

WINNING FREEDOM

2023
summer
school

29 June - 1 July, London

TOPIC GUIDE

 Ideas
Matter

LIVING FREEDOM

Renewing freedom through education and debate.

Living Freedom offers opportunities for younger generations to explore ideas and debate ideals as they relate to the past, present, and future of freedom.

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TOPIC GUIDE: LIVING FREEDOM SUMMER SCHOOL 2023

Living Freedom Summer School aims to help you get to grips with the best that has been said and written over the centuries and engage with important contemporary issues.

Our expert thinkers and campaigners will help you explore the value of free speech and other freedoms today. The themes to be explored range widely and this Topic Guide provides some background that will help you navigate the themes we will discuss.

PROGRAMME AND READINGS

This Topic Guide contains outlines of all lectures, panels and workshops taking place over the three days of Living Freedom, as well as some recommended readings, videos and podcasts.

These are hyperlinked so you can easily access them by clicking on the links within the pdf. It is not essential to read, watch or listen to all the material provided. But familiarising yourself with the topics covered – especially where they are less familiar to you – will help you get the most out of the school. You also may want to return to this guide at a later date.

For those that wish to explore more widely, some more general background material is included that cover contemporary topics and historical developments.

BACKGROUND READING, LISTENING AND VIEWING

READ: [Letters on Liberty](#)

Various authors, Academy of Ideas, 2020–23

This pamphlet series is dedicated to creating rowdy, good-natured disagreement and stimulating people prepared to experiment with what freedom might mean today. The pamphlets can be downloaded free in PDF format.

LISTEN: [Culture wars, then and now](#)

Episodes 1 to 12, Ideas Matter, 2019

This podcast series from Ideas Matter explores the emergence and evolution of the culture wars. Lecturers examine the intellectual, cultural, social and political ideas that shape the culture wars.

WATCH: [Genius of Western Civilisation](#)

Episodes 1 to 6, The New Culture Forum, 2023

Inspired by TV programmes such as *Civilisation*, Kenneth Clark's 1969 masterpiece, The New Culture Forum's six-part documentary series explores the history, achievements and genius of Western civilisation.

THURSDAY 29 JUNE

18:30 – 20:00 OPENING LECTURE

Freedom of conscience: 21st-century challenges

The idea of conscience first emerged when ancient Greek playwrights had their characters wrestle with their inner voices. Since then, in religious and secular times alike, living in accordance with one's beliefs has thrown up tricky moral dilemmas. Legislators defying a party-political line that conflicts with their ethical beliefs, pacifists objecting to military service and medical professionals asked to provide abortion-related care have all wrestled with how conscience should guide their actions.

The issue of conscience is again in the news. For example, lawyers signed a 'Declaration of Conscience' stating they would not prosecute environmentalist protesters. Others fear that the scope for exercising conscience is now under threat. Critics say politicians holding religious beliefs, such as the SNP's Kate Forbes, are inappropriate choices for high office. Individuals who refuse to 'take the knee', place pronouns in their email signatures or give vaccinations face pressure to conform to new or evolving social mores and policy objectives. And with institutions and businesses mandating training to eradicate biases and 'problematic' thinking, can freedom to exercise *conscience* survive the quest to control *unconscious* biases?

Why is freedom of conscience important and what are the main threats today? What constitutes the legitimate exercise of conscience? Where practical conflicts arise, for example, with anti-discrimination equality laws or medical service provision, how should we respond? How can we defy pressure to embrace new cultural or political norms and avoid a retreat into one-dimensional thinking?

LECTURER

Professor Frank Furedi sociologist and social commentator; author, *100 Years of Identity Crisis*

LISTEN: [Leaders with faith](#) *Moral Maze*, BBC Radio 4, 4 March 2023

[Moral Conscience through the Ages: Fifth Century BCE to the Present](#) Stephen Darwall, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 3 October 2015

[Politicians have the right to strong religious views. But not to be shielded from scrutiny](#) Kenan Malik, *Observer*, 26 February 2023

[Eco-cultist lawyers are undermining the rule of law](#) Matthew Scott, 25 March 2023

[There is nothing wrong with unconscious bias Don't let them control your thoughts!](#) Frank Furedi, *Roots and Wings*, 29 August 2022

FRIDAY 30 JULY

09:00 – 10:00 LECTURE

Freedom in the age of identity politics

Loved or loathed, identity politics is inescapable in contemporary battles over freedom. To some, the political embrace of the personal is a vital tool in the struggle against oppressive institutions and practices. Proclaiming identity, they say, is the means to advance the causes of respect and tolerance for minorities. To others, identitarian politics is a divisive force in society and represents the antithesis of liberal ideals. Many who celebrate diversity and inclusion also seem hostile to those holding different views and seem keen to exclude them.

Some point out that historically progressive political movements fought for individuals to be free to transcend their circumstances rather being defined by their race, religion, gender or sexuality. But others now worry that we are overly focused on individual freedom, in the process degrading relationships and corroding the intimate links and communitarian instincts of groups with whom we enjoy a natural affinity. In making the case for the free individual, how do we avoid reducing freedom to a lifestyle or consumer choice?

Is the contemporary claim to identity necessarily hostile to more universal political ideals such as freedom and equality? Beyond the culture war of identity politics, how should we seek to construct a sense of ourselves and of freedom today?

LECTURER

Dr Joanna Williams founder and director, Cieo; author, *How Woke Won*

[How identity politics destroys freedom](#) Roger Scruton, *Acton Institute*, 17 September 2021

[Identity politics isn't hurting liberalism. It's saving it](#) Zack Beauchamp, *Vox*, 20 February 2020

[Focusing on diversity means we miss the big picture. It's class that shapes our lives](#) Kenan Malik, *Observer*, 29 January 2023

[Who's afraid of identity politics?](#) Jonathan Dean, *LSE Blogs*, 9 December 2016

[The reactionary turn against the sexual revolution](#) Joanna Williams, *spiked*, 11 June 2023

10:30 – 11:30 WORKSHOPS: FREE-SPEECH DILEMMAS

OPTION 1. On campus: should we veto the heckler's veto?

The right to protest is a crucial a part of free speech. But increasingly, events in universities – such as Kathleen Stock's recent appearance at the Oxford Union – are subject to protests that are deliberately designed to disrupt proceedings and to intimidate and silence speakers.

Defenders of these protests say it's better to protest speakers they dislike rather than try get them cancelled. Noisy, disruptive interventions, they argue, are simply a form of free speech. But where such protests – or the possibility of disorderly protests – lead to an event being cancelled, abandoned or rendered pointless, they amount to a 'heckler's veto'. Opponents argue that the right to protest does not amount to a right to silence others. Given that free expression within universities is vital to developing knowledge, they argue that institutions should not be obliged to support speech that restricts another's right of expression or academic freedom more widely.

While some allege that some universities can display a failure of leadership when faced with staff and student campaigns against academics, should universities take practical steps to restrict protests? After all, University of Edinburgh recently banned one heckler from attending or being within 200 feet of any protest on any subject on the university's campus. Is it legitimate to veto the heckler's veto? Or could this be a slippery slope that may end up constraining and compromising wider hard-won freedoms?

SPEAKERS

Dr Shereen Benjamin Academics for Academic Freedom, University of Edinburgh

Dr Julius Grower Ann Smart Fellow in Law, University of Oxford

Leader: Helen Joyce has a right to speak, and students have the right to protest it *Varsity*, 5 November 2022

The UK's Freedom of Speech bill needs an exemption for heckling James Murray and Alice Sullivan, *Times Higher Education*, 13 November 2022

Next steps on protest and free speech Jenny S. Martinez, Stanford Law School, 22 March 2023

University bans Trans and Non-Binary Liberation Officer from protesting on campus Lucy Jackson 27 February 2023

OPTION 2. WhatsAppened to privacy?

Encrypted messaging through WhatsApp is popular amongst those wishing to communicate privately with friends and colleagues. But recent high-profile cases reveal that our messages are not as private as we thought. Last year, two policemen were jailed after sharing highly crude posts on a WhatsApp group, including awful jokes about rape and sexual assault. Then, over 100,000 messages exchanged between the former health secretary, Matt Hancock, and others at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic were leaked - revealing ministers, civil servants and advisers mishandled scientific evidence and mocked dissident voices.

The Communications Act 2003 makes it a crime in the UK to post anything 'grossly offensive' on a 'communications system'. And many worry that, on the grounds of protecting children from abuse, the new Online Safety Bill will be used to outlaw end-to-end encryption, allowing third parties to access private messages. Threat of exposure seems to have spooked the government, which is now taking its own Covid-19 Inquiry to court in order to limit release of private ministerial conversations.

Should there exist a principle that ministers - and everyone else in society - should be able to keep communications private? Some say scrutinising and exposing government secrets is in the public interest, not least where our liberty is under threat through decisions made via WhatsApp. Others say we have a right to privacy, even where the public have an interest in decision-making or vile messages are exchanged.

Why is privacy so important for freedom? Should we be worried by recent trends to invade privacy, or are there times when it's legitimate for our private messages to become public property? What is the public interest, and does it matter whether those leaking information have a political motive to expose our private conversations?

SPEAKER

Dr Tiffany Jenkins writer and broadcaster

"It's sort of a private thing" Tiffany Jenkins, *Strangers and Intimates*, 2 June 2023

WhatsApp and Signal unite against Online Safety Bill amid privacy concerns

Alex Hern, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2023

The importance of exposing Matt Hancock's WhatsApp messages Fraser Nelson, *Spectator*, 1 March 2023

Why Boris's WhatsApps should stay private Mick Hume, *spiked*, 2 June 2023

OPTION 3. What's wrong with updating old books?

Publishing books has never been so tricky. Sensitivity readers are now regularly commissioned to highlight or ward against offensive character details. And not just new works, but even those by long-dead writers are now subject to rewrites or 'updates'.

In 2011, the republication of Mark Twain's classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, replaced the 'n' word with 'slave'. Plans are afoot to republish Ian Fleming's James Bond series with 'racial slurs toward black people' removed. But even depictions that appear innocuous to many are targeted. Puffin Books made sweeping changes to Roald Dahl's children's books, meaning that Augustus Gloop is no longer fat, Miss Trunchbull's face is not 'horsey' and no children in *Matilda* are 'delinquents' or 'idiots'.

Some say updates protect against modern audiences reacting badly to outdated content – what was normal 100 or even 30 years ago might be inappropriate today. Republishing works intact might insinuate that publishers agree with their content or allow readers to believe 'outdated' views are acceptable. But critics argue that 'edits' militate against books – as historical documents – providing unique insights. Censorship is an affront to artistic freedom – and an insinuation that readers can't take their historical context into account.

Are fears for old books exaggerated, when often minute alterations are inconsequential to the overall plot? Perhaps these changes may even help to ensure the longevity of books by making them continually relevant? Or is there something more at stake for literature, if texts are subject to the whims of contemporary political debate, forever under threat from the red pen?

SPEAKER

Ella Nixon art historian

LISTEN: [What are Sensitivity Readers, and do you need one?](#) Patrice Williams, *Fully Booked: The Hidden Gems Author Podcast*, 6 April 2023

WATCH: [Lionel Shriver: Insensitivity Reader – Live at the UnHerd Club](#) *UnHerd*, 16 March 2023

[Roald Dahl publisher Puffin Books is having its cake and eating it, too](#) Erik Kain, *Forbes*, 24 February 2023

[Sensitivity readers: what publishing's most polarising role is really about](#) Lucy Knight, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2023.

[Been there, read that](#) Ben Sixsmith, *The Critic*, 19 December 2021

11:45 – 12:45 LECTURE

Dystopian or dysfunctional? The 21st-century state

Concern with authority is as old as human history itself. In the modern world, moral values, science and democratic consent have all played important roles in creating cohesion and conviction amongst those that govern. Certainly, ideological and class divisions remained. Nevertheless, authoritative political leadership helped legitimise power, providing the state and society a sense of direction.

In recent years, however, new elites have appeared directionless and often incompetent. Institutions riven with disputes over cultural values seem unsure of what they stand for. State agencies are often dysfunctional, unable to provide healthcare, housing or transport. Crisis seems to be the word of the year – energy crisis, cost-of-living crisis, climate crisis, housing crisis – meaning a ‘state of emergency’ is now ubiquitous. At the same time, as evident during the pandemic, freedoms and democracy are easily sidelined as heavy-handed and often unaccountable agencies attempt to exert control over public life.

What is distinct about today’s elites and their attempts to exercise authority? How should we understand the relationship between authority and authoritarian? For those keen to make the case for freedom, what should we be concerned about today and how do we make the case for renewing liberty?

LECTURER

Josie Appleton director, Manifesto Club; author, *Officious: Rise of the Busybody State*

WATCH: [Authority in the 21st Century](#) Frank Furedi, Leeds Salon, 26 September 2014

[The emergency addiction](#) Josie Appleton, *Notes on Freedom*, 21 May 2023

[Social Division after Representation](#) Tara McCormack, *Lawyer’s Fees, Beetroot, and Music*, 17 January 2023

[Keeping Control](#) Philip Cunliffe, *The Northern Star*, 13 January 2023

[Response to ASB Action Plan](#) Manifesto Club, 31 March 2023

13:45 – 14:45 WORKSHOPS

What the papers say

The daily news is awash with stories that raise vital questions about the future of freedom. We have seen galleries cancelling artists or their work; the witch-hunting of non-conformist sports stars; 'safety'-driven online censorship; and royals lording it over the press.

Having spent lunch perusing the papers for newsworthy freedom-related stories, each group – led by guest reviewers from the world of journalism and public relations – will consider the questions posed by the day's news for the future of freedom.

GROUP A

GUEST REVIEWERS

Liam Deacon consultant, Pagefield

Sonia Gallego journalist, senior producer, Al Jazeera English

Rob Lyons science and technology director, Academy of Ideas

HOST

Kevin Rooney teacher; member, Academy of Ideas Education Forum

GROUP B

GUEST REVIEWERS

Sam Armstrong legislative affairs director, Free Speech Union

Dave Bowden associate fellow, Academy of Ideas

Poppy Coburn freelance journalist and commentator

HOST

Austin Williams director, Future Cities Project

GROUP C

GUEST REVIEWERS

Marion Calder co-director, For Women Scotland

Harry Howard correspondent, *MailOnline*

Charlie Peters reporter, GB News Investigates

HOST

Dr Mo Lovatt national coordinator, Debating Matters

15:15 – 16:30 DEBATE

The dangers of progress?

Historically, the quest for freedom was often understood to be bound up with the ideal of progress. ‘*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*’, the maxim of the French Revolution, has long been associated with Enlightenment notions of progress and reason.

Today, society seems less certain of the benefits of progress. Key features of modernity such as urbanisation, mobility, secularism and affluence are often deemed counterproductive to liberty. Many worry that centuries of modernisation have sidelined traditional values of family, religion, service and honour to leave us in thrall to consumerism and captured by individualist and materialistic desires. The sexual revolution – once deemed central to women’s liberation and increased personal autonomy – is being reassessed as detrimental to women and the family, and even blamed for reduced birth-rates and demographic imbalances. Where technological advances once held the prospect of freeing ourselves from the bonds of nature, today – from food to fashion – the organic is celebrated over the manufactured.

How should we define ‘progress’ and how do we account for collapsing belief in its benefits? Are progress and tradition necessarily in direct and bloody competition or can we make the case for a creative tension worth celebrating for social benefits? From industry to the internet, cars to contraceptive pills, has progress gone too far and become a threat to contemporary freedoms? Or might the cause of liberty benefit from a new dose of utopian thinking?

SPEAKERS

Nina Power writer and philosopher; senior editor, *Compact*

Ralph Schoellhammer political theorist, Webster Vienna Private University

LISTEN [Progress](#) *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, 18 November 1999

WATCH ["I Don't Believe In Progress"](#) Mary Harrington, *Triggernometry*, 14 July 2021

[Modernity is making you sterile](#) Louise Perry, *Spectator*, 7 May 2023

[Progressives Against Progress](#) Fred Siegel, *City Journal*, Summer 2010

["The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race": Theodore John Kaczynski Dead at 81](#) Cassandra MacDonald, *Timecast*, 10 June 2023

[Count me out of this cultural pessimism](#) Brendan O'Neill, *spiked*, 19 March 2023

16:45 – 17:45 WORKSHOPS: THE STATE AND SOCIETY

OPTION 1. Surveillance state: the all-seeing eye?

'It's terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when in a public place or within range of a telescreen', warned Winston, protagonist in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Today, such prophecies seem well-founded. Big Brother Watch reports that a secretive Whitehall-based Counter Disinformation Unit monitors government critics' speech online and that police and private companies are rolling out facial-recognition surveillance cameras. Foreign powers such as China appear to track data via TikTok, while the UK government demands proof of identity to vote in elections and proposes bans on encrypted messaging.

What is driving this seeming descent into a surveillance society? The age-old riposte to defenders of civil liberties is that 'if you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear'. So why is privacy important and what are the main threats posed by surveillance? Given that many of us voluntarily post our intimate thoughts and personal information on social media and happily use loyalty cards that enable accumulation of wide-ranging personal information, are we all complicit in undermining private life? Are we exhibiting the politics of paranoia or is surveillance threatening the free society?

SPEAKERS

Mark Johnson legal and policy officer, Big Brother Watch

Timandra Harkness journalist, writer and broadcaster

WATCH: [Revealed: the government's secretive political surveillance program](#)

Triggernometry, 1 February 2023

[The Government Censorship Unit you've never heard of](#) Mark Johnson, *UnHerd*, 6 September 2021

[Planes, Trains And E-Scooters: Surveillance State And The End Of Freedom Of Movement](#) Gaspard Koenig, *Worldcrunch*, 1 May 2023

[Coronation surveillance is a step towards a dark future](#) Timandra Harkness, *UnHerd*, 5 May 2023

OPTION 2. A war on civil society?

Civil society thrives upon the free flow of information and ideas, and the scrutiny and debate this underpins. Whether information letters produced by early traders and merchants, newspapers and radical pamphlets discussed in nineteenth-century coffee shops and salons, or more recently, blogs and Substacks posted on the world wide web and debated in forums and chatrooms, society has benefited from expansion of free communication. Private individuals came together to form a public, in turn requiring public authority to justify itself before public opinion.

Recently however, escalating top-down controls threaten to disrupt and even stigmatise peer-to-peer interaction. Draconian hate-speech controls in Ireland threaten to make private possession of offensive material a crime – meaning you could be jailed without saying or writing a single ‘hateful’ word. Other initiatives go further than bans. The war on misinformation leads to shadow bans on social-media accounts and ensures access only to ‘trusted’ sources – for example, on health or climate – while promoting officially approved influencers and fact-checkers to give ‘correct’ information. Online-safety regulations shield us from posts or websites deemed harmful, with services sending us to ‘approved’ charities and helplines instead.

Why has communications across civil society come to raise such concerns now? Cyberbullying, revenge pornography or encouraging self-harm can be deeply unpleasant and even dangerous. But does ease of online accessibility justify the new strict regulations and penalties? How concerned should we be about conspiracy theories and misinformation – and is the spread of such ideas a problem of private companies more interested in profitable clicks than verifiable truth, or something broader? How should we balance concerns about these issues with protecting free expression?

SPEAKER

Fraser Myers deputy editor, *spiked*

DEBATING MATTERS TOPIC GUIDE [**'Tech companies should act to stop online misinformation'**](#)

LISTEN: Marianna in Conspiracyland BBC Sounds, 1 June 2023

[**Facebook is all power with no transparency – and ministers are happy to silence dissent**](#) Fraser Nelson, *Telegraph*, 2 June 2023

[**The truth about the BBC's war on 'disinformation'**](#) Fraser Myers, *spiked*, 23 May 2023

[**A curious plea for a disinterested public**](#) Dolan Cummings, *spiked*, 29 January 2011

OPTION 3. 15-minute cities: conspiracy versus reality

The idea of a '15-minute city' is highly fashionable. For supporters, the concept is simple enough: placing essential services within 15 minutes' walk will ensure that we ditch our cars and walk more, improving health and the environment.

Local services, fewer cars and cleaner streets seem like a good idea. But there are plenty of critics. What about people who work, shop or go to school further afield? Or more specialised services who rely on customers from the wider city and beyond, from niche bookshops to major hospitals? And what about the freedom to travel? With councils such as Oxford proposing dividing the city into zones and placing limits on how often people from neighbouring zones can drive through them, critics say that authoritarian policies akin to lockdown restrictions are being expanded into new areas of our lives.

Are enforced restrictions against 'unnecessary journeys' illiberal, even authoritarian? Or is the reaction to 15-minute cities – that they are part of a grand plan to restrict our freedoms on the pretext of saving the planet – overblown? If restrictions boost health and the environment, is there anything wrong with the state taking the initiative and individuals making sacrifices? What is a city for and who should decide how we live and travel?

SPEAKER

Alan Miller co-founder, #together

LISTEN: [Thou Shalt Not Drive](#) Future Cities Podcast, 29 January 2023

[Free Our Streets](#) #together, 7 January 2023

[What are 15-minute cities and why are antivaxers so angry about them?](#) Max Kendix, *The Times*, 22 February 2023

[In defence of the 15-minute city](#) Liz Rowlinson, *Spectator*, 28 March 2023

[Fifteen-minute cities are not a socialist plot](#) Nicholas Boys Smith, *Conservative Home*, 3 March 2023

[The authoritarian crusade against the car](#) Austin Williams, *spiked*, 30 March 2023

18:00 – 19:00 IN CONVERSATION WITH CRITICS

What is criticism?

Critics used to be respected and even feared for their ability to make definitive judgements on everything from artistic works to catwalk fashions. But nowadays, terms such as ‘judgement’ and ‘discrimination’ are often deemed purely negative phrases. In an era when everybody’s opinions or work must be ‘respected’, to criticise risks being labelled ‘judgemental’. In universities, critiquing the work of students has become contentious lest it damages their self-esteem. And with many endorsing ‘non-judgementalism’ as a positive value, critics exercising judgement can be assumed to be arrogant, closed-minded, lacking in empathy or suffering from unconscious bias. To be discriminatory is even worse, often taken to imply intolerance.

Why are the tasks of critiquing, judging and discriminating seen negatively today? How can we regain our critical faculties — to see ourselves as helpful, not toxic — and overcome hostility to making fundamental critical judgement calls? At a time when artistic or literary quality is often deemed to be a question of personal taste or political outlook, what should be the grounds for exercising judgement? In an age that values celebrity endorsements and below-the-line commentators, what is a critic, what is their role and why should we listen?

Austin Williams director, Future Cities Project

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Clive Davis chief theatre critic, *The Times*

Ivan Hewett classical music critic, *Telegraph*

[Five Critical Essays on The Crit](#) Machine Books, Spring 2023

[What did the critics who trashed Georgia O’Keeffe have in common? See if you can guess](#) Katy Hessel, *Guardian*, 1 May 2023

[The importance of being moral](#) Angus Kennedy, *Policy*, Vol. 30 No. 3, Spring 2014

[Why don’t critics make judgments anymore?](#) Raphael Rubenstein, *Art in America*, 25 January 2023

[I’m an art critic. will AI steal my job?](#) Martin Herbert, *Art Review*, 30 January 2023

SATURDAY 2 JULY

09:30 – 10:30 LECTURE

What does it mean to be human in a world of generative AI?

People are fascinated, amused and alarmed – often all three at once – by the recent popularity of generative AI tools. Such tools take prompts in natural human language and respond by generating remarkably sophisticated text (chatbots like ChatGPT and Bard), images (Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, DALL-E) or other outputs (moving images, speech, music, programming code). Some people welcome the new possibilities that these tools seem to offer for human creativity and flourishing. Others fear the consequences – from students getting AI to write their homework, to artists and journalists losing their livelihood to AI, to reputations being ruined and public discourse polluted by AI-generated scams and 'deepfakes'.

What 20th-century events and philosophies originally shaped the invention of AI? What 21st-century phenomena are shaping the way we understand AI now? Will generative AI add to, or detract from, the meaning in our lives?

LECTURER

Sandy Starr deputy director, Progress Educational Trust

LISTEN: [Living Freedom: Artificial Intelligence and implications for freedom](#) Sandy Starr, Ideas Matter, 19 April 2023

Letter on Liberty: AI: Separating Man from Machine Sandy Starr, Academy of Ideas

[Computing machinery and intelligence](#) Alan Turing, *Mind*, Volume LIX, Issue 236, October 1950, Pages 433–460

[There's more to AI than 'killing all humans'](#) Matthew Feeney, *CapX*, 8 June 2023

[Noam Chomsky: The false promise of ChatGPT](#) Ian Roberts, Noam Chomsky, Jeffrey Watumull, *New York Times*, 8 March 2023

[The cynical hysteria around AI](#) Timandra Harkness, *UnHerd*, 2 June 2023

11:00 – 12:00 LECTURE

The 'stolen years': understanding the lockdowns

The Covid-19 Inquiry commissioned by the UK government is barely underway, but it has already descended into farce. Yet with many young people still enraged over lockdowns and furious as to their devastating impact on growing up, we urgently need to account for the 'stolen years' and their impact.

It's not surprising lockdown was experienced as an era of loneliness, anxiety and fear. The purgatory of Zoom replaced the lecture theatre. Hopes of building networks and relationships were dashed as the interactive seminars, student societies and social life more generally were sacrificed for confinement to student halls and flats. Recent problems of socialisation and solidarity are regularly laid at the door of the depression and fraught relationships created during Covid.

Yet accounting for this period is difficult. For example, teachers and academics have long been praised for a commitment to the young, so why did they and their institutions give up on their educational mission? And why wasn't there more outrage and activism? Despite mounting evidence proving pandemic mismanagement, even a majority of the young still support lockdown restrictions, with more than half of 18- to 24-year-olds believing official measures imposed were not strict enough.

By 2020, commentators were already pushing the idea of 'Generation Covid'. But should the Covid era define us? While many point to mental-health challenges, do they underestimate our ability to bounce back from even the toughest times? Some say we are seeing a permanent shift in the experience of growing up. But to what extent has Covid given rise to a distinct generational outlook? Have habits of fraternity and solidarity been damaged irreparably or can we rescue the idea of freedom from widespread fatalism?

LECTUER

Dr Jennie Bristow sociologist, co-author, *The Corona Generation*

'Broken and defeated': UK university students on the impact of Covid rules Molly Blackall and Sasha Mistlin, *Guardian*, 11 January 2021

How the Covid shock has radicalised generation Z Paul Mason, *Guardian*, 2 June 2021

Why do young people still support lockdowns? Max Mitchell, *UnHerd*, 25 March 2023

Generation CUB – how the events of Covid, Ukraine and Brexit will shape our teenagers' lives forever Jennie Bristow, *Telegraph*, 10 March 2022

13:00–13:30 TWO LECTURES ON THE CLASSICS

13:30–14:15 FOLLOW-ON SEMINARS

Why literature matters

The study of English Literature appears to be in terminal decline. ‘Pale, male and stale’ is the term often used to criticise curricula that predominantly feature traditional writers like Shakespeare, Milton and Aristotle. Some people say that in the fast-moving world of the internet and satellite television, the concept of so-called Great Books is arcane and irrelevant. For many young people, English Literature is deemed a subject too preoccupied with societies and individuals they no longer recognise. Consequently, even literature teachers are often defensive, resorting to justifying teaching texts simply as the means to aid the process of social change, while students are encouraged to see the subject through a political lens, rather than something of innate value and beauty.

As illustrated by the plummeting popularity of English literature in both schools and universities, clearly current ideas on English literature are failing to inspire a new generation of readers. So how have we arrived at this point? And more importantly, why does literature matter? What are the arguments we need to make the case anew for literature and inspire the readers of tomorrow?

SPEAKER

David James independent school deputy head and writer

Politics and the decline of English Literature: why a vital subject is on the slide

David James, *CapX*, 15 May 2023

Black kids should study Larkin, Tomiwa Owolade, *UnHerd*, 29 June 2022

The literary canon is exhilarating and disturbing and we need to read it

Camilla Nelson, *The Conversation*, 31 March 2016

Why classical music matters

'This is a desperate moment. The entire art form is threatened', said the renowned music director of the London Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle, earlier this year. Both English National Opera and BBC Singers - a world-renowned chamber choir - are facing financial struggles to survive. There are regular rows over programming the Proms. University curricula have been rewritten to 'decolonise the ear'. As a result, one critic says, 'we are seeing a flight from the great musical achievements of European culture'; another suggests that 'classical music is disappearing from cultural settings where it used to be common - community events, adverts, sports coverage.'

At one time, classical music was rigorously defended - certainly by the sector itself, but also within wider society. But today, many in the classical world feel embattled. The genre is decried for being elitist - including by voices within the cultural sector who see it as being out of touch with the social mores of the 21st-century.

Who defends classical music today - and should it be defended? Is it time to shake up the genre, make it more accessible? How can the case be made that classical music matters today and for the future?

SPEAKER

Ian Pace professor of music, City, University of London

How the culture wars are killing Western classical music Ian Pace, *Spectator*, 9 October 2021

Simon Rattle: 'This is a desperate moment. The entire art form is threatened'

Richard Morrison, *The Times*, 20 April 2023

Bach in town Niall Gooch, *The Critic*, 4 August 2022

14:45 – 15:45 LECTURE WITH RESPONDENTS

Liberty and gender: how can we talk about trans?

Such is the toxicity around debates on transgender ideology, many despair that productive discussion has become impossible. So how can we ensure disagreements can be aired and that everyone, regardless of gender outlook, has the ability to freely choose how to live?

Those that are gender critical see some red lines. For example, many people argue that the biological sex is immutable, regardless of feelings about gender. Yet such arguments are often met with accusations of 'transphobia', which can lead to both people and events being cancelled. The claim that 'trans-women are women' is often more than simply a rhetorical posture; it leads to the effective abolition of single-sex spaces, women's health care, women's sports and can distort valuable statistical data.

Nonetheless, there are also grey areas, or at least some complicating factors and moral dilemmas to discuss.

For example, for those who are concerned about men having access to women's single-sex spaces, do their concerns extend to those who have fully medically transitioned or just to those who simply self-identify as a different gender? Or take the adults who choosing to change gender but who do not insist on using single-sex spaces. Should they really be denied the freedom to dress and live as they wish? Perhaps they might be valuable allies to those fighting for freedom?

In the culture wars around transgender, the enforced use of gender-based pronouns militates against conscience-based freedoms. But should we always insist on using the pronouns associated with biological sex - or can it be polite and reasonable to use someone's chosen pronouns?

And what about the battles over drag queens? It may be right to worry about age-appropriate materials in schools and the integration of Drag Queen Story Hour to sex and gender education. But is there a danger that drag queens, whose audience is mostly adults, risk being rejected per se and face intolerance that goes against living freely?

Often there are issues of regulations and law. Take safeguarding. Affirmation of gender dysphoria for pubescent teenagers and children, often behind their parents' backs, cuts to the heart of safeguarding and family privacy. But how do we avoid creating a general panic about predators? Elsewhere, there are attempts to clarify that the "sex" in the Equality Act means sex - whether someone

is biologically male or female - and not whether they have a Gender Recognition Certificate. But is there a danger that being a woman becomes dependent on emphasising sex as a protected characteristic?

Fighting for liberty requires maximising constructive debate. So how should we talk about trans?

SPEAKER

Claire Fox director, Academy of Ideas

RESPONDENTS

Maya Forstater executive director, Sex Matters

Dennis Noel Kavanagh director, Gay Men's Network

WATCH: [Gender Wars](#) Channel 4, 30 May 2023

[The meaninglessness of moderation](#) Josephine Bartosch, 3 June 2023

[Today's Common debate on sex, gender and the Equality Act. The Government must clear up this mess](#) Maya Forstater, *Conservative Home*, 12 June 2023

[Sleight of words – Why the function of language matters](#) Dennis Noel Kavanagh, Kavanagh's Substack, 29 November 2022

[The Oxford kids are alright](#) Kathleen Stock, *UnHerd*, 1 June 2023

16:00– 17:00 MORAL MAZE

OPTION 1. Reparations: should Britain make amends for its colonial past?

Some kind of slavery has been around throughout much of human history. But the Atlantic slave trade between 1440 and 1863 was easily the most vicious case. Many long-standing institutions and organisations can trace some link back to the slave trade. Universities, banks, the *Guardian* and the British monarchy have shown extensive personal wealth or inheritances drawn from slavery and the slave trade. But, what, if anything, should we do about this history?

Today, our government acknowledges and has apologised for numerous atrocities of colonialism, as have some members of the royal family. The tearing down of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol shows at least some in the public have sympathy. But opinions are divided on the question of whether enough has already been done. Some argue Britain must pay its former colonies to achieve equity in the world, while others argue that today's Britons ought not to be punished for the mistakes of history.

Are we responsible for the actions and beliefs of people who lived and died hundreds of years before us? Are claims of inherited discrimination a reality that needs to be rectified, or is there a danger that a 'victim narrative' about the impacts of colonialism is patronising to people of African heritage? The French Afro-Caribbean political philosopher, Frantz Fanon, once wrote: 'I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.' Should Britain make amends for its colonial past? And, if so, are reparations the way to do it?

SPEAKER

James Heartfield author, *Britain's Empires: A History, 1600–2020*

LETTER ON LIBERTY: [Against Reparations](#) James Heartfield, Academy of Ideas, June 2023

LISTEN: [How should Britain make amends for its colonial past?](#) Moral Maze, BBC Radio 4, 21 June 2023

[Nikole Hannah-Jones makes a case for reparations with 'The 1619 Project' series](#) Candice Williams, NBC News, 26 January 2023

[Should America pay reparations for slavery? Ta-Nehisi Coates v Coleman Hughes](#)

Ta-Nehisi Coates and Coleman Hughes, *Guardian*, 19 June 2019

[Returning the Benin Bronzes](#) Ralph Leonard, *Areo*, 11 June 2021

OPTION 2. Nation state: the morality and law of borders

In a world of free trade and easy international travel, many believe national borders are outdated. Policies like deporting migrants to relatively underdeveloped countries such as Rwanda strengthen sentiment that borders are illiberal and even authoritarian. Instead, many believe that today's cosmopolitan, open societies are more consistent with transnational governance and post-border forms of global citizenship.

While critics of borders believe they are callous for setting people apart, others argue that animosity towards borders reflects a failure to understand the value of national sovereignty. Whether due to the legal status that defines citizenship and a right to vote, or for preservation of cultural traditions and national identity, defenders of borders argue that it's entirely legitimate for a community to be selective of its members. More broadly, some argue, the turn against borders reflects a wider discomfort in enforcing boundaries and the trend to celebrate the transgressive over advocating clear values and exercising judgement.

Are borders now past their sell-by date? To what extent do transnational law and institutions threaten the stability and integrity of a bordered nation state? Is enforcing borders really the only way to preserve a cultural identity? And anyway, in an age of the 'digital nomad', doesn't solidarity stretch way beyond one's national community?

SPEAKERS

Dr Alka Sehgal Cuthbert director, Don't Divide Us

Steven Barrett barrister, Radcliffe Chambers; writer on law, *Spectator*

LISTEN: [Sovereignty](#) *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, 30 June 2016

LISTEN: [The Morality of Borders](#), Moral Maze, BBC Radio 4, 21 June 2023

[Why borders matter](#) Theodore Dalrymple, *Spectator*, 1 September 2012

[Here's why a border-free world would be better than hostile immigration policies](#) Luke de Noronha and Gracie Mae Bradley, *Guardian*, 26 July 2022

[The EU rule of law crisis](#) Steven Barrett, *The Critic*, 5 February, 2023

17:15 – 18:30 CLOSING LECTURE WITH RESPONDENTS

Online harms to trigger warnings: safetyism versus freedom

Trigger warnings and microaggression policies have become increasingly familiar on campus. But the latest idea is welfare rooms equipped with ear plugs to shelter from ‘controversial’ speakers. Is the transformation of universities into ‘safe spaces’ now complete? While we can snigger at ‘de-stressing parties’ with colouring books, are students any different from the rest of society? After all, many people believe we face an unprecedented range of threats. Anxiety allied to yearning for safety is evident in warnings over formula milk and processed foods, panics over drink-spiking and catcalling, and paranoid parenting that is creating a generation of ‘cotton wool’ kids.

As evident during the pandemic, dedication to safety necessitates significant trade-offs in freedom. Take online safety. In the name of protecting us from often ill-defined and expansive notions of harm – ranging from encouraging self-harm and suicide to ‘psychologically harmful’ online misogyny or trolling – we stand on the cusp of empowering (indeed, forcing) Big Tech to censor what we can see and watch.

The nineteenth-century liberal thinker JS Mill coined the idea of the ‘harm principle’. Under this quintessential defence of personal autonomy, we must be free to make private choices unless they cause harm to others. Today, when practically all aspects of life are deemed risky, the principle of *potential* ‘harm’ is the means to argue for restrictions on freedom.

What happened to resilience and how do we explain our existential insecurity? What is the balance between safety and freedom, and how do we successfully argue for taking risks? In the face of society-wide preoccupation with safety, what are the arguments we need today to renew the case for liberty?

SPEAKER

Ella Whelan co-convenor, Battle of Ideas festival; commissioning editor, Letters on Liberty

Letter on Liberty: [The case for women’s freedom](#) Ella Whelan, Academy of Ideas, July 2022

Letter on Liberty: [Beyond the Harm Principle](#) Rob Lyons, Academy of Ideas

[The danger of safetyism](#) Matthew Crawford, *UnHerd*, 15 May 2021

LETTERS on LIBERTY



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academyofideas.org.uk/letters

LIVING FREEDOM

About Living Freedom

Living Freedom is a project of the educational charity Ideas Matter. It was founded in 2017 with the aims of cultivating free inquiry and resuscitating the spirit of freedom through enthusing a new generation.

Living Freedom Summer School 2023

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Ideas Matter advances education and good citizenship through the promotion of ideas of tolerance, open debate and participation in democracy.

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The Ian Mactaggart Trust was established in 1984. It supports suitable charities in the United Kingdom and abroad.

The Free Speech Union is a non-partisan, mass-membership public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members.

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Alumni for Free Speech encourages universities to achieve policies and practices in relation to freedom of speech which comply with the law and best practice.