societies in London? It can come up with the Sylvans, and complete strangers

can come here and actually experience something, gain a sense of purpose, learn the skill of public speaking, which is very much about improving their cognitive skills. That's just one hypothetical example, of what are hopefully many to come. But AI is not the thing.

Closing for the proposition: resources, purpose and excellence

So I think the real dichotomy we can see here, between the job and the purpose, is basically between the objective and the resources, and this is mainly what this is. I agree completely that when you have more resources, it allows you more comfort and more luxury, to be able to ask yourself greater questions. It is documented. Hobbes actually talked about this in the Leviathan, one of my favourite chapters of his book, when he talked about greater consciousness being achieved in a state of abundance, and I completely agree with that.

So more resources promote human thriving, but at the same time, when you have resources, you are able to define a purpose for them. Because if you chase resources without having a purpose for them, you don't really know what to do with them. And we humans have evolved to a point where it's not about farming for food because we're hungry, and then not being hungry and being too exhausted to do anything else. This state of abundance in history and evolution has put us in a state where we need a purpose for what we do. We're not in a state of survival any more.

And companies and nations understood it very well. You need your employees to have a greater sense of purpose in what they're doing. They're more effective, because when you have a purpose in what you do, you escape heteronomy. Heteronomy is where you have different desires that pull you in many different directions, and you're less effective in what you do. When you have a global view of yourself and you define a purpose, you have a priority in life, and you put yourself together. You're more effective in what you do. Same for citizens in a nation.

So this is where we go. We need a purpose because this is how we are. We're not in primitive states any more. Now, what do we do? Why do we do it? If AI does everything better than us, and if robots can do things more effectively than us, then why do we do things? We do things because of what they are in themselves, and because they promote our excellence: art, logic, critical thinking, spirituality, knowledge. We think of all of those as good in themselves, and we do them because we have the time to do them, and because we want to cultivate what makes us better and more accomplished as individuals. Hence Maslow's pyramid. Thank you.

The vote

So the motion is: the greater threat from AI is not job loss but loss of purpose. So, with three votes for, nine against and two abstentions, this house does not believe the greater threat from AI is not job loss, but loss of purpose.