

GAZETA

VALSASSINA

SCHOOL PUBLIC SPEAKING

HEALTHCARE
PHILOSOPHY
EDUCATION
YOUTH
ETHICS
ART
ENVIRONMENT
DEMOCRACY
CITIZENSHIP
DEBATE
SPORTS
CHANGE
SOCIETY
2024/2025
TECHNOLOGY

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Paginação idg · Imagem Digital Gráfica

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Outubro de 2025



Editorial

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“Cada texto produzido pelos alunos/as revela olhares únicos, inquietações pessoais e vozes singulares, mostrando a riqueza da diversidade dos pensamentos”

Inspirados pelas palavras de José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prémio Pessoa 2023, convidamos todos/as a viver o ano letivo 2024/2025 com olhos atentos ao espanto, à admiração e à redescoberta. O espanto, como nos lembra Tolentino de Mendonça, não é apenas um instante de surpresa, é a oportunidade de revisitar o que julgávamos conhecer, de recuperar o fascínio pelo mundo à nossa volta, e de nos perguntarmos: “E se? Porquê? Como?” O espanto é o motor da curiosidade que nos impulsiona a querer saber mais e a ir mais longe.

Neste espírito, o projeto *Public Speaking* propõe transformar a curiosidade e o espanto em expressão organizada de pensamentos e de emoções. Baseado em metodologias como o *Task-Based Learning* e o CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*), o projeto desafiou os/as alunos/as a assumirem-se como agentes de mudança, a traduzir ideias em discurso e a construir confiança ao comunicar em inglês.

No ano letivo 2024/2025, os/as alunos/as do 11.º ano foram desafiados/as a debater, e debater em inglês vai muito além do domínio linguístico. É uma oportunidade para os/as alunos/as desenvolverem pensamento crítico, competências comunicativas e rapidez de raciocínio, além de contribuir para aprenderem a detetar desinformação e para argumentarem de forma sólida. Cada debate é uma aula de organização de ideias, de coragem para expressar opiniões e de abertura para escutar o/a Outro/a.

Ao desafiar os/as alunos/as a partilharem ideias e preocupações, este projeto estimula a reflexão sobre os desafios do presente e do futuro, promovendo competências que vão muito além da sala de aula. Cada texto produzido pelos alunos/as revela olhares únicos, inquietações pessoais e vozes singulares, mostrando a riqueza da diversidade dos pensamentos.

Nesta edição da Gazeta Valsassina, celebramos o espanto transformado em palavra, a escola como espaço de liberdade e de diálogo, de respeito mútuo e de construção coletiva de saberes e de valores. Cada linha, cada debate, cada reflexão é um convite a provocar novos espantos, novas descobertas e novas formas de olhar para o mundo.

Esta memória das conquistas da Liberdade é também um convite para o futuro. Um futuro moldado pelo diálogo, pela responsabilidade e pela inovação, onde cada palavra tem o poder de inspirar mudança.

Dar Voz às Ideias: *Public Speaking* e debate como ferramenta de aprendizagem

Ana Paula Gouveia e Maria João Godinho Professoras de Inglês

Debater em inglês no Ensino Secundário é uma prática que vai muito além do simples exercício linguístico. Trata-se de uma oportunidade para os/as alunos/as desenvolverem competências comunicativas, pensamento crítico e confiança ao expressar ideias numa língua estrangeira, assim como a capacidade de detetar desinformação e demagogia. Ao participar em debates, os/as alunos/as não ampliam apenas o seu vocabulário e melhoram a pronúncia, mas também aprendem a organizar argumentos de forma lógica e a responder de maneira rápida e eficaz.



No 11.º ano pede-se trabalho de pares aos/as alunos/as. Este projeto de debate decorreu da seguinte forma:

Primeiramente, foi pedido aos/as alunos/as que sugerissem temas da atualidade que de algum modo lhes causasse alguma perplexidade, dúvidas ou sentimento de oposição.

Em seguida, baseados nas escolhas dos temas e nas posições pessoais que têm sobre cada tema, formaram-se pares compostos por alunos/as com opiniões opostas sobre um tema.

Depois, foi estudada a linguagem e a metodologia de debate da tradição parlamentar inglesa.

A seguir, os/as alunos/as foram escrevendo a pares e por etapas sob a orientação das professoras.

Após estas quatro etapas, os debates foram apresentados em aula, tendo havido heteroavaliação entre os pares para selecionar os quatro melhores debatientes (dois pares) de cada turma segundo os critérios previamente divulgados em aula.

Finalmente, decorreu uma competição de escola em que se selecionaram os seis melhores debatientes (três pares) da escola.

O desenvolvimento deste trabalho defrontou alguns desafios, nomeadamente o apoio excessivo em *chatbots* pelos alunos e pelas alunas durante o



processo de escrita. Ou seja, surgiu a necessidade de refletir sobre como potenciar a IA enquanto ferramenta auxiliar de escrita sem desvirtuar o sentido e o orgulho da autoria. Outra questão que se manifestou foi a frustração sentida pelos alunos/as quando excertos dos seus textos eram corrigidos por falta de clareza, por conterem erros na argumentação ou por evidenciarem conhecimento ainda deficiente. O que os alunos e as alunas sentiam era que o que haviam escrito estava claro e inteligível.

Também houve esporádicos atritos relativamente à equitativa contribuição para a investigação e escrita dos textos assim como ao desempenho entre os elementos de alguns pares.

Gradualmente estas dificuldades foram-se constituindo como etapas de crescimento e de apuramento das competências de escrita, de argumentação e de retórica.

Esta Gazeta é o repositório dos textos que constituíram a base dos debates. O interesse, o empenhamento, o prazer e o orgulho da maior parte

dos alunos e das alunas ao longo da realização deste projeto foi uma agradável surpresa. Também o clima de aula foi positivamente transformado.

Um importante objetivo deste projeto é a preparação para situações do mundo real. O inglês é hoje uma língua internacional, utilizada em contextos académicos, profissionais e culturais. Saber debater em inglês ajuda os jovens a preparar-se para exames, entrevistas e futuras oportunidades de estudo ou de trabalho em ambientes internacionais. Além disso, os debates permitem que os/as alunos/as contactem com diferentes perspetivas, promovendo a tolerância e a capacidade de ouvir ativamente, além de permitir o desenvolvimento das suas competências linguísticas.



A prática regular de debates em sala de aula estimula ainda a autoconfiança. Muitos estudantes sentem receio de falar em público, mas, com a experiência, aprendem a gerir a ansiedade e a comunicar de forma clara. Assim, debater em inglês no Ensino Secundário não é apenas um exercício escolar, mas uma ferramenta valiosa para o crescimento pessoal e académico.

IDENTIFICAR
SITUAÇÕES QUE
INTERPELEM CADA
ALUNO/A

SELECIONAR UM
TEMA / PROBLEMA
POR GRUPO

INVESTIGAR
SOBRE O TEMA
ESCOLHIDO

ORGANIZAR AS IDEIAS
E ESTRUTURAR A
EXPOSIÇÃO INICIAL

PREPARAR A
ARGUMENTAÇÃO
PARA O DEBATE

DEBATER EM
PUBLICO

The Power of Art: Expression, Identity and AI

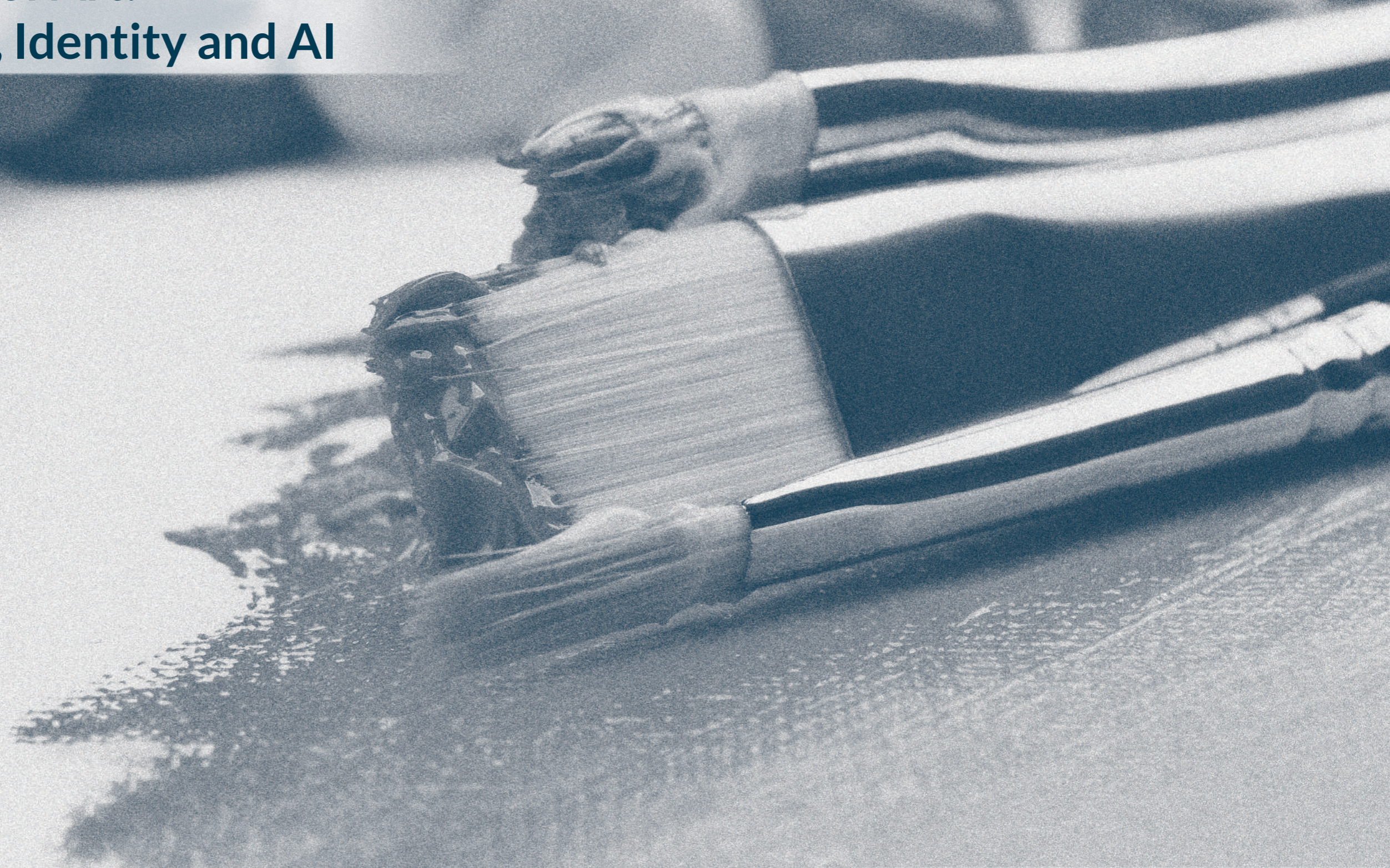


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Generative AI in Art

Enzo Magalhães and Henrique Macedo 11.º 3

Enzo Magalhães (EM): Today, we are going to discuss the harm that generative AI brings to the world of art. I, for one, firmly believe that there's no place for such half-measures in the world of art, and that there should be strict regulations against its use in a creative environment.

Henrique Macedo (HM): I'm here to defend the use of generative AI in art. I believe there's absolutely no reason we should exclude such a powerful and diverse tool from the content industry. I believe this technology will be essential to producing media in just a few years, and that regulating it would be akin to kneecapping ourselves as a society, somewhat like the burning of the Library of Alexandria.

EM: Well, firstly, it simply looks bad. Every AI picture boasts extremely high resolution, with impossibly realistic details that completely clash with the often dubious anatomy. Sites like *Midjourney* and *Microsoft Create* use (what I think are ugly) images as positive examples to advertise themselves! This tendency is at the forefront of AI, at its core. Never could these things pass for real pictures, much less real art.

HM: That is your subjective view on those images. In a few years — maybe even less — AI will be able to perfectly recreate not only real-life visuals but also every artistic style ever invented. Just think about how far it's already come: images created by AI just two years ago were widely criticized for looking awkward and unrealistic, while today's results are often so convincing that most people can't even tell they're not real. The progress has been rapid and undeniable. This technology is only getting better with time — and there's no stopping it.

Not only that, but AI art is quick and easy to produce! It's going to democratize content-making! No longer will people with physical disabilities such as not having arms be excluded from making art. No sooner than having access to it, they will be able to emulate their favorite creators' style! Now, how could that in any way cause "harm"?

EM: You say that like disabled artists don't already exist. For example, Henri Matisse was wheelchair-

bound, yet he still created beautiful paintings. Furthermore, Sarah Biffin, who was born with no arms and barely any legs, created masterful portraits.

Both artists produced truly unique and unrepeatable works — something entirely unlike the sterile output generated by AI (Isaacs-Thomas, 2023). Unlike human creativity, AI image generators don't create; they merely detect patterns and reassemble fragments of existing images into something that mimics a given prompt. What this means is that AI cannot create real art. It doesn't incorporate its real-life experiences in its images because it doesn't have any, and it doesn't create anything new. What it does is more similar to a collage, except that collages, when made by a person, reflect how that person thinks, feels and how they've lived their life. None of that applies to AI art. In other words, it's nothing more than art theft.

HM: Well, it's commonplace for artists to take inspiration from other artists. Are they stealing? No! Just because AI does it, it doesn't mean it's different in anyway, so don't be so stubborn and unwilling to accept innovation. AI can also be used by those same artists you mentioned, if they ever wanted to collaborate. Using the technology the way you mentioned in a site like *Midjourney*, joining two different styles is about as easy as blinking. Humans are, by nature, capable of and prone to error. More than that, styles, like people, tend to clash. A collaboration should be harmonious, not a battle for control, and AI can help with that.

EM: You're talking about removing the human component from art! Conflict and disagreements are integral to art! Collaboration should be a process where two artists come together and combine and compromise! Conflict is not only inevitable, but also absolutely necessary for great art. Also, have you even considered the environmental risks AI brings to the table? According to a report by *MIT Technology Review*, generating one AI image costs as much energy as fully charging your phone (Heikkilä, 2023)! Are you willing to let our planet burn to power your ugly pictures?

HM: There you go with your emotionality again. Progress takes time and energy. Sending rockets to space also takes quite a bit of power. Anyway, I think



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I've proven my point. There's no stopping AI or its evolution. One day it will be indistinguishable from any other kind of content. You'll be able to create your own Da Vinci painting, or Bergman film. Moreover, it has no real downsides, aside from that ridiculous perceived "theft" you spoke of. Honestly, to try and run from the future with absurd regulations is nothing short of asinine.

EM: In closing, I believe I've explained thoroughly why AI art is nothing more than a fad, and neither an art form nor a tool for art. It cannot create, only steal and replicate what its algorithm dubs compatible. It can't create art, only content. It doesn't even serve as a meaningful compromise for people with physical disabilities. In fact, using their experiences to justify AI-generated art is deeply misguided — many of these individuals have produced some of the most powerful and original works in art history, despite or even because of their limitations. To equate that

with automated image generation undermines their achievements. Therefore, we must introduce clear regulations to limit the use of generative AI in creative fields before it further undermines the integrity of the art world.

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Does Art Need Meaning

Margarida Silva and Sofia Amaral 11.º 4

Margarida Silva (MS): I'm really interested in the never-ending debate concerning whether art needs to have meaning or not. To me, art's purpose feels completely connected to its meaning and expression. It's what gives art its depth and power. I believe art is a form of communication, like a language that can convey emotions, beliefs, and messages. Think about pieces like Van Gogh's *Starry Night* or Picasso's *Guernica*. They're so moving because they carry deep emotional and cultural meanings.

Sofia Amaral (SA): I'm really fascinated by this debate, and I do see where you're coming from, but I have a different perspective. I think art can be valuable even if it doesn't carry a specific message or meaning. For example, artists like Mondrian or Pollock create works that focus on shapes, colors, and textures. They're beautiful just for what they are, without

necessarily telling a story or expressing a specific idea. I think that the sensory experience and the aesthetic value are also important parts of what makes this type of art as valuable as art with a clear meaning.

MS: That's an interesting point, Sofia. I agree that those artists offer something special, particularly in how they question traditional ways of showing things. But doesn't having a meaning create a stronger connection between the artist and the viewer? I remember my first experience with modern art. I was twelve, staring at a painting of a single black dot on a white canvas. It didn't mean much to me at first, but then my teacher suggested it could represent loneliness, and suddenly I saw it in a whole new light. That made me realize that meaning can be found even in abstract or minimal art, depending on the viewer's interpretation.



Photo by Anna Kolosyuk on Unsplash

SA: That's a great story! And I think it supports my view. At that moment, you gave the dot its meaning, based on your teacher's perspective and your own thoughts. Abstract art, in particular, invites each viewer to interpret it in their own way, which is a big part of its appeal to me. I remember reading about the artist Helena Matta, who shared one of her abstract pieces, and someone commented, "Beautiful angel wings." Helena said that was a great interpretation, even though she hadn't meant it originally. This story makes it very clear that art does not necessarily need to have a fixed meaning since the value of a piece can simply come from the perspective of each viewer making it even more unique.

"There's value in art's ability to allow for individual interpretation and reflection since the viewers can enjoy a unique moment of freedom."

MS: I get that. There's value in art's ability to allow for individual interpretation and reflection since the viewers can enjoy a unique moment of freedom. But don't you think art with a clear message or emotion has a different kind of power? Research shows that when people view meaningful art, like pieces with cultural or personal significance, they experience deeper emotional responses. It activates areas in the brain related to memory and emotion, which suggests that meaning in art enhances its impact.

SA: True, but abstract or non-representational art can also provoke deep emotional responses, just in a different way. It challenges us to connect with something less defined, which can be just as powerful. When you look at abstract art, it stimulates creativity and engages the brain areas responsible for imagination, leading each person to develop their own feelings and ideas about their experience with the art piece (Kirsh, 2017).

MS: That's a good point. Abstract art encourages personal freedom and creativity. But do you think it

has the same impact on inspiring change on our society as art with a clear message? Pieces like *Guernica* have inspired generations to reflect on war and its horrors. They're not just visually impressive, they carry a message that's meant to provoke thought and inspire change. Art with a clear purpose can reach people on an emotional and intellectual level, making them think more deeply about issues they might not have considered otherwise.

SA: I think that art with a message can inspire change, but I also believe that abstract art has the power to do so in its own way. It challenges traditional ideas and encourages viewers to have other thoughts and ideas, which can be revolutionary in itself. Art that doesn't tell people what to think, but instead invites them to explore their own thoughts.

MS: Maybe the question isn't whether art needs meaning but rather what kind of meaning it brings. Art with a clear message can provoke thought and inspire change, while abstract art allows for personal freedom and individual reflection. In the end, both types of art might share a common purpose: to connect with us, whether by sharing a clear message or by giving us room to find our own.

SA: Exactly, Margarida! Maybe that's the beauty of art, it can be meaningful and thought-provoking whether it carries an explicit message or leaves its interpretation open to the viewer. Both perspectives bring something important and innovating to the experience of art.

"Maybe the question isn't whether art needs meaning but rather what kind of meaning it brings."

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Rethinking Education: Challenges, Change, and the Future of Learning



The Case For and Against Mandatory Sex Education

Afonso Matos and Madalena Rosário 11.º 2A

Afonso Matos (AM): I choose to debate this topic with my counterpart because it's quite an interesting and serious topic on which we have opposing points of view. We believe that if the wrong decision is made, it could harm many children's lives. My goal is to show you why there should be no sex education classes.

Madalena Rosário (MR): As a student, I know that my school and most schools in my country don't have "sex education" classes and is limited to basic biology. Many important topics, like consent and healthy relationships, are never discussed. As a result, I must learn about these things through friends, family, and the internet, which is not always reliable. If comprehensive sex education was mandatory, at least from the eighth grade up, students would be better prepared to make informed decisions and be able to protect themselves.

Does sexual education encourage early or risky sexual activity? This is what most of the population believes, but what they don't know is that well-designed and well-delivered sexual education programs support positive decision-making around sexual health.

AM: Does transferring responsibility for sex education from parents to schools infringe on parental rights to instill moral and cultural values in their children?

MR: Transferring sexual education to schools doesn't infringe on parental rights, it merely ensures all children receive accurate and essential information. While parents have the right to instill their values, some may hold beliefs that are harmful or incomplete, potentially leaving children uninformed or at risk. Schools help fill this gap, providing accurate education that protects all students.

AM: Bruno Bettelheim, one of the most prominent psychoanalysts of the post-World War II era, said, "[y]ou cannot have sex education without saying that sex is natural and that most people find it pleasurable," potentially leading young adults to explore sexual intercourse because it's described as pleasurable.

MR: According to a study aimed to understand whether certain Comprehensive Sexual Education

(CSE) goals can be achieved, the systematic review examined a wide range of research to find evidence supporting educational approaches that improve adolescent sexual health. The review, covering thirty years of studies, shows that schools providing CSE can reduce homophobia and related bullying, improve understanding of genders, promote healthy relationships, prevent child sexual abuse, and reduce violence in relationships (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021). I disagree with Bruno Bettelheim's view that sex education should be taught as pleasurable. The focus should be on responsibility, consent, and safety, not uniquely on pleasure.

AM: Although you may be right to a certain extent, Madalena, I believe that sex education in schools restricts parental rights to sexual education based on their values and norms. Some parents would rather keep discussions on sexuality, relationships, and morality in the family or simply have them reflect their own views shaped by religion or culture. This could undermine family values and diminish parents' ability to instill their unique moral perspectives.

MR: Could limiting discussions about sexuality to parental values restrict children's ability to explore their own beliefs? Some parents may impose narrow or discriminatory views, which could hinder their children's personal freedom.

“Does transferring responsibility for sex education from parents to schools infringe on parental rights to instill moral and cultural values in their children?”

AM: Madalena, you realize that the responsibility to teach sex education is increasingly being transferred from families to schools and ultimately to the government. Sexual education also risks making minors, curious about sexuality earlier than when they



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should if it is introduced at an early age. Many people fear that by talking about sexual issues too soon or before children are emotionally and psychologically ready, it will cause confusion or promote improper behaviors.

MR: Misinformation from unreliable sources like media or peers, where sexual activity is portrayed as fun and thrilling, could still influence minors, leading them to experiment without fully understanding its meaning.

AM: Critics maintain that a stronger emphasis on abstinence or no education at all until children are at least eighteen would be more advisable. They argue that it is more advisable to offer these classes only to legal adults, as they presumably have greater experience and maturity regarding the subject.

MR: However, if sex education is postponed until adulthood, how can minors make informed choices during their teenage years? Many teens are already exposed to sexual themes before turning eighteen, and without guidance, they may lack the tools to handle them responsibly.

AM: Is there direct evidence that such improvements translate to better adolescent sexual health?

MR: The risks associated with adolescent sexual behavior, particularly unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are significant. Over one million people from 15 to 49 years old contract a sexually transmitted infection (STI) daily, and the global incidence of the human immunodeficiency virus reached 39.9 million in 2023 (HIV.gov, 2023), with the highest rates in underdeveloped countries, particularly affecting women. Each year, 16 million adolescent pregnancies occur globally. Condoms are the most effective method for preventing both unintended pregnancies and STIs, but their effectiveness depends on proper use. By providing correct information about transmission and prevention, this education leads to more responsible behavior.

AM: Nonetheless, Madalena, shouldn't school time and resources be prioritized for core academic subjects like mathematics, science, and literacy instead of social and moral topics?

MR: Core subjects like math and science are important, but sexual education is equally essential. It helps students make informed decisions about their bodies and relationships, addressing issues that can't always be covered at home. Schools must provide accurate information to prevent sexual risks and relationship violence. Making sexual education mandatory promotes student well-being and safety. Also, this subject, when implemented in schools, will give students resources to learn how to test and treat sexually transmitted diseases, ensuring they know where to seek help if needed. Through this education, students learn about different contraceptive options, such as birth control pills, patches, injections, intrauterine devices, and emergency contraception, like the morning-after pill. A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that adolescents who received comprehensive contraceptive education were more likely to use effective methods than those who did not, all significantly contributing to lower rates of unintended pregnancies (Santelli et al., 2007). Comprehensive sexual education uses real-life scenarios and studies to help students understand the potential consequences of sexual activity, improving their awareness on the consequences of their decisions.

AM: As I said before, school time and resources should be spent on young people in academic subjects such as mathematics, science, and literacy, not extended to fringe subjects in social and moral areas like sex education.

MR: Wouldn't it be important for students to also be prepared for social and moral issues, like sex education, that are part of their real-life experiences?

AM: Sex education could be better addressed outside of school or in extracurricular programs, not as part of the academic curriculum. Already, school systems are under immense pressure to ensure that students leave with appropriate knowledge and skills for their future careers, so adding in sex education only takes much-needed time and resources away from core learning areas.

MR: If sex education is taught at home or in extracurricular programs, isn't there a risk of conflicting approaches or contradictory information between what students learn at school and what they receive at home?

AM: Critics and I note that many such social issues, like sex education, could be better and more appropriately handled within the home or in extracurricular programs so that schools can continue to focus on academics and better equip students for professional success.

A study associated with The Heritage Foundation claims that sexual education focuses on contraception and does not discourage teen sexual activity if "protection is used" (Martin, Rector and Pardue, 2004). In that same study, there's a poll made by Zogby International where parents were asked what they thought about young adults having intercourse – 79% of parents want teens to be taught to save sex until marriage, 12% want teens to delay sex until after high school, while only 7% support teaching that teen sex is okay with contraception.

After debating this topic, we have concluded that neither of us will be able to change the other's perspective. I continue to believe that comprehensive sexual education should not be mandatory in schools, and Madalena still believes it should.

MR: Despite both of us presenting various studies and evidence, our individual views on this matter remain unchanged, though now they are more informed. Moving forward, it will be easier to engage in discussions on this topic, as we have both gained significant knowledge about it. Therefore, let us agree to disagree!

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Compulsory Education: A path to equality or a barrier to freedom

David Matos and Martim Cabral 11.º 2A

Martim Cabral (MC): Today, we are debating whether we should reduce compulsory education. I believe that reducing it would draw away students who might not want to or cannot study and fall off the educational system too easily. In fact, it will not only hold them back as well as increase social unbalance and damage their future. Furthermore, reducing compulsory education could limit personal growth, which is important especially at a time when having hard skills as well as soft skills is vital to keep up to date.

David Matos (DM): But Martim, do you really believe that a place where you always repeat the same things is the best place to promote your personal growth?

MC: Don't you know that many well-paid jobs require high skills, critical thinking and technical knowledge sustained throughout schooling? For instance, countries with a longer period of compulsory education have been found to have higher levels of economic growth, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Countries where schooling is compulsory for a minimum of 12 years such as, Finland and Germany, were also listed as having some of the highest literacy rate and Gross Domestic Product per capita, as reported in the year 2020 by the OECD data.

DM: Would you agree that experience often teaches people more practical skills than what is learned in a classroom?

MC: As I was saying, in Finland, children must study until the age of 18, as in all the Western world, and the country constantly ranks at the top tier of PISA rankings, which indicate the strong performance of students in all educational levels. Such achievements are associated with longer periods of formal education that promote the development of necessary skills.

DM: I agree with you, school is important because it teaches meaningful content. However, I think you made a huge misconception about learning, you seem to think that going to school is the only way to acquire skills and knowledge and that is not true. If that was the truth, you would not need to have many years of experience

in order to be proficient enough to do certain jobs, you would instead, just need to have a university diploma. The reason why that does not happen is because you can develop skills in various ways by working or by studying and that's why, quitting school to start working will not make you under-skilled. Now, were you saying that the most educated countries have higher GDPs, right?

MC: Indeed.

DM: I wonder if countries with a highly educated workforce are wealthy because having a more educated workforce leads to higher levels of wealth or because wealthy countries are the only ones that can afford to educate their population.

MC: I believe that it isn't as straightforward as you make it out to seem. It is a much more complex issue than you are making it out to be and so you cannot reach that verdict.

DM: Robert Leahy, the Director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy, states: "The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s." This quote is important to understand the compromise we make every day when we go to school.

MC: A study from Florida State University and Princeton University found that "those with a college degree had lower levels of depressive symptoms than those without a college education."

DM: Alright, but that does not change the fact that we exchange our happiness for skills and then we use those skills together with our time to make money in the hopes of being happy. To me that simply does not make sense. In my opinion, we should only train the skills that each student will use in their future job. This strategy enables them to have a complete education without compromising their mental health.

MC: I see your point; however, I tend to disagree with your statements concerning what school can provide us with. While it is true that some experiences at school may be stressful, this environment also



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provides you with the opportunity for personal growth and enables you to make social connections. Learning how to overcome these challenges is also a topic that we develop and improve by attending school.

DM: Do you believe they actually teach that in school?

MC: Yes, I do believe that most of the skills are obtained through schooling. In addition, the belief that some jobs may not require formal education past a certain level does not imply that education can be delayed. In fact, education is not only about work and skills, it is also about developing critical thinking and the ability to fit into society.

Furthermore, reducing mandatory education might emphasize social contrasts. Mandatory education is meant to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have the same opportunities for learning and obtaining the same knowledge as their more well-off colleagues. Decreasing this period would most certainly raise the dropout rate, especially within vulnerable groups.

Based on previous cases, we can conclude that prolonged compulsory education can reduce inequalities. For instance, in 2009, Portugal raised the required schooling age from 15 to 18. This reform aimed to improve literacy, reduce dropout rates, and promote social inclusion. Now I ask you: can informal

learning systems guarantee you the same results?

DM: Formal education is not equal for everyone either. There are students in private schools that have access to better education while there are students that do not have teachers for months. With that said, we should not use the fact that reducing formal education creates inequality as an argument against it.

MC: You are wrong, we should worry about inequality, because it is a breaking point. General knowledge is a tool that can be used in many ways to overcome daily obstacles.

As a result, Portugal has experienced a significant decline in school dropout rates – from 35% in 2000 to 8,9% in 2021, according to Eurostat. This reduction has impacted mostly students from low-income backgrounds and rural areas, who are more likely to dropout earlier in order to provide for their families. By keeping these students in school for a longer period, we may start to close the gap between social classes once and for all.

DM: I do not agree with you. Some people believe that compulsory education would increase social differences. This belief stems from the fact that reducing compulsory education would make fewer people go to university which, in turn, would make those who do go earn more. That, in fact, could not be

further from the truth. Let's suppose for a second that college students started to earn more money. In this hypothetical scenario, wouldn't people be attracted to go to university because of the increased pay? Wouldn't that make people with a university degree more common?

MC: Initially, it would make college more appealing to students, which could positively contribute to economic growth.

DM: On the contrary, reducing compulsory education would decrease social differences. That is because, if you start working at a younger age you will be able to earn more money by the age of 25. For example, college students had earned €87.970 on average by the age 25, whereas students that started to work at 16 had earned €103.330.

MC: Can we agree that the value of experience depends on education? Without that component, how can individuals ensure that they are competitive in a world that demands more and more specialized knowledge?

DM: I do agree, but I do not think that everybody needs 12 years or more of education, because not everybody will need the skills that come with that. A study shows that 37% of all people that graduated from university went abroad. This study should be taken by our government as a warning of the consequences of the phenomenon of over qualification. This phenomenon occurs when there are too many highly educated students competing for very few job offers. And how can we stop this? The answer to this question is simple: we have to stop encouraging all people to go to college. We can do this by offering reliable alternatives, such as professional courses or starting work sooner.

MC: Indeed, you raise an important concern about students who hold an academic degree going abroad in search of better working conditions. However, I believe that this issue is related to the economic conditions of Portugal, where low incomes drive people away. In fact, the problem is not the education in Portugal. This is proven by the high number of international students that have chosen our country to study abroad. In fact, “[i]n recent years, the number of international students choosing to study in Portugal has increased by 14% since 2022, with 69.965 international students enrolled in higher education in Portugal” (Portugal Pathways).

DM: So, Martim, if education is not the problem, how would you ensure that graduates stay in Portugal instead of seeking opportunities abroad? And what do you suggest to promote the Portuguese economy?

MC: Instead of reducing the number of students pursuing higher education, a better approach might be to focus on creating competitive opportunities, ensuring that skilled graduates have job offers in Portugal, rather than seeking them abroad.

DM: However, that could be the best of two worlds, helping the increase of the Portuguese economy and the students that choose Portugal to attend college.

MC: To sum up, limiting compulsory education would have serious consequences for both the individual and society. Education is more than a privilege; it is the opportunity for you to grow personally and to have the skills you need to live nowadays. As Nelson Mandela said, “[e]ducation is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

By maintaining or expanding compulsory education, we guarantee that regardless of the students’ social context, they may become successful agents in a wealthier and more equal society. “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest”, as said by Benjamin Franklin.

DM: Overall, school nowadays is not as important as it used to be, because we no longer live in an era when the only way to learn is by going to school. Now, we can learn new things by googling them or watching a video about them. Therefore, we should stop valuing going to school as much as we do, right. Instead, we did quite the opposite. We gradually raised the age for compulsory education and motivated our students to get a college diploma. The consequences of these actions are catastrophic, 37% of all college students went abroad and the average high school student has the same anxiety level of an average psychiatric patient in 1950. I’ll leave you with the words of Albert Einstein – “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what has been learned in school.”

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Is It Fair: Rethinking exams in the portuguese school system

Ana Sá and Maria Lopes 11.º 3

Ana Sá (AS): My partner and I will discuss the current Portuguese school system and its examination structure. I'd like to start by noting that in Portugal, the education system is controlled by the state through the Ministry of Education. According to their data, never has the country been so close to achieving full literacy, with 95% of the population literate and mandatory school registration nearing 100%. Additionally, the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education reports a 3% increase in Portuguese university students, further demonstrating this effectiveness (Government of Portugal, 2023).

Maria Lopes (ML): When analyzing the academic performance of Portuguese students in mandatory schooling between 2015 and 2023, the results show a decline in their abilities relative to OECD countries. Hardly has the Portuguese education system been more scrutinized, with PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), reporting that one in four 15-year-olds performs poorly in math, reading, and science (OECD, 2023). They struggle with basic algorithms or simple text interpretation. How can we consider the system effective if it doesn't meet individual students' needs? Is the issue with teaching methods or the fairness of examinations?

AS: Firstly, I believe the problem doesn't lie in the exams. The structure is balanced to ensure fairness and accountability. For example, the 12th grade average combines 75% coursework performance and 25% national exams. These standardized exams uniformly measure knowledge and skills across schools. The average also follows a weighted system: subjects like Psychology (studied for one year) have less weight than Portuguese (studied for three years). Students can improve their performance in earlier subjects during the 12th grade, which motivates continuous effort. Not only do exams motivate students, but they also standardize evaluation across schools.

ML: I firmly disagree. The 75%-25% split is unfair. A single exam that only accounts for 25% seems unbalanced when students endure years of coursework and weeks of stress preparing for it. For example, a student with a 13 average who scores 15 on the exam – which is very optimistic – ends up with 13,5 as their final result. Does this justify the stress

and effort? No. The solution is simple: exams should not be mandatory. Only if exams become optional will students truly feel the balance they need. If exams were weighted at 35%, students would face less stress and feel their efforts were more meaningful.

AS: I disagree with my partner; exams must be mandatory. They ensure that high school grades accurately and fairly reflect students' learning levels. Without them, internal school assessments might vary significantly in standards. Furthermore, exams provide access to various university courses. According to the Direção Geral do Ensino Superior (DGES), no sooner do students complete their exams than they can apply to multiple institutions, offering numerous opportunities for higher education.

ML: The problem with mandatory exams is their scope. One exam covering three years of content is excessive, especially given its duration – up to three hours. Research shows people work efficiently for only 15-20 minutes, with the brain requiring breaks after a maximum of 1 hour (White, 2014). Consequently, at no time during such a lengthy exam can students perform at their peak efficiency. Furthermore, mandatory exams can affect students applying for competitive courses. For example, a student with a 19,6 average might see their average drop due to one bad exam, potentially preventing them from entering their desired program.

AS: Actually, students must be prepared to answer questions under pressure. The school system ensures they are equipped for exams, and classes are designed to be 100% efficient. Exams also prepare students for real-life challenges, such as problem-solving and decision-making under stress in the labor market.

ML: Rarely do I see evidence that classes are efficient. Many schools have sessions exceeding 50 minutes, which already surpass students' attention spans. Moreover, teaching methods don't adapt to individual needs. Someone with ADHD, for instance. If even a neurotypical student struggles to focus for an hour, how can students with ADHD be expected to do so during classes or exams? Treating all students the same way is unfair, especially when some have diagnosed conditions requiring accommodations.

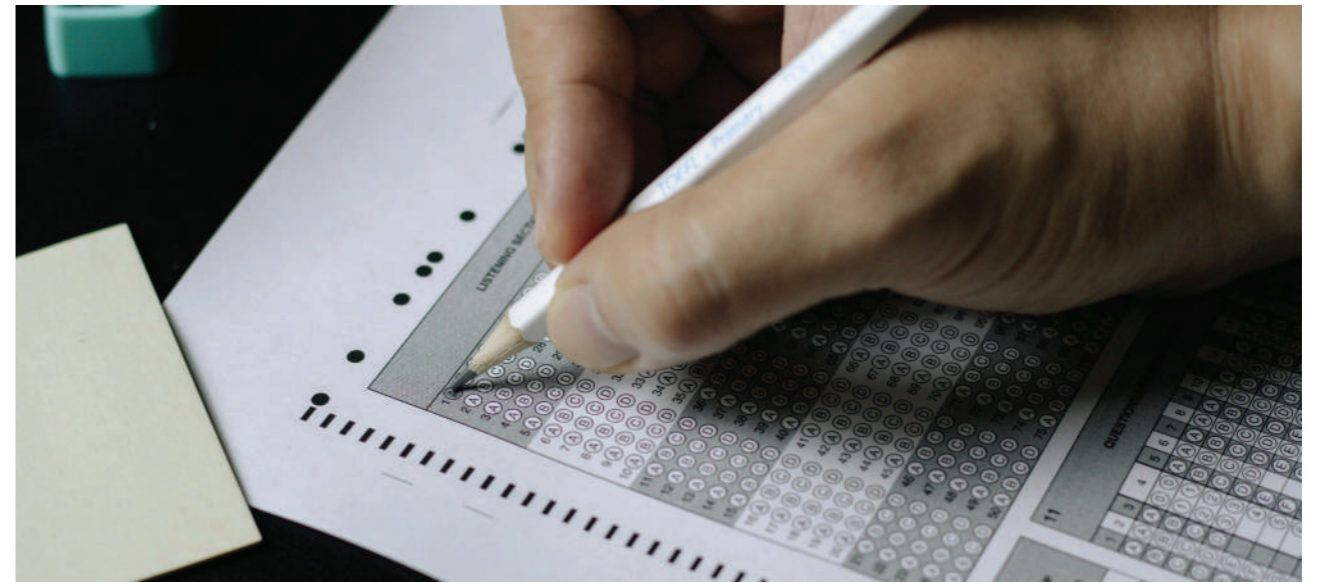


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This brings us to a crucial point: has education improved like everything else? Traditional teaching methods still dominate, relying on lectures that prioritize memorization over critical thinking and creativity. Standardized tests reduce learning to exam preparation rather than fostering deep understanding. Not only does this limit creativity, but it also widens inequities.

AS: One example of this evolution is Portugal's integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which promotes structural reforms and common frameworks across 48 countries to improve the quality and consistency of higher education. These ongoing adaptations aim to create a more effective and inclusive educational system over time.

Regarding your point, are you suggesting that students with disabilities should be segregated or excluded? That would be highly detrimental. For instance, if a student with ADHD spends their entire education in a separate setting, they may face significant challenges entering the job market. This is due in part to the prejudice of individuals who, having never experienced life with a disability, may wrongly assume these students are less capable. In reality, such assumptions stem from ignorance, not from the students' abilities, as individuals with ADHD are just as capable as anyone else when given the right support.

ML: In conclusion, I strongly believe the Portuguese school system and examination structure are fair.

Never has a system worked so efficiently to assess a student's knowledge, as the Ministry of Education combines coursework and standardized exams to assess them. Exams are vital for validating high school grades and ensuring consistency in learning outcomes. Furthermore, the weighted system allows students to improve their averages through exams or coursework, motivating continuous effort.

AS: In sum, the current examination and education system is clearly unfair and poorly designed. The Ministry of Education seems to focus on an idealized group of students modeled after the highest achievers, rather than addressing the needs of individual learners. Greater value should be placed on scientific research and evidence-based practices to ensure that the system aligns with what we know about learning, development, and educational equity.

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Should College Be Free?

Francisco Vinagre and Raquel Ferreira 11.º 2A

Francisco Vinagre (FV): In my opinion, all colleges, including public ones, should charge tuition because without these payments, neither the universities nor the state would have sufficient funds to adequately invest in education. Tuition revenue allows colleges to allocate resources effectively. It can fund student services, counseling, and career services. Consequently, with tuition fees, we can help those who truly need help by providing them scholarships and financial aid programs.

Raquel Ferreira (RF): Everyone should have the same opportunities to go to a university. Wealth or lack of it should not be the reason to quit studies. To me, it is not fair that so many people with potential cannot afford to go to college.

This topic is important to me because I am a student, and I know how lucky I am. Unfortunately, this is not the reality of most of our country's population. According to *SIC Notícias*, more than half the people in need do not go to college (Gonçalves and Neto, 2024).

FV: Raquel, you know that the quality of college education in Portugal is very good, with several universities ranking well internationally. This elevates the value of investment in education. For those who struggle financially, scholarships are available to provide the necessary support, so that talented students can go on with their studies regardless of their lives.

For the students that don't have the financial condition to study abroad on their own, there are already solutions for that. The Portuguese government, with the help of Direção Geral do Ensino Superior (DGES), gives out scholarships, specially to programs like Erasmus.

RF: It's true that there are scholarships, but they do not cover everyone, not all students who face financial difficulties can access scholarships. And sometimes they don't cover all education-related expenses. Some students may feel stigmatized by receiving scholarships as if they need "help", which would not happen in a system of free and universal education.

A student from the countryside who wants to study in Lisbon will have to pay for accommodation and tuition. A person who earns the minimum wage will not be able to afford this.

Francisco, don't you see that by eliminating tuition fees, it would be possible to help reduce social and economic disparities, thus helping to create a fairer society where academic and professional success isn't determined by a family's financial capacity.

Statistics from the DGES show that submissions of scholarship applications have increased, which is characteristic of deficiencies which many students have experienced over recent years. Too many people are applying for scholarships, but they can't cover everyone.

FV: In Portugal, 80% of the students go to public universities. This makes it one of the most affordable options in Europe for higher education. Compared to many other European countries the cost of tuition in Portugal is relatively low, especially for EU students

RF: How can Portuguese people want the country's economy to improve, if they don't provide education to those who can help improve it?

FV: While education is crucial for improving Portugal's economy, simply providing access to it is insufficient to address issues like the shortage of doctors.

Firstly, the quality of education must be prioritized; without high-quality institutions and resources, motivated students may not receive the education needed to succeed in fields like medicine.

Secondly, financial incentives and support are crucial. Students from less privileged backgrounds need scholarships to pursue their studies fully, or they may still struggle to enter high-demand professions.

Lastly, broader socioeconomic factors must be considered. If students see better opportunities in other countries, they may leave, undermining the benefits of increased education. By paying for college, we are investing not just in individuals but in the future of our communities and the economy as a whole.

RF: The average monthly amount a student needs to attend higher education is €900,90, according to a study by ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon (Durães and Chaíça, 2024). Not paying tuition fees would help reduce these expenses.

Denmark, ranked as the country with the fourth-highest GDP in the European Union, provides free access to higher education. While taxes may be higher, it makes sense given the higher income levels of families. This is partly due to the country's outstanding education system, which results in lower dropout rates and a more skilled workforce. Free education ensures more people can attend university, leading to a more qualified population that significantly contributes to the nation's prosperity.

FV: In Denmark, this is only possible because the Danes are paying around 60% of their income in taxes, so the money they don't pay in college they end up paying in taxes. And they continue to pay because investing in education is always going to be important to society.

Denmark is able to support this system because it made significant investments in education early on, which led to a majority of the population securing well-paid jobs. This, in turn, enables them to pay higher taxes that fund free college education, encouraging more people to pursue higher education.

RF: Yeah, but as you said, most of the population had a high-paying job. This happens because most people went to college. The problem is that in Portugal there are a lot of people that are not able to go to university, so there are a lot of people earning the minimum wage. Taxes for people with the minimum wage are lower so less money enters the economy. People with a higher education have the capacity to produce more wealth, and the government earns more money that can be invested in education.

According to Article 74 of the Portuguese Constitution, the state must gradually ensure free education at all levels and according to Article 76, "[t]he access system to University and other higher education institutions guarantees equal opportunities and the democratization of the education system" (Assembleia da República). These are goals that we, as a developed country, should achieve.

FV: As you said, Raquel, we have to guarantee that all people have the same educational opportunities, but for that to happen we can't make all universities free, because to cover the money of the tuition we would have to raise the taxes of a population that doesn't have the purchasing power of Denmark. Why don't we have the same purchasing power as Denmark? The answer lies in education and economic development. Denmark invested consistently over the years in meeting human needs and industrializing its economy, which led to a highly educated workforce and strong economic growth. In contrast, Portugal lagged behind, partly because it joined the European Union later and because its governments, faced with limited resources, were unable to invest effectively in critical areas.

In conclusion, we can only give the population free education when we have higher salaries and purchasing power, until then, we have to continue to invest with the money of tuition and taxes for the future population to have better jobs and lives. Only when we can pay higher taxes will we be able to make education free.

RF: In my opinion, we will only be able to impose these taxes when we manage to reduce such significant economic inequalities. Ensuring equitable education for all seems to me to be a good starting point for change.

In conclusion, as long as there are people with low levels of education, wages will remain low, and the state's revenue will consequently be smaller. A system where education is universal will improve the country's level of education, resulting in a more skilled workforce, and leading to a richer and more diversified economy.

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Educating Teens on Sexual Health: Benefits, risks, and realities

Leonor Santana and Sofia Kameira 11.º 1A

Sofia Costa (SC): My colleague and I will be discussing sexual education in schools. Have you ever thought about how misinformation could shape a teenager's life? Picture this: Sarah, a 15-year-old like any other, has many questions about body changes, relationships, and sexual health. Without proper guidance from school, she turns to the internet only to be confronted with inaccurate and distorted information. Not only is this Sarah's story, but also the reality for many teens. Studies show that 70% of teens rely on the internet to learn about sexual matters and 40% of that information is false. In this debate, I will explore why sexual education in schools is not just helpful, it's essential.

Leonor Santana (LS): I'll show you another perspective: imagine John, who's also 15, comes home one day confused after a school's sexual education class, that included explicit content on contraception and sexual orientation. His parents were waiting for the right moment to have this conversation with him, ensuring that he understood the consequences



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and the importance of decisions on sexual matters. Like John, many teens go through that situation. In fact, *SIC Notícias* decided to interview a family to understand their opinion on sexual education classes in schools. The parents did not agree and so did the teens, who even said, and I quote: "The teachers are not incompetent; our parents simply want to teach us in the way they think is best for us" (translated by the authors). This is a real scenario, where real families believe that it isn't the best way to teach teens about sexual matters. This raises an important question: are schools the right place for such intimate topics?

SC: Consider it this way: such classes raise awareness among teenagers about the potential consequences of sexual activity at an early age, including the risks of teen pregnancies and the transmission of STDs. According to *SIC Notícias* (2023), in Portugal, around 1.600 teenagers aged 19 and under gave birth in 2022. On a global scale, 13% of teenagers give birth before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2023). These numbers are shocking, because at that age, girls should be envisioning their dreams and enjoying the last teenage years, not taking care of a child. Only when schools provide sexual education, can we decrease these numbers. As we know, pregnancy experience can be traumatic, especially during the early years of one's life; therefore, teen girls shouldn't face these problems. And that is not the only negative consequence. STDs can also harm adolescents, who don't take the necessary precautions such as condom use, which can lead to serious diseases like AIDS and gonorrhea. Awareness is important, and the best way to spread it is through sexual education.

LS: Although those statistics can be correct, not only is that proof that the sexual education system in Portugal remains underdeveloped and inefficient, but it also highlights a significant problem: the inconsistent implementation of sexual education across schools. Without an equal approach, students may receive different levels of education, with few exposed to comprehensive programs, while many receive minimal or outdated information. This inconsistency increases the challenges of addressing early sexual activity and teen pregnancies. While many people believe that sexual education provided in schools will automatically lead to lower rates of teenage pregnancies, David

Paton, Professor at the University of Nottingham, published a study that shows that some programs assigned to reduce teen pregnancies through sex education had mixed outcomes (Adams, 2012). In some cases, these programs even led to an increase in early sexual activity and pregnancies among teens, because they feel pressured to engage in such activities. This raises the question: why should sexual education be included in schools if it may contribute to higher rates of sexual activity among adolescents?

SC: More recent research shows that well-designed sexual education programs do not lead to increased sexual activity but rather equip teens to make responsible decisions. Nowadays, comprehensive sexual education, also known as CSE provides accurate information about sexual health, reproduction and contraception, allowing teens to make informed decisions about their bodies and relationships. Understanding the risks and consequences of sexual activities opens opportunities for young people to determine the appropriate timing and the right partner for engaging in sexual activity. Based on what John Santelli et al. (2018) verified, the absence of comprehensive sex education leads to higher rates of sexual violence. His studies indicate that students who received that education before entering college were significantly less likely to be sexually assaulted. Now, this information really proves how important and meaningful sexual education is in someone's life. And that is not the only aspect. As we know, first-time experiences can be traumatic as well, but sexual awareness can significantly help reduce the associated trauma. In fact, many sexual education programs verified delays in the age of first intercourse, leading to fewer negative experiences.

LS: I recognize the advantages that understanding sexual health can bring to teens. Still, I disagree with the relationship between the delay in the age of first intercourse and negative experiences. People can have their first sexual experience at 25 and still have a negative experience.

Additionally, most CSE programs often provide factual knowledge about physical aspects like the ones you've referred to, but rarely do these programs address the emotional and psychological readiness and maturity required for sexual activity. Neglecting crucial areas like skills for health and well-being results in no reflection on whether they are truly ready for physical intimacy. One of these consequences is the

idea that they're prepared to have sex when they aren't, which can be very dangerous, and is one of the biggest causes of trauma. Therefore, sexual education does not necessarily equip teenagers with the emotional maturity needed to engage in sexual behavior.

SC: The solution isn't to eradicate sexual education in schools. The benefits of these classes are evident and undebatable, as I mentioned before, there are numerous studies linking it to the reduction of teen pregnancies and the spread of STDs. Not until all schools adopt comprehensive sexual education will teens be fully equipped with the knowledge and skills to make informed and safe choices in the present and future. Ensuring that CSE becomes a universal standard in schools guarantees that young people like Sarah grow into confident and well-informed adults, empowering future generations to make the right decisions. But the real question is: how long will we wait before prioritizing the education that could change their lives?

LS: Yes, we all know about those benefits, but should we really scare kids with excessive information about sex and risk eventual trauma? Throughout history, people have been learning about sex and understanding their bodies on their own and at the right time, whenever they feel ready. The truth is that every individual has their own level of maturity and in no way should we confront kids with sexual information if they aren't prepared to understand it. So, before we put all our faith in school-based sex ed, let's ask ourselves: are we truly preparing teens, or just setting them up for premature experiences?

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Teaching Without a Degree: A necessary solution or a risky shortcut?

Madalena Silva and Martim Figueiredo 11.º 2B

Madalena Silva (MS): I believe education shapes who we are, and the role of a teacher is crucial in that process. That's why the topic I'm debating today – whether it is acceptable to become a teacher without a degree in education – really resonates with me.

Education is the foundation of any society, shaping individuals and future leaders. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process, and their qualifications directly impact the quality of education students receive. Allowing individuals without formal teaching qualifications to educate undermines the integrity of the profession and outcomes for students.

Teaching is not solely about expertise in a subject, it's about pedagogy, classroom management, and addressing diverse learning needs. These skills are best developed through formal training in education programs that prepare teachers for the complexities of modern classrooms.

Additionally, in diverse classrooms, untrained teachers may lack the ability to adapt lessons for students with disabilities, language barriers, or unique learning needs. This not only leads to poorer educational outcomes, but also exacerbates existing inequalities. In Portugal, 41.000 students are currently without teachers due to temporary absences, and an estimated 90.000 students will lack a teacher in at least one subject during this academic year. Hiring qualified teachers is a short-term fix with long-term consequences that society cannot afford to go through.

Martim Figueiredo (MF): You are quite right, education is undeniably vital, but teacher shortages are a pressing crisis that threatens the students' access to learning. As you said, in Portugal, frequent strikes and unfilled teaching positions disrupt the continuity of education. As of 2024, Lisbon, Setúbal, and Faro face 60% of the shortages, with the subjects of Information and Communications Technology and Special Education being critically affected. Hiring underqualified teachers, supported by mentoring and professional development programs, offers a practical solution to ensure that schools remain operational.

Moreover, standardized curricula, technology-driven tools, and collaborative models provide under qualified teachers with the resources needed to teach effectively. New Zealand, for example, has adopted the Limited Authority to Teach, allowing non-qualified individuals to step into teaching roles during shortages, ensuring that no child is left without a teacher. It is not about compromising on quality; it is about ensuring that no child is left without access to education while long-term solutions are developed.

MS: Yes, addressing teacher shortages is critical, but lowering standards by hiring underqualified teachers undermines the very foundation of education. Training programs for these teachers cannot replicate the depth of pedagogical expertise, classroom management skills, and adaptability that formal education programs instill.

Take, for example, classrooms with mixed abilities students. Without proper training, teachers may struggle to provide adequate support to students with special needs or advanced capabilities. This could marginalize vulnerable students, perpetuating cycles of inequality and reducing their opportunities for success. In Ireland, 745 underqualified individuals were employed in the first five weeks of this school year to fill gaps, illustrating how quickly reliance on untrained teachers can escalate.

MF: Formal qualifications are important, but they are not the only measure of a teacher's ability to inspire and educate. Many successful educators rely on practical experience, creativity, and passion, which can be just as impactful as credentials.

Hiring underqualified teachers doesn't mean lowering standards. With targeted training and mentoring, these teachers can quickly adapt to classroom demands. For instance, Ireland uses temporary placements and mentoring to maintain quality, while private schools often prioritize a teacher's ability to engage students over formal qualifications.



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MS: I see your point, but I think teaching is not merely about delivering content, it is about fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. Under qualified teachers often lack the pedagogical tools to achieve these outcomes, leaving students ill-prepared for future challenges.

For example, under qualified teachers may rely heavily on memorization rather than cultivating analytical skills. This may hinder students' academic and personal growth, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating societal inequalities. The long-term consequences of poor-quality teaching are profound, affecting not only individual students but also the wider community.

MF: Yes, I understand your point. However, crisis situations demand flexibility and innovation. Hiring under qualified teachers, when coupled with robust support systems, provides an effective way to ensure education continues uninterrupted. Passionate individuals, equipped with training, can adapt quickly, and bring fresh perspectives to classrooms, fostering creativity and engagement.

Additionally, this approach prevents students from missing critical years of education due to teacher shortages. In New Zealand, the number of under qualified teachers has more than doubled since the pandemic began, but the Ministry of Education has ensured that these educators are equipped with mentoring skills to maintain education standards. It is a temporary but necessary solution to protect the

rights of children while governments address systemic challenges like recruitment and retention. Flexibility is key to ensuring no child is left behind.

MS: Education is a long-term investment in the future of society. Hiring under qualified teachers may seem like a quick fix, but it risks creating a generation of students who lack critical thinking skills and academic confidence. The solution lies in addressing systemic issues, such as improving teacher recruitment, retention, and working conditions.

The risks posed by recruiting underqualified teachers could include, poor student engagement, widening inequalities, and diminished academic outcomes which are too significant to ignore. To ensure quality education for all, we must prioritize trained and qualified educators.

MF: This debate is not about lowering standards but about adapting to an urgent crisis. By hiring under qualified teachers and equipping them with the right tools, we can maintain access to education for all students. Passion and creativity, when supported by professional development, can make these teachers become effective and impactful.

The education system must be resilient and flexible to meet challenges. This solution balances immediate needs with long-term commitments, ensuring students receive the education they deserve even in times of crisis.



The Role of Physical Education in Academic Grading

Maria Inês Leitão and Rodrigo Ribeiro 11.º 2B

Maria Inês Leitão (ML): I would like to tell you a story. I have very good grades in subjects like economics, math, English, etc. But, no matter how much effort I put into PE, I can never achieve as much academic success as I do in other subjects. This obviously contributes negatively to my final grade. So, how can we make such an interpretive subject have such an impact on our grade?

Rodrigo Ribeiro (RR): Well, I have a story with a different perspective. Allow me to tell you my story. Last year, I was feeling overwhelmed with school, I was constantly buried in textbooks and assignments. Maybe that's why I started focusing more on my PE class, not necessarily to excel in sports but to push myself to be more active. Initially, I thought it was just a way to take a break from studying, but it ended up being much more. As I put more effort into PE, I noticed I was acquiring increased focus and feeling less stressed when studying for other subjects. So, why is PE still seen as optional?

ML: I firmly believe that PE should not count for one's high school final grade. I would like to start off by saying that in Portugal, there have been changes throughout the years about this aspect. Before 2004, the grade in Physical Education was included in the final overall grade. Between 2004 and 2012, it only determined whether a student passed the subject but did not affect the final average. In 2012, Physical Education grades were once again counted toward the final high school average.

RR: PE has a huge impact on our lives, and it deserves more recognition. How many times have you felt like you couldn't focus on your homework or could not concentrate during class? I know I have felt that way plenty of times. But when you go out and do some physical activity, whether it is playing soccer, basketball, or even just going for a run, it helps clear your mind and boosts your energy. It is not just about getting your body moving – it is about getting your brain in a better place. PE helps us perform better in every other subject. That is one of the reasons why it should count for our final grade.

ML: The problem is that, although others believe that

having PE counting for the final grade makes students more physically active, I have recently read a 2017 study that showed the opposite. The study showed that students who did not have PE counting for their final grade associate the subject with something positive rather than negative, therefore they practice more sports and are more active (Gomes, 2017).

RR: Regardless, I believe that a lot of people do not realize that physical activity has a direct impact on our brains. Research shows that exercise improves memory, focus, and even mood. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) conducted studies that show that students who are more physically active tend to get better grades and perform better in school.

ML: The study that I mentioned earlier is not the only study showing that PE is more effective when students are just focused on participating in class rather than on competition and on grades. That is why it should not count for the final grade. I believe that the purpose of PE is to develop the taste for an active and healthy lifestyle among children and teenagers, and later on that this lifestyle can be perpetuated throughout adulthood. By grading this school subject, competition is promoted which is not always necessarily healthy. Being graded is stressful, which could make students consider sports as something negative.

RR: Well, in my opinion, being active is not just about staying fit, it is about performing better academically. If physical activity improves our brain function and helps us learn better, then why shouldn't it be recognised as an important part of our education? The truth is, Physical Education teaches us important life skills, like discipline, teamwork, time management, and how to deal with stress.

ML: To reinforce my point, I would like to share Dr. John Ratey's opinion, a neuroscientist and author. He defends the idea that PE should not be associated with grades: "Exercise is not just a way to keep the body in shape; it is the key to unlocking the brain's full potential. If we want to encourage students to exercise, we need to stop making it about grades and instead focus on fostering an intrinsic love for movement and

well-being." Ken Robinson, an educator and author of *The Element*, explores another idea related to this. He believes that: "The purpose of education is not simply to churn out students who excel in standardized tests, but to foster creativity, exploration, and a love of learning. If physical education becomes another subject where students are judged on performance, we run the risk of making exercise feel like a chore rather than a source of personal growth." In fact, current school education relies too much on assessment which has lately been debated by educational experts.

RR: Regardless of that, incorporating PE into the final grade is extremely important. The World Health Organization has declared obesity as a global epidemic. Not to mention that sedentarism is an increasingly bigger problem that affects today's children, teenagers and adults. By making PE count for the final grade, physical activity and healthy habits are promoted and this epidemic is fought.

ML: I would like to emphasize that I am not trying to defend that PE should not exist or be valued, in fact, I believe that everyone should have physical activity present in their lives. But PE should not be considered as important as subjects like English, Portuguese or math, since these are the subjects that are truly important for good job performance.

RR: What about the people who want to follow careers related to physical activity/sports?

ML: In that case, those people could have the opportunity to include PE in the mandatory subjects to access college.

RR: I strongly believe that PE is an important tool for promoting inclusivity and equity in schools. This subject promotes opportunities for students of all backgrounds, abilities, and fitness levels to participate and succeed in different types of activities. This inclusivity is especially important in fostering a sense of belonging among students, encouraging them to value diversity and work together, regardless of their differences. When PE is part of the final grade, it ensures that students who may not excel academically still have an opportunity to be recognized for their strengths in other areas, helping to balance the focus on intellectual and physical development.

ML: The problem is that not every student has the same opportunity to practice sports outside school,

which directly affects the PE grade. Physical abilities vary from student to student, so naturally some will have more ease in the referred subject. I believe that school is a place for the people who are academically talented to stand out, just like if someone is more physically talented, there are a variety of sports tournaments for them to stand out. PE should not be another subject where students have to worry about grades, but instead focus on the subject as something to help with their personal growth.

RR: Overall, I believe that Physical Education should most definitely count toward the final grade. It is not just about running laps or playing games, it is about promoting students' physical, mental, and emotional well-being while teaching essential life skills such as discipline, teamwork, and resilience. If we are going to grade students on how well they perform academically, we should also acknowledge the role that physical health plays in academic success. If we aim to encourage healthy habits and value diverse talents, including Physical Education in the final grade is a decision that benefits everyone.

ML: As previously stated, while I deeply value the importance of Physical Education in promoting healthy habits and personal growth, I believe it should not count toward the final grade. PE should be a space where students can develop their physical abilities and explore their potential without the added pressure of grades. Grading this subject creates unnecessary competition and stress, which can turn exercise into a chore rather than a positive and enjoyable experience. By not including PE in the final grade, we can support students in building lifelong healthy habits, which is the goal of the subject.

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Teaching in the Age of AI: Challenges and opportunities for students and educators

Maria Morgado and Mariana Coelho 11.º 2A

Mariana Coelho (MC): Imagine this scenario: a student is sitting in front of their computer, overwhelmed by an impending deadline. Instead of wrestling with the assignment, they turn to AI, type in some topics, and within moments, the essay is done. Convenient, right? But now let me ask you, does this convenience outweigh the deeper consequences? Is relying on AI for academic work truly setting students up for success, or is it fostering a dangerous shortcut culture?

Maria Morgado (MM): My stance on today's debate is clear: AI is not a threat to student success in fact, it can be a powerful tool when used responsibly. While critics argue that AI encourages laziness and promotes academic dishonesty, in how it is used lies the real issue, not in the technology itself. A study by *EdTech Magazine* found that over 80% of students using AI reported improved learning outcomes (Slagg, 2024). This suggests that AI can be an incredible ally in academic achievement.

MC: Now picture this: in front of their computer sits a student, staring at a blank document. The assignment is due in a few hours, and panic is setting in. But instead of brainstorming ideas or making an outline, the student starts using an AI writing tool. A topic is entered, and within minutes, a complete essay appears. The relief is immediate – but at what cost? Sacrificed, perhaps, is the process of learning: research, analysis, and writing. Would we truly allow technology to replace the experience of learning?

MM: AI threatens essential skills like critical thinking and creativity. Stanford's AI Index Report reveals that while AI simplifies tasks, it risks undermining confidence in independent learning. Educators also warn that relying on AI for cognitive effort weakens intellectual growth. Responsible integration is vital to preserve education's integrity.

MC: Integrating AI into education provides students with crucial skills for the rapidly changing job market, where AI will be key for innovation. According to Tanya Milberg's (2024) "The future of learning: How AI is revolutionizing education 4.0", education systems must adapt to teach students the skills necessary for a digital economy: "In today's rapidly evolving technological

landscape, the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and education is not just a future possibility, it is imminent."

Additionally, Gupta (2024) highlights that technological advancements, particularly AI, will significantly reshape job markets, emphasizing that "understanding how AI influences job markets is crucial for navigating the future of work." As industries increasingly adopt AI-driven solutions, a competitive edge will students gain with familiarity with this tool, ensuring they are ready for a workforce where AI-driven careers are likely to dominate.

MM: Over-reliance on AI can limit a student's ability to develop soft skills like problem-solving, creativity, and emotional intelligence, which are equally important in the workforce. Additionally, AI technologies are always evolving, so what students learn today might become outdated quickly. Instead of focusing heavily on AI, education should prioritize critical thinking to prepare students for a wide range of future challenges, not just AI-dominated fields. There is a risk that transferring too much of the cognitive work to AI may weaken foundational skills like writing, which is central to learning how to think. This suggests that outsourcing too much to AI might harm student's ability to engage deeply with material.

MC: The rise of AI in education has significantly undermined teachers' roles by eroding their authority and increasing their workload, especially when it comes to detecting AI-generated work. This technological reliance limits students' critical thinking and essential skills, creating a culture where shortcuts replace genuine learning. By streamlining the educational process, AI encourages students to depend on technology rather than fostering deep understanding, which is crucial for their intellectual growth.

Moreover, this shift threatens the emotional support and mentorship that teachers provide, which AI cannot replicate. The human connection in education is vital for developing resilience, empathy, and interpersonal skills.

Additionally, this dynamic may worsen educational inequality, as students from wealthier backgrounds have better access to advanced tools, leaving disadvantaged students further behind. Recent research highlights these

concerns. A study found that 25% of K-12 teachers believe AI tools like *ChatGPT* do more harm than good, raising alarms about academic dishonesty and negative impacts on learning (Lin, 2024). To address these challenges, it is crucial to establish clear guidelines for AI use in classrooms and develop training programs that empower teachers to integrate technology effectively. By prioritizing these strategies, we can ensure that students remain well-prepared for future academic and career demands while preserving the invaluable role of teachers in fostering a meaningful educational experience.

MM: The argument that AI weakens teachers' roles in education overlooks several key benefits AI offers in enhancing, rather than diminishing, the impact of teachers. AI can provide personalized learning experiences tailored to individual student needs. Every student learns at a different pace, and AI can adjust the learning process to match students' strengths and weaknesses. This allows students to engage with difficult concepts at their own speed, improving both understanding and retention. Rather than undermining teachers, AI equips them with the tools to address diverse learning styles more effectively.

In fact, AI can free teachers from the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches, allowing them to focus on those who need extra support while enabling advanced learners to move forward at a faster pace (Hamadeh, 2024; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023).

MC: While it's true that unequal access to technology can exacerbate educational inequality, this is not a fault of AI itself. AI could help close the gap by providing personalized support to under-resourced schools, as we can see on the same study above.

MM: In conclusion, while there are concerns about the role of AI in education, when integrated responsibly, AI is not a threat to students' academic success but rather a powerful tool for enhancing it. AI equips students with essential skills for a future where technological innovation will drive the job market. Additionally, it provides personalized learning experiences that adapt to individual strengths and weaknesses, making education more effective and inclusive. Rather than replacing human teachers, AI empowers them, allowing educators to focus on students who need extra support while enabling advanced learners to progress at their own pace. By embracing AI in education, we are not compromising success, but instead, preparing students for a future

where adaptability and innovation are key. So, is it more of a threat to students' success to embrace AI, or to ignore its potential and leave them unprepared for a rapidly changing world?

MC: Overall, while AI offers several benefits in the educational landscape, such as personalized learning and preparing students for the digital economy, its overuse can be harmful. AI poses risks to critical thinking, creativity, and essential academic skills, as it encourages students to avoid meaningful engagement with material. Additionally, reliance on AI threatens teachers' roles by reducing human mentorship and increasing academic dishonesty. As AI continues to evolve, it's important to balance its advantages with preserving the learning process's integrity, ensuring students develop the skills for long-term success.

Moreover, over-reliance on AI can hinder the development of soft skills, like emotional intelligence and problem-solving, which are critical for future careers. Education should foster deep understanding, curiosity, and independent thinking, ensuring students thrive in a world shaped by both human creativity and technological advancements.

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More Than Just a Dress Code: The debate over school uniforms

Pedro Pais and Sofia Lameira 11.º 2A

Pedro Pais (PP): I am a former student of Colégio Planalto. I made the decision to transfer to another private school due to a matter of great importance, one that I believe deserves greater attention and discussion.

Sofia Lameira (SL): When I was younger, I always wished I could wear those school uniforms that I used to see in movies and TV shows; they just looked so clean and aesthetically pleasing, and I believed that they were a sign that someone was upper class.

PP: During my time at Colégio Planalto, I faced an issue that many students worldwide can relate to: the school uniform. Initially, it appeared to be a minor inconvenience. However, as someone who dealt with this issue for six years, it gradually became more challenging.

SL: According to Pfister (2023): "School uniforms have been successful in reducing bullying in their ability to cultivate equality and inclusivity. When students wear the same attire for school, socioeconomic disparities and fashion-related judgments are minimized. This fosters a strong sense of unity and belonging, breaking down the barriers that often lead to bullying. Regardless of their background or economic status, students can feel accepted and valued for who they are, rather than for what they wear."

In fact, uniforms promote a collective identity and a sense of belonging among students. My mother spent her childhood and adolescence in an all-girls catholic school where she had to wear a school uniform every day, her sentiment towards them are the following ones: "there was that feeling that all the girls were equal, there wasn't that problem with bullying about clothes, or worry about the newest trends, there wasn't the mockery from some girls to others about not having the current trendy piece of clothing."

PP: However, Sofia, uniforms fail to address the underlying causes of bullying. While they may reduce bullying based on clothing, they do not eliminate the deeper issues that drive such behavior. Students may still face bullying for other reasons, such as body type



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or personality. In this way, uniforms merely mask inequalities rather than resolving them. As stated by middle school students, Caroline Doyle (2014): "Teachers assume that if everyone wears the same thing, no one can make fun of each other for what they wear. That may be true, but your clothes are not who you are. Uniforms can't hide your personality. Being bullied is just as likely when you are in uniform as when you aren't in uniform. Uniforms don't make everyone the same. They just make everyone look the same."

This highlights that while uniforms create a surface-level appearance of equality, they fail to address the root causes of bullying or promote genuine inclusivity.

SL: While it is true that uniforms alone cannot eliminate all forms of bullying, Pedro, they contribute to addressing some of the factors. Bullying is often an issue with multiple causes, but reducing opportunities for judgment based on clothing can create a better environment. When students wear uniforms, schools can focus on embracing respect and empathy through other ways, and they can also create a more serious and disciplined setting, because let's be reminded what school is actually for, learning. Wearing a uniform can avoid distractions, sharpen focus on schoolwork, and allow students to perform better academically.

Also, uniforms alleviate the stress of deciding what to wear each day, and as studied have shown: "uniforms reduce anxiety about appearance and promote self-confidence through a feeling of belonging. [...] Uniforms remove 'mental clutter' students have to cope with each day, and overwhelming evidence shows that students feel happier and more confident when wearing school uniforms" (Mayville, 2019).

PP: Uniforms may reduce the stress of choosing outfits, but they also eliminate opportunities for self-expression. At Planalto we had to wear uniforms every day, so all the students there looked very similar, so none of them could express themselves. For six years, I wore a uniform and felt like I couldn't explore my identity.

SL: Personal style indeed contributes to identity development, as you say Pedro, but self-expression isn't simply based on clothing. Teens can explore and show their individuality through other ways, such as hobbies, extracurricular activities, and personal achievements. Uniforms make sure that clothing doesn't become a source of pressure or competition, allowing students to express themselves in other ways. Plus, adolescence is already a time of self-discovery, and not having to worry about outfits can help students focus on developing their identities rather than relying on physical appearances.

Furthermore, uniforms are practical because they save time and money, as parents don't have to worry about buying expensive, trendy clothes for their kids, and students can get ready faster in the morning. Additionally, uniforms can be reused or passed down, making them more economical over time.

PP: While uniforms might appear cost-effective, they often compromise on quality. At Colégio Planalto, for example, approximately 400 uniforms were imported annually for the students. To minimize expenses, these uniforms were often made from cheap materials, which resulted in them becoming itchy and uncomfortable over time. This discomfort not only distracted students but also made it more difficult for them to concentrate during class.

SL: The issue of poor-quality materials is not related to the adoption of school uniforms, but rather a result of the specific sourcing decisions made by certain schools. Many schools use durable, high-quality fabrics designed for comfort and durability. If a school

chooses cheap materials, that's an issue that can be addressed without eliminating uniforms altogether. And, in the long term, uniforms can financially help struggling families who just do not have the money to spend on different pieces of clothing, and if they have multiple children, they can pass down their uniform, saving money.

Uniforms can even contribute to the safety of students, seeing as they can help identify someone who does not belong there: "By making it easier to identify students and spot outsiders, uniforms help in preventing unauthorized individuals from blending in with the student body" (UniformMarket, 2024).

Uniforms might not be perfect, but they address several critical challenges in schools, including bullying, economic disparities, and daily anxieties about appearance. They create a structured, equal environment where students can focus on their education instead of fashion trends or social status.

PP: Uniforms may seem to address certain issues, but they often create new challenges, including suppressing individuality, causing physical discomfort, and redirecting bullying towards other aspects. Instead of relying on dress codes that restrict personal expression, schools should prioritize inclusivity through more meaningful initiatives. By addressing the root causes of inequality and promoting a culture of respect, we can create environments where all students feel valued.

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Unity or Uniformity: What do school uniforms really achieve?

Sofia Fernandes and Sofia Machado 11.º 1A

Sofia Fernandes (SF): My colleague and I will be discussing whether school uniforms should be mandatory. This debate is relevant nowadays, because it intersects with issues of individuality, mental health, and equity in education. It raises important questions about self-expression and the impact of dress codes on student well-being, and the role of schools in the production of an inclusive environment.

Imagine that you wake up and you don't know what to wear so you waste a lot of time choosing your outfit and end up being late to school. Wouldn't you like to have a school uniform to wear every day to avoid this kind of situation? Research shows that schools with uniforms have fewer distractions, improved behavior, and stronger community bonds. That's why I believe that school uniforms should be mandatory.

Sofia Machado (SM): Is it fair to limit students' self-expression just to avoid a few late arrivals? According to a study, 65% of students believe that wearing what they want boosts their confidence and creativity. Shouldn't we allow students to express themselves in a way that helps them feel comfortable and confident at school, rather than forcing them into uniforms that reduces their individuality?

Why would everyone have to be the same and be forced to use something they don't want? I strongly believe that students should have the freedom to express themselves through their clothing.

SF: I would like to start off by saying that school uniforms promote equality and reduce peer pressure in schools. According to the 2013 *Journal of Educational Research*, by minimizing the focus on fashion and socioeconomic differences, uniforms promote a sense of equality, where students are less likely to feel judged based on their clothing. Also, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2013) show that 86% of school principals believed uniforms helped reduce peer pressure related to clothing. They noted that students in uniform-focused schools were less likely to feel pressure to conform to certain fashion trends, contributing to a more inclusive environment. By removing superficial barriers, uniforms achieve more

than just standardizing attire, they open doors for students to connect beyond appearances, cultivating a community built on acceptance and mutual respect. And isn't that the kind of environment every student deserves to thrive in?

SM: The problem is that by making the students dress all the same, there is no space for different ideas, people should have the fundamental right to express themselves freely. In Sweden an agency determined that uniforms were a human rights violation because "dress and appearance should be decided by the students themselves" (Hofverberg, 2018). Adolescents see clothing choices as a means of identification, and seeking an identity is one of the critical stages of adolescence, according to the late developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1950). When students must wear the same outfits, rather than being allowed to select clothes that suit their body types, they can suffer embarrassment at school.

SF: It's also important to note that uniforms create cost concerns and economic disparities. Not only do Americans have to spend around \$1 billion on school uniforms but they also have to do it every year. The commercialization of school uniforms in public schools also undermines the promise of a free education by imposing an extra expense on families. Parents already pay taxes, and they still need to buy regular clothes for their children to wear when they're out of school and for dress-down days. Do you really think that this is fair to families that are already struggling to get by?

SM: I understand that concern, however studies show that uniforms can reduce long-term costs for parents (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013). In no way should families invest in trendy or branded clothes, they should just invest in a few sets of uniforms that last longer and are more affordable in the long run. Additionally, many schools offer financial assistance or uniform exchange programs to help families who may struggle with the initial cost. Under no circumstances do clothes keep students focused on their education, it has been proven that uniforms do. Studies show that after the introduction of school uniforms, the test scores increased by about 3% (Draa, 2005).



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SF: Plus, the National Association of Secondary School Principals said that "[w]hen all students are wearing the same outfit, they are less concerned about how they look, thus, they can concentrate on their schoolwork", proving that uniforms help students focus on what truly matters. Their education. Imagine the impact: fewer distractions, more focus, and a real boost to academic performance. Isn't that what every school should strive for?

SM: I disagree with that, school uniforms do not improve attendance, academic preparedness, or exam results. A study that analyzed a national sample of 10th graders found no effects of uniforms on fights, suspensions, no effects on pro-school attitudes, academic preparedness, and peer attitudes toward school (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 1998). Uniforms simply fail to deliver the promised benefits when it comes to fostering a better learning environment. A uniform alone does not enhance education.

SF: In conclusion, school uniforms play a crucial role in promoting equality, discipline, and focus within the educational environment. By eliminating distractions caused by fashion competition and economic disparities, uniforms create an environment where students can concentrate on their academic growth and personal development. Not only do uniforms create a sense of community and belonging but they also reinforce a positive school identity. The benefits far outweigh the concerns over individual expression, as students still have numerous opportunities to showcase their creativity beyond their clothing. As we consider the rising challenges within education today, it is essential to embrace practical solutions like school uniforms that enhance learning and unity. Imagine a school where the focus isn't on what students wear,

but on what they can achieve. Where the pressures of fashion and economic disparities vanish, and every student is empowered to reach their fullest potential. This is the transformative power of school uniforms, creating an environment where equality, focus, and community thrive.

SM: In the end, while school uniforms might seem like a simple fix, they come with more downsides than benefits. Under no circumstances should students be forced to dress the same as it can hold back their individuality and creativity, making them feel like they can't fully express who they are. Plus, the idea that uniforms solve deeper issues like bullying or academic focus is an oversimplification. These problems go far beyond clothing choices. On no account should what students wear be the focus, schools should be addressing the root causes of these challenges. Uniforms are just a band-aid solution to much bigger problems, and they don't do enough to create the kind of positive change schools really need. They fail to address the real causes of bullying, inequality, and lack of focus. By focusing on appearance, we ignore the real work needed to foster inclusion, personal growth, and academic success. True change requires more than just a uniform, it requires a shift in mindset, a commitment to understanding and solving the challenges students face every day.

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A black and white photograph of several donkeys in a field. One donkey in the foreground is looking towards the camera, while others are visible in the background. The image has a grainy, high-contrast appearance. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid on the top left, and a semi-transparent white banner is at the bottom right.

Our Planet, Our Responsibility: Debating Our Future

Photo by Daiga Ellaby on Unsplash

Zoos: Sanctuaries for conservation or prisons for profit?

Catarina Correia, Filipa Santos and Margarida Couto 11.º 4

Catarina Correia (CC): Today, we chose to debate about whether zoos are beneficial or morally unacceptable.

Filipa Santos (FS): I personally disagree with zoos because I believe that animals belong in their natural habitat, away from a locked-up cage.

Margarida Couto (MC): In my point of view, modern zoos which are focused on the best interest of the animals, like providing environmental enrichment in their resident spaces, are very important for the protection of endangered species, nature research and public awareness about wildlife. That's why I am in favor of zoos.

CC: Well, I think both of you are right, whenever I've visited other countries, going to the zoo was always something not to be missed because both my family and I always liked to visit and see the different animals in the various zoos in other countries.

MC: I believe in modern zoos, which provide a safe environment for endangered species, where they are not only protected but also often inserted into the wild through programs created for the recovery and reproduction of animals.

One success story was the Scimitar Oryx, which, thanks to the Lisbon Zoo, made it possible for this animal to return to the wild.

CC: Nonetheless, zoos can also show different drawbacks. For example, animals living in captivity have limited space when compared to their natural habitat, which can be an issue, ending up being harmful for them. This can lead not only to health problems, such as joint damage and heart conditions that normally would not happen in the wild, but also to the reduction of their average life expectancy. An RSPCA study analyzed the lifespan of 4.500 elephants, both in the wild and in captivity, over a period of 38 years. It was discovered that elephants living in zoos died an average of 17 years earlier than their wild counterparts, with some elephants dying as young as 2 years old (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2004).

FS: The early deaths of elephants in captivity are reason enough for me to be against zoos. Wild animals should have the right to live freely in their ecosystem. In the wild they're free to roam, hunt, explore and act according to their nature. But animals in zoos are often confined to small enclosures that cannot satisfy their needs for a happy and healthy life. For example, one day, the Lisbon Zoo got a report showing a dolphin trainer surfing on a dolphin in the zoo's dolphinarium. The video shows the dolphin being hurt, and according to Empty Tanks – an event that takes place each year across the globe to advocate against dolphin and whale captivity – the injuries were a direct result of the trainer's actions.

CC: Although there are cases of injured animals in zoos, as Margarida said, these institutions usually have the mission of protecting and preserving wildlife, especially endangered species, which would not survive by themselves, due to climate change, habitat destruction and many others. This way, many zoos participate in programs for the protection of endangered species, preventing their extinction and helping increase the population through monetary contributions.

FS: But is it worth keeping injured animals in captivity rather than keeping them free in their habitats? If it were me, I would prefer to live freely even knowing that there would be more risks in my daily life than being caged simply for the public's entertainment.

CC: Certain zoos do not keep the animals only for the public's entertainment; nowadays, there are breeding programs that also play a big part in saving species from extinction. For example, Marsh (2024) states: "Genetics in breeding programs is crucial, especially given the 69% drop in vertebrate populations since 1970. Successful breeding focuses on more than just increasing numbers – it emphasizes genetic diversity for healthy, resilient offspring. This diversity helps species adapt to changing environments and resist diseases, making it a critical factor in conservation efforts. This approach leads to healthier populations and enhances their ability to adapt to environmental changes. It's essential for the survival and thriving of species in zoos and the wild."

MC: I would now like to take advantage of my colleague's argument, which states that zoos prevent

extinction and help increase the population through monetary contributions, to talk about the money that the zoos also generate, which shows that zoos are not an economic liability. They even constitute an important source of new income and jobs. Studies reveal that in 2012 direct expenditures accredited to zoos and aquariums contributed to a total of 13.2 billion dollars to the United States' GDP, and that direct spending generated 4.4 billion dollars in wages for workers and supported 132.015 jobs in the United States.

FS: Although Zoos contribute to the economy, animal health should always come first and never the money, animals often experience depression and emotional torture when they are removed from their natural habitats, sold, or locked up in cages just for the entertainment of an audience. Many animals develop deep social bonds with their families or groups in the wild, and being separated from them can cause serious psychological harm. Besides, it restricts their independence and prevents them from engaging in the behaviors that are characteristic of their species. For example, Pizza, a polar bear, lives in an aquarium located in Guangzhou, southern China. She is there mainly for people to take selfies. For this reason, she was considered the saddest polar bear in the world (BBC News, 2016).

MC: The attractions that appeal to the public make the zoo an important place for stimulating the appreciation of animals. According to Reade and Waran (1996), this contact provided by the zoo has affected visitors' perception of animals, thus increasing their understanding of the way they behave in the wild, which influences conservation awareness. Another study carried out at the Australia Zoo, in 2008, showed that around 54% of the public revealed that they would like to change their attitudes to help with the task of conservation.

FS: Although your arguments are valid, I came to the conclusion that animals should live freely in their own environments and not be kept in cages. Remaining in small and limited spaces takes away their freedom and stops them from acting as they would in their habitats. Being sold, transported, and put on display for people's entertainment often makes animals stressed and unhappy. In addition to that, because they are unable to hunt, explore, or interact with others as they would in the wild, many animals experience depression. Although most people say that zoos support animal protection, these institutions often prioritize profit over the health

of the animals this way, helping them stay secure in the outdoors, rather than keeping them in captivity, is, in my opinion, the best approach to safeguard them.

MC: Socially, they offer valuable information investing on investigation and research to promote awareness on the protection and concern of wildlife and biodiversity, due to the connection established between visitors and animals. Not only that, but zoos also play a very important role in the conservation of endangered species, through programs created for their recovery, reproduction and reintroduction into their natural habitat.

CC: I believe both of you make valid points, zoos offer many benefits for animal species, but they also present issues that are not always widely known and can potentially harm the animals. On the one hand, zoos play a big role in the conservation of endangered species, rescuing them from natural disasters, habitat destruction and creating breeding programs which aim not only to increase the number of animals but to make sure they are healthier and have an easier adaptation to new environments. On the other hand, the drawbacks of zoos, particularly the limited space, can sometimes harm the animals as shown on the studies previously mentioned about how the elephants kept in zoos have a shorter lifespan than the ones who live in their natural habitat.

In conclusion, our debate highlighted the complex role of zoos, revealing both their potential benefits for conservation and education, as well as the ethical concerns surrounding animal welfare. While opinions may differ, we all agree that the health and well-being of animals must remain a top priority. Ultimately, by protecting wildlife – whether in captivity or in the wild – we are also safeguarding ecosystems and contributing to the future of our planet.

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Should Zoos Be Abolished? A debate on animal welfare

Cathy Zheng and Tomás Dinis 11.º 2B

Tomás Dinis (TD): I would like to welcome you to today's debate on the abolishment of zoos. In this debate, I will be presenting the reasons why I believe zoos should not be abolished.

Cathy Zheng (CZ): I will explain why I believe zoos should be abolished. It's an issue that requires careful consideration of the treatment animals have and don't have in zoos.

TD: I would like to start this discussion, so let me take you back to my childhood. Picture yourself as a young, curious child, fascinated by animals, standing right in front of a majestic tiger or a big giraffe, just imagine the excitement you would feel. Zoos provide experiences like these that stay with us forever. I firmly believe that zoos are essential places that should not be abolished. They play a crucial role in education and culture, and connect us with the animal world.

CZ: While that may sound beautiful, let me ask you this, Tomás, would you enjoy being confined in a small cage, with no freedom to live as you were meant to? I believe zoos are not the natural reserves that Tomás makes them seem to be. Instead, they trap animals in unnatural environments, where they suffer from stress and anxiety. As Jane Goodall wisely said: "Zoos cannot begin to provide the space, freedom, and mental stimulation that wild animals require to thrive." It is about time we rethink whether we should continue keeping animals in such conditions.

TD: I see your point, Cathy, but we need to remember that zoos are essential for education and conservation. They are not just places purely built for entertainment, but crucial spaces where people, both children and adults, can learn about animal behavior, conservation efforts, and the importance of preserving our biodiversity. For example, Kansas State University highlights how zoos provide a connection between people and nature, fostering an understanding of the environment that might otherwise be lacking. They allow children to see the animals they've only read about or seen in videos, creating a better connection to the wildlife they are learning about, and at the same time inspire future generations to care about the environment.

CZ: While I acknowledge that zoos may have some educational value, we must ask ourselves: Is it worth the cost of keeping these animals in captivity? Research from the Humane Society shows that about 75% of animals in zoos engage in unnatural behaviors like pacing and self-harming, behaviors that reflect their psychological distress. These animals are not living naturally, they are suffering. Shouldn't we find a way to teach people about animals without subjecting them to captivity?

TD: But Cathy, you're overlooking a crucial fact about how modern zoos have evolved. Modern zoos prioritize animal welfare, especially those accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and follow high standards of care. They ensure animals have proper nutrition, spacious habitats, and opportunities for social grouping. Moreover, zoos play an important role in protecting endangered species. Take the California condor, for example, which was brought back from the brink of extinction through zoo breeding programs. The same can be said for the Arabian Oryx. Without zoos, these species would likely be extinct. Isn't that a noble cause?

CZ: It may seem noble, Tomás, but let's not forget how many animals are kept in zoos that are not endangered at all. These animals are often kept in captivity purely for entertainment purposes. Even when it comes to endangered species, breeding them in captivity doesn't guarantee that they will survive if released into the wild. The Captive Animals' Protection Society reports that animals born in zoos often fail to adapt when reintroduced into their natural habitats. Instead of focusing on zoos, why not invest in wildlife reserves where animals can live in more natural environments, with more freedom, and still be protected from the threats they face in the wild?

TD: Wildlife reserves are indeed admirable, Cathy, but they are not always practical or accessible for everyone. Not everyone can afford to travel to distant locations or other continents to see wildlife. Zoos offer an affordable and accessible way for families to experience and learn about animals. In addition to being educational, zoos also protect animals from external threats like poaching and habitat destruction.

CZ: But what about the safety of the animals inside zoos? Life in captivity can be just as harmful as life in the wild. Take elephants, for example. In the wild, elephants roam vast distances, but in zoos, they are confined to small enclosures. This limited space often leads to physical problems, such as arthritis and early death. National Geographic reports that almost 80% of zoo animals display signs of anxiety and depression (Beyer-Fraile, 2022). Wouldn't you agree that their psychological well-being is just as important as their physical safety?

TD: You make a great point, Cathy, but I believe you are overlooking the important research that zoos contribute to. Zoos are vital for scientific studies that have helped advance our understanding of diseases, such as the Ebola virus in primates. Zoos also play a key role in animal behavior studies that help scientists understand how different species survive and interact in the wild. This kind of research would be nearly impossible without the controlled environment that zoos provide.

CZ: While I agree that research is important, we must recognize that it can be done ethically without confining animals. Advances in technology, such as camera traps, drones, and other observation methods, now allow scientists to study animals in their natural habitats without disturbing their daily lives.

TD: But what about children like I used to be, Cathy? Zoos inspire curiosity and create a love for nature in young kids. I remember visiting the zoo as a child and being amazed by the diversity of animal life. These experiences made me create respect for wildlife and my desire to protect it. If we take away zoos, how can we expect future generations to care about wildlife if they never have the chance to connect with these animals in person? A screen or a virtual experience cannot replicate in any way the amazing feeling and wonder that comes with seeing an animal so close to us.

CZ: I understand the educational value, Tomás, but we need to think about the bigger picture. Instead of zoos, we could promote eco-tourism and virtual reality experiences. These technologies allow people to learn about animals while preserving their freedom. Eco-tourism also helps support conservation efforts in the wild, giving people the opportunity to contribute to conservation while respecting the natural rights of the animals. Wouldn't you agree that we need to prioritize freedom for all living beings?

TD: Cathy, I agree that freedom is important, but so is survival. Many species are on the brink of extinction due to habitat loss and climate change. Zoos provide a lifeline for these animals, providing safe spaces where they can reproduce and thrive. The Arabian oryx, which was once extinct in the wild, now roams free again, thanks to zoo breeding programs. Isn't saving a species from extinction worth the effort, even if it means keeping them in captivity temporarily?

CZ: I don't deny the importance of conservation, Tomás, but I believe there are more ethical ways to protect these animals. Wildlife sanctuaries and reserves achieve the same goals. These places allow animals to live in semi-natural environments where they can exhibit natural behaviors and interact with their species. We don't need zoos to achieve these conservation goals. Instead, let's invest in solutions that respect the animals' freedom and their rights to live in the environments they were meant to live in.

TD: So, we've come to the end of this debate, and we will be concluding our opinions on this theme. I strongly believe that zoos are indispensable for education, conservation, and accessibility. They inspire curiosity, protect endangered species, and provide safe spaces for animals to thrive. Instead of abolishing zoos, let's work on improving their standards to ensure a better future for both animals and humans. Let us not deny future generations the chance to connect with the zoological wonders of our planet.

CZ: In my opinion, zoos are outdated institutions that prioritize human entertainment over animal welfare. By transitioning to wildlife reserves, natural parks and sanctuaries, we can create a world where animals live freely and ethically. It's time to let go of confinement and embrace a future where we respect the natural rights of all creatures. Let's give animals the freedom and the living conditions they deserve.

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Food Choices and the Climate Crisis

Enzo Reame and Filipe Gama 11.º 2A



Photo by Stijn te Strake on Unsplash

Filipe Gama (FG): Climate change, specifically global warming, is perhaps the most serious problem today. One proposed solution is promoting vegetarianism, which is what my partner and I will debate. Do you believe that adopting a vegetarian diet is a viable solution to mitigating climate change?

ER: I do believe vegetarianism could play a significant role. Livestock farming contributes approximately 14,5% of all global greenhouse gas emissions, with methane from ruminants being particularly harmful due to its high warming potential. Reducing reliance on meat could directly lower these emissions. Additionally, just like Paul McCartney once said: “If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian.”

FG: While I acknowledge the environmental impact of livestock farming, a universal shift to vegetarianism presents its own challenges. For instance, increased

dependence on crops like soy or corn could lead to widespread monoculture farming. This practice threatens biodiversity and disrupts ecosystems, potentially creating new environmental issues.

ER: That is a valid concern, Filipe, but we must also consider the extensive environmental degradation caused by livestock farming. For example, large-scale deforestation in the Amazon rainforest is driven by cattle ranching and the farming of soy as animal feed. This not only accelerates biodiversity loss but also reduces the planet's capacity to absorb carbon dioxide.

FG: You raise an important point about deforestation, Enzo, but it is also worth noting that certain plant-based foods also have significant environmental costs. Crops like almonds and avocados are extremely water intensive. To illustrate this: producing a single pound of almonds requires nearly 1.900 gallons of water.

If vegetarian diets became universal, these crops might further strain global freshwater resources.

ER: That is a fair observation, but when comparing water use between plant-based and animal-based food production, plants still have a lower overall impact. For instance, producing a pound of beef requires more than 1.800 gallons of water, and this figure excludes the water needed to grow feed crops. A well-planned vegetarian diet generally demands fewer natural resources.

FG: I concede that point, Enzo, but another concern lies in the environmental footprint of processed vegetarian foods. Items such as plant-based burgers and meat substitutes often undergo energy-intensive production processes. Extracting proteins, processing them, and packaging these products contributes significantly to their carbon emissions. In some cases, they may rival the impact of traditional meat production.

ER: That is true for certain processed products. However, vegetarianism doesn't need to rely on such alternatives. A diet based on whole, minimally processed foods like vegetables, grains, and legumes avoids many of these concerns. Moreover, even if some vegetarian products have higher production emissions, they still pale in comparison to the long-term environmental damage caused by livestock farming.

FG: Perhaps, but another critical consideration is the socio-economic impact. Livestock farming supports millions of people, particularly in rural areas. A rapid global transition to vegetarianism could disrupt these communities, with significant economic consequences. Any solution must address such realities.

ER: I agree that the economic implications cannot be ignored. However, we could support rural communities by promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Diversifying crops and adopting regenerative farming techniques could benefit both the environment and local economies, providing a balanced approach to this transition.

FG: While diversification could mitigate some issues, it does not eliminate the risks associated with over-reliance on certain crops. Monoculture farming, even for plant-based diets, can lead to biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and increased vulnerability to pests. These challenges could persist even with a reduction in meat consumption.

ER: That is true, Filipe. And yet it is worth noting that much of the soy currently grown is used to feed livestock rather than for direct human consumption. Redirecting this land toward crops for human consumption could reduce the overall environmental burden. Furthermore, sustainable farming practices could minimize the risks of monoculture.

FG: I see your perspective, but I would argue that addressing climate change requires a broader approach. Beyond dietary choices, we must focus on reducing food waste, which accounts for a substantial portion of global emissions. If one-third of food is wasted, the resources used to produce it, whether meat or plant-based, are squandered.

ER: I fully agree that tackling food waste is essential, Filipe. However, reducing meat consumption remains one of the most impactful individual actions to lower emissions. Even a partial shift toward vegetarianism, such as adopting a flexitarian diet, could yield significant benefits for the environment.

FG: I agree that moderation might be a more pragmatic approach, Enzo. Encouraging reduced meat consumption rather than complete elimination could balance environmental sustainability with economic and cultural considerations.

ER: Precisely. A flexitarian approach allows for gradual change while still achieving reductions in emissions and resource use. Of course, systemic changes, such as promoting renewable energy and supporting sustainable agriculture, are equally crucial.

FG: In conclusion, I believe that while vegetarianism alone cannot resolve climate change, reducing meat consumption is a step in the right direction. Jonathan Safran Foer has stated: “We can save the planet by changing how we eat, but it doesn't have to be all or nothing.” Coupled with broader initiatives, this could form part of a comprehensive strategy to protect our planet.

ER: I agree, Filipe. A collective effort, encompassing dietary shifts, systemic reforms, and sustainable practices, will be necessary to address the climate crisis effectively. Progress, not perfection, should be our goal. However, I still think that, maybe not immediately, but over a long period of time it will make a difference.

To Zoo or Not to Zoo: Examining the role of zoos today

Francisco Aguiar 11.º 1B and Margarida Lopes 11.º 3

Margarida Lopes (ML): Have you ever thought about a zoo in reality and not only the fun and entertainment part about zoos? Rarely do people think about this problem which has a deep impact on the animals of our world. Well, today's debate is precisely about zoos. These have long been a part of human culture, showcasing animals from around the world and playing a role in various aspects of society. However, the presence and purpose of zoos has raised important questions and discussions in recent years. At the core of this debate are key issues surrounding animal welfare, conservation efforts, and educational value. Zoos house a wide variety of animals, often in environments different from their natural habitats, leading to different views on the credibility of their work. This debate will explore various perspectives on whether zoos should continue to exist or not and what role, if any, they should play in our world today.

Francisco Aguiar (FA): Throughout my whole childhood I had a big interest in zoos, making me go to about 10 different ones across the world. Zoos have had a big impact on humans and wildlife, making us question if they should or not exist. Imagine a world without zoos, would we be there the same number of species that exist nowadays? Would science be the same? More than 30 species have been saved from extinction with the help of zoos, such as the red panda, the axolotl, the koala, and many more. Thus, I strongly believe that zoos should exist not only because of their huge influence in science research, but also because of their impact on the environment.

ML: As we consider the role of zoos in our society, it's essential to reflect on the broader implications of keeping animals in captivity and its consequences. While some may argue that zoos serve vital purposes, there are significant concerns that challenge this point of view that weigh a lot more than the favourable arguments my colleague will elaborate on.

The ethical implications of keeping animals in captivity are profound and multifaceted. One of the primary issues is the psychological and emotional toll that confinement can take on animals. Many species are highly social and thrive in complex, dynamic environments. When placed in restricted spaces

that fail to mimic their natural habitats, animals can experience a range of stress-related behaviours. This deprivation can lead to lifelong consequences that no scientific advances can make up for, no matter how big they are. For example, species like elephants and tigers, which roam large territories in the wild, may develop signs of distress, such as pacing, over-grooming, or repetitive actions that often indicate anxiety or boredom.

FA: If animals shouldn't be kept in captivity, then, at this moment, we wouldn't have a lot of species that still exist. Many people misunderstand the purpose of zoos, which is a significant mistake. They do not exist merely to keep animals in captivity; rather, their primary goals are education and conservation. Moreover, modern zoos are required to uphold animal welfare standards and respect the rights of the animals in their care. For example, the Animal Welfare Act ensures that animals in captivity are treated humanely by regulating how they can be cared for. Additionally, for an animal to be legally exhibited, its enclosure must be approved by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, which sets standards for cage size based on the specific needs and size of the animal.

My colleague talked about stress, and I can't disagree that it exists but, in most cases, animals suffer from stress because some zoos don't respect these laws. Of course, some individuals still exploit animals, but we must recognize that numerous organizations actively work to protect animal rights and hold offenders accountable. It is rare to find reputable zoos operating outside the bounds of the law.

Also, saying that all zoos don't follow these rules is wrong, since we have a lot of known organisations that collaborate with zoos, like World Wide Fund for Nature, that we know respect animal rights. To reinforce my point, we can prove that zoos are important to the world because they bring a lot of accurate knowledge to a young audience. How do they do that? With simple but effective methods, through posters, videos, or even free-time activities. We have to credit these actions. Not only are they protecting the environment, but also trying to spread awareness to the future of our planet. For example, many guided



Photo by Aleksandrs Karevs on Unsplash

zoo tours not only educate visitors about the animals but also explain how we can help protect them and promote sustainability to safeguard our planet.

ML: It's interesting how my colleague defended his point of view asserting that zoos can be an asset for educating the public about wildlife and environmental issues. While zoos aim to educate, observing animals in artificial environments cannot provide an accurate understanding of their behaviours and needs. This can lead to misconceptions about wildlife and the complexities of their natural habitats. If we don't truly understand what these animals require to thrive, how can we expect to protect them? This can lead to animal neglect, since this type of education misleads the public about their needs, nobody actually knows how to properly take care of these animals and fulfil their needs.

FA: In conclusion, the debate on the existence of zoos brings forward compelling arguments on both sides. On the one hand, zoos have undeniably contributed to conservation efforts, scientific research, and public education. They have played a significant role in saving

species from extinction and raising awareness about wildlife and environmental preservation. However, we cannot ignore the ethical concerns surrounding animal welfare, the psychological effects of captivity, and the potential for misinformation about the true nature of these animals.

ML: Ultimately, this debate is not just about whether zoos should exist but about how they can evolve to address these concerns. The question remains: Can zoos continue to exist in a way that prioritizes both the well-being of animals and the education of humans, or should we seek alternative solutions that better respect the autonomy and natural habitats of wildlife? It is a discussion that requires continued evaluation, innovation, and commitment to ensure a harmonious coexistence between humans and the animal kingdom. Thank you all for engaging in this important conversation.

The Fast Fashion Dilemma

Rita Machado and Sofia Briosa 11.º 4

Rita Machado (RM): Fast fashion is a curse and not a blessing. I decided to speak about this controversial topic because I find it intriguing that no one is alerting us to how much damage we can do by buying a product from a fast fashion company like *Zara*, *H&M*, *GAP*, *Primark* and many others.

Sofia Briosa (SB): I will be taking the opposite approach, that Fast fashion has more value than what it's given. That's why I believe, this industry ever since it has emerged, it's been a dominant force in the retail industry providing consumers with both affordable and stylish clothing options that keep up with trends.

RM: Fast fashion is not just about keeping up with trends, but it is a whole industry that leaves behind disastrous consequences for nature and all living creatures. For example, besides the immense waste visible in a place like the Atacama Desert, in Chile, which has grown to become one of the largest landfills of discarded clothes in the world, this industry affects our planet in many ways.

One of the most serious environmental consequences of fast fashion is its impact on water resources. For instance, the production of a single unit of a cotton T-shirt can consume up to 2.700 liters of water, which is the same amount of water that a person drinks over 2,5 years. Textile dyeing is a major polluter of water as well. According to the World Bank, 20% of the world's wastewater originates from the textile dyeing and finishing processes (Dutta et al., 2022). Toxic chemicals used in dyes are often dumped untreated into rivers, harming aquatic ecosystems and endangering human health.

Besides water pollution, we can't forget the issue that is the massive carbon footprint of fast fashion. It's responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions, which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Synthetic fibers widely exploited in fast fashion, like polyester, are made of fossil fuels and take several hundred years to degrade. Approximately 35% of the microplastics in the ocean remain on the seafloor and are from synthetic fibers, increasing the challenge of plastic infesting marine areas.

SB: Although fast fashion has damaged to the Earth in the past, with both society and knowledge development accompanying each other, we have begun to think beyond the immediate, and so have fast fashion brands. Environmentalists often raise issues regarding the environmental damage of fast fashion. However, the industry is increasingly adopting sustainable practices. As reported in the *Global Fashion Agenda's* "Pulse of the Fashion Industry", companies using sustainability strategies have avoided an average environmental impact of 5% below baseline, creating an opportunity for evolution. Brands such as *H&M* are attempting to use 100% sustainable or recycled fibres by 2030 and *Uniqlo* is investing in solutions that lower water consumption and reduce carbon emissions.

Even without the fancy equipment and new technologies, fast fashion's ability to quickly adapt to trends is another strength. In a matter of two weeks, companies such as *Zara* can develop, produce and deliver the latest collections as opposed to the usual fashion cycle of several months. This responsiveness satisfies consumer demand while reducing the risk of overproduction. Because fast fashion companies emphasize smaller, trend-driven items where excess inventory is unlikely, they increase the chance that excess inventory will lead to waste.

RM: You forget that fast fashion thrives on overproduction and overconsumption. The big players continuously release new collections every few weeks to keep consumers buying. This unsustainable cycle encourages the exploitation of natural resources, as



Photo by Becca McHaffie on Unsplash

companies clear forests, mine for raw materials, and use enormous amounts of energy to meet demands. Factories often violate basic labor laws, forcing people – sometimes, even children – to work long hours in environments filled with toxic chemicals and dangerous machinery. The devastating collapse of the garment factory in Rana Plaza in Bangladesh in 2013, which resulted in more than 1.100 workers being killed, served as a reminder of the negative impact of the fast fashion industry and its human cost. As environmental activist Livia Firth has said: "Fast fashion isn't free. Someone somewhere is paying".

Fast fashion goes far beyond what is visible in the stores. It is an industry that lives off wastefulness and exploitation, profits above people and above the earth. Although it can feel rewarding in the short term, it is worthwhile to think ahead to its consequences. Each garment we buy has a "shadow cost" that is being paid by the planet.

SB: But we cannot fail to remember that fast fashion has made a strong contribution to the world economy. According to the McKinsey Global Fashion Index, the fashion industry contributed approximately \$2.5 trillion to the global economy in 2020, with fast fashion brands playing a central role in this growth (Balchandani et al., 2023). These companies, like *Zara*, *H&M*, and *Uniqlo*, have created millions of jobs worldwide, spanning design, manufacturing, logistics, and retail.

Particularly in developing countries, the fast fashion industry has been a lifeline for economic opportunity. For example, in Bangladesh the garment industry employs more than 4 million people, the majority being female. This work has helped women achieve more economic autonomy and a route to a better social standing. The World Bank (2019) has noted that industries like fast fashion have contributed significantly to reducing extreme poverty in countries like Bangladesh by generating stable income opportunities.

RM: Worldwide, textile waste, at a rate of more than 92 million tons, per year, is a huge amount, finding its way into garbage dumps or being disposed of in fires. This disposable attitude bleeds into other areas of life and contributes to a throwaway society, which values only convenience at the expense of both sustainability and responsibility to the earth. In addition, the drive for continuous purchase encourages a cycle of materialism, in which people attribute self-worth to their ability to continue running with transient fads, instead of quality, inventiveness, or ethical decisions.

SB: Fast fashion has provided people of all socioeconomic classes with access to trendsetting apparel by leveling the playing field. Until very recently, the realm of fashion was for the rich, but even people with limited funds can now put their stamp on style with the latest fashions. The affordability and accessibility of brands like *Shein* and *H&M* allow individuals to redefine their identities and stay updated with global trends.

Fashion journalist Elizabeth Cline (2013), in her book *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*, argues: "Fast fashion has made it possible for average people to participate in fashion and express their creativity in ways that were once out of reach for most."

RM: I'll just ask you this one thing, do you really think it's worth making that big of an impact just for a trend? The next time you're tempted to buy something from a fast fashion brand, think about the bigger picture. It's time for all of us to make more conscious choices, support sustainable fashion, and demand change from this destructive industry.

SB: While fast fashion is subject to serious valid critique, it not only has economic and social benefits, but also rapidly growing sustainability initiatives that place it at the heart of the globalized world of today. With increased industry sustainability investment, it has the potential to bring this balance between economic advantage, environmental duty, and personal empowerment.

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Facing Addiction for Human Wellbeing

Photo by Vidit Goswami on Unsplash

Nicotine: Should it be banned?

Inês Quental and Rita Atalaya 11.º 2A

IQ: Among us, teenagers, smoking is becoming more and more normalized and that worries me. People get addicted at a young age and that makes it harder to quit. Besides that, a lot of young teens who choose not to smoke still get affected just by being friends or being close to someone who does.

RA: I chose this topic because even though I have people in my family who have had health problems because they smoked, I still think that nicotine should not be banned.

IQ: I'd like to start by saying I think nicotine should be banned because it has a lot of dangerous elements that turn into serious health risks, it is a highly addictive substance that can lead to many diseases such as respiratory problems, and heart disease. What's more, it also makes the risk of having various cancers higher.

RA: How can you prove that, Inês?

IQ: According to the World Health Organization (2025), tobacco use is responsible for over 8 million deaths each year, including more than 7 million from direct tobacco use and around 1.2 million from secondhand smoke exposure. Additionally, research from The American Heart Association (2021) says that smokers are 2 to 4 times more likely to develop heart diseases compared to non-smokers.

RA: None of that mentioned cancer, how can you sustain that allegation?

IQ: The American Cancer Society states that nicotine itself can promote the growth of cancer cells and that about 80% of lung cancer deaths are due to smoking. Banning this substance could reduce the number of diseases caused by tobacco and also make public health results better.

RA: On the other hand, nicotine should not be eliminated. I have family members who, after 60 years of smoking and having already tried to quit, couldn't do it.

IQ: But that doesn't mean quitting would harm them...

RA: However, if they tried to stop now, it wouldn't

be good for them, because they've been smoking for so many years and they're so used to it that if they stopped, they'd start to get more stressed, gain more weight, and be less patient.

IQ: Nevertheless, Rita, you are aware that nicotine products, especially e-cigarettes and vaping devices are contributing to the increase of unhealthy addictions among younger generations.

RA: How can you demonstrate that more clearly, Inês?

IQ: This has been proven by The National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020), which reports that most nicotine addictions begin in adolescence, as 90% of adult smokers started smoking before the age of 18.

The earlier a person is exposed to nicotine, the more likely they are to develop a dependence on it, the prohibiting of nicotine would not only reduce the addictions early on but also reduce the risk of exposure to harmful substances and lower the probability of a lifelong tobacco addiction.

RA: While that is true, nicotine helps in the treatment of several diseases, such as neurological and obesity problems.

IQ: Do you have evidence of that?

RA: There is research that suggests that nicotine may have a protective role in the treatment of certain neurological diseases, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

IQ: How can it help?

RA: By acting as a central nervous system stimulant, it can help improve cognitive functions, memory and even slow the progression of these diseases. In 2002, a study published in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* indicated that nicotine can positively influence neurodegenerative diseases by increasing dopamine and improving cognitive function (Ernst and Salzman, 2002).

IQ: Does it only help with neurological diseases?

RA: No, nicotine has been linked to reduced appetite and promote weight loss.

IQ: What do you mean by that?

RA: If nicotine ceased to exist, there could be an increase in obesity in certain groups who use this substance as a form of weight control, although this is not a healthy way of losing or maintaining weight. Studies indicate that nicotine affects metabolism and decreases caloric intake (Schwartz and Bellissimo, 2021).

IQ: Alright, you've got a point there, Rita.

RA: In addition, the nicotine products industry, especially in countries where tobacco production is an important source of employment and income, has a major economic impact. This prohibition could cause job losses and considerable economic losses.

IQ: Which countries are that?

RA: Countries like Brazil and the United States have a tobacco production chain that directly impacts the agricultural economy.

IQ: On the other hand, the healthcare costs associated with treating diseases that are caused by nicotine are substantial.

RA: What proof can you provide to sustain that?

IQ: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023), a national public health agency in the USA, estimates that smoking-related illnesses cost the U.S healthcare system more than 170 billion dollars annually, so, if nicotine ceased to exist, it would lead to significant healthcare savings.

RA: And how can that affect our economy?

IQ: Well, reducing nicotine could lead to fewer sick days and a more productive work environment. According to The American Lung Association, smoking costs employers 156 billion dollars each year in lost productivity due to premature death and smoking-related illnesses. I can also state that while tobacco taxes generate a big revenue for governments (12 billion dollars in the USA), the costs associated with tobacco – related healthcare and lost productivity – often exceed this revenue which means the problems out rule the benefits nicotine has for the economy.

RA: In conclusion, the debate about whether to ban nicotine or not involves putting health worries against freedom and economic factors. My opponent, supporter of the ban, argues that nicotine is addictive and harmful, and can lead to health risks for smokers and those around them. They believe that reducing nicotine use could lower healthcare costs and improve public health.

IQ: However, my opponent argues that nicotine can help with certain neurological diseases and obesity, and they point out the economic benefits, like tax revenue. They also show some concerns about how difficult it would be for someone who has smoked their entire life to quit if nicotine were banned.

RA: Ultimately, any decision should carefully consider public health, personal freedom, and the economic impact, based on solid research and a goal of promoting a healthier society.

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Smoking Outdoors: Personal right vs. public health

José Rocha and Leonor Fernandes 11.º 2A

Leonor Fernandes (LF): I chose this topic because I've always been intrigued by how personal freedoms intersect with public life. When I go to restaurants, there are usually designated smoking areas where people can smoke without disturbing others, allowing a balance between different preferences. If smoking in designated outdoor areas minimizes the impact on others, should we restrict a person's right to make personal choices in public spaces?

José Rocha (JR): When I go to a football stadium, which is a leisure space, I feel uncomfortable with the fact that there are people smoking next to me. It harms my experience. I think you should be allowed to harm yourself but not others. Everyone should have the right to make their own decisions regarding their health.

LF: Many studies have shown that secondhand smoke in open-air environments poses a significantly lower health risk compared to indoor smoking. With the significantly lower health risks of second-hand smoke outdoors, is it fair to treat outdoor smoking with the same level of restrictions as indoor smoking? This experience supports my position, which is in favor of allowing smoking outdoors, as long as it's done with responsibility.

JR: To defend my position, Leonor, my first argument is the fact that secondhand smoke is damaging the health of non-smokers. To me, this is the most important issue concerning our topic, because first of all, it has a direct impact on what is most important in human life: our health. A study made by the National Institutes of Health suggests that passive smoking is associated with an increased risk of many diseases or health problems, namely in children, such as asthma and cancers (Cao et al., 2015).

LF: I hear you, José, but consider this: the negative health effects of inhaling some secondhand smoke are but the tip of the iceberg when compared with living in densely populated urban areas. Living in a polluted city causes you more health problems than the inhalation of cigarette smoke.

JR: In fact, living in a densely populated area with lots of pollution, is something most people cannot

easily avoid, since there are more jobs available, while secondhand smoking could be much easier to avoid.

LF: That being said, by focusing on responsible behavior, like keeping smoking confined to specific areas while maintaining distance from crowded spots, we can ensure that people enjoy their freedom without negatively impacting others. Studies conducted by the World Health Organization in multiple countries show that a majority of the public supports the creation of designated smoking areas outdoors, instead of total bans. Smokers also have their rights, and banning the ability to smoke outdoors altogether can feel overly punitive.

JR: Nonetheless, Leonor, you are aware that when people smoke outdoors, it's often very difficult for those around them to avoid secondhand smoke. For example, many smokers smoke outside buildings. Upon leaving and entering that building one has to walk through that wall of smoke. Therefore, a non-smoker ends up being exposed, without consent, to the smoke and the smell of tobacco. That is unpleasant for the senses and violates personal space. By polluting the air and the objects around them, smokers deprive non-smokers of the free choice whether to be exposed to secondhand smoke or not. Being able to breathe fresh air which is not polluted by the chemicals, or the odor of the smoke should have priority over the smokers' rights to smoke.

LF: Yes, José, but saying that even the slightest smell of smoke violates private spaces sets an unreasonably high standard for public spaces.

Rather than banning outdoor smoking altogether, it is more practical and appropriate to focus on establishing respectful boundaries that balance the needs of all individuals in the community.

JR: I think that it is important to highlight the fact that tobacco farms represent a considerable area around the world, namely above 3 million ha in 2022 (Shahbandeh, 2024). If smoking outdoors was banned, the production of tobacco would decrease. What I am trying to say is that if companies produced fewer amount of tobacco, the agricultural area used for its cultivation would be smaller. This would allow tobacco farms, which would

no longer be needed, to be used for food production or tree planting, thus helping the environment.

LF: But the tobacco farms generate a lot of money. They are also a vital part of many communities. They create millions of jobs - farmers who grow the tobacco, factory workers who process it, retailers who sell it, and those who transport it. What's more, tobacco sales generate significant tax revenues for governments, so they can fund, for example, public services and infrastructures. If we continue to restrict the number of places where people can smoke, especially outdoors, we may accidentally cause a sharp fall in smoking rates, leading to economic instability.

JR: That's fine, but healthcare for smoking related illnesses becomes a burden on taxpayers and the insurance market. Smoking places a considerable burden not only on individuals, but also on the NHS, for example. It costs approximately £12.6 billion each year, including £1.4 billion from social care and £8.6 billion from lost productivity.

LF: On the other hand, studies show that tobacco industries contribute over \$800 billion annually. In countries like the U.S., tobacco-related jobs provide income for over 500.000 people, particularly in farming where alternatives to tobacco cultivation are limited. For governments, tobacco taxes contribute billions to public finances.

JR: My last argument focuses on the environmental factor: banning smoking in outdoor spaces will improve the environment in the short and long term. I believe that this is a strong argument because, first of all, cigarette butts are the item that gets thrown on the ground the most around the world. In Portugal, in 2016, it was estimated that 7.000 cigarette butts were thrown on the ground every minute (Cardoso, 2016).

LF: While it's true that cigarette butts contribute significantly to litter, banning smoking in outdoor spaces may not be the most effective solution. Education and better waste disposal systems, such as more accessible ashtrays or fines for littering, could address the problem without infringing on personal freedoms. Additionally, many outdoor spaces have natural ventilation, making the environmental impact of smoke itself minimal compared to other pollutants like vehicle emissions. A ban might shift focus away from more pressing environmental issues.

JR: Alright, but assuming that there would still be people who didn't care, we can conclude that cigarette butts would continue to be thrown to the ground. Cigarette filters are full of toxins that pollute the ground and waterways, damaging flora and fauna. Most filters also have bits of tobacco attached, further polluting the environment with nicotine, which is poisonous. They are also made of cellulose acetate. Depending on the conditions, it can take 18 months to 10 years for a cigarette filter to decompose.

LF: As my last argument, the cultivation of tobacco takes merely 0,09% of all agricultural land in the world.

JR: Ok, but even if it is a small part of land, tobacco production uses a lot of pesticides that harm tobacco farmers. These pesticides also harm the environment in that, for example, they contaminate the soil, affecting several of its factors such as fertility.

LF: To wrap it all up, permitting smoking outside in designated public spaces leads to a compromise between individual freedom and societal well-being. This maintains fairness to smokers and non-smokers, as well as the economies that rely on tobacco. Promoting responsible action and not the overregulation of banning will protect citizens' rights and their general welfare minus restricting normal freedoms.

JR: I disagree, and for the reasons already mentioned, I defend that smoking outdoors is not the correct path. It exposes non-smokers to secondhand smoke, which is harmful to human health. It also contributes to environmental pollution through cigarette litter. Outdoor spaces should prioritize the health and well-being of the majority. With that being said, creating smoke-free environments is the best and the most respectful choice for society.

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Addiction and Accountability: Should alcoholics receive liver transplants?

Madalena Aleluia and Sofia Carvalho 11.º 1A

Sofia Carvalho (SC): Have you ever thought that addiction is not just a personal failure but a medical condition? In case you didn't know, excessive drinking is the biggest risk factor for death and disability among 15- to 50-year-olds (Lim et al., 2012). Do you believe that according to the World Health Organization (2020) excessive drinking causes 2.6 million deaths yearly? Now, as the name suggests, you can't live without your liver. This is the largest organ inside your body. For individuals in end-stage liver disease, who can't recover, a transplant may be the only way to save their life. At no time should we exclude them from an opportunity to recover and start over this one and only life.

Madalena Aleluia (MA): Alcohol-related liver diseases that are eligible for liver transplant usually develop after 10 or more years of heavy drinking. Not only is the cost of transplants substantial in Portugal, but also the availability of organs is critically low. Having that in mind, do you think it would be fair to spend public money and resources curing a disease caused by a condition that around 60% of doctors either don't think can be considered a disease or think that it is a self-afflicted one? I disagree that alcoholics should be allowed to receive a liver transplant.

SC: Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) is a recognized medical condition that alters brain chemistry. Beyond its clinical definition, the roots of alcoholism often lie in psychological issues. Did you know that according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, about 50% of individuals with a mental health disorder will develop a substance use disorder at some point in their lives (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020)? For instance, a study found that people with depression are 1,7 times more likely to have AUD (Hasin et al., 2013). In a population of people with anxiety disorders, the rate of alcohol misuse is significantly higher, with 20-40% of those diagnosed also battling AUD (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2025).

When considering emotional and psychological struggles as triggers for alcohol use, it's crucial to note that 75% of people who struggle with alcoholism report

using alcohol as a form of emotional self-medication. These numbers reveal a clear relationship between mental health, emotional coping, and alcohol misuse, demonstrating that alcoholism is not just a matter of choice but deeply connected to psychological and emotional issues. Can we truly blame individuals for what is largely beyond their control? No, we can't.

MA: In agreement with a survey among doctors in Denmark and Germany, conducted by Judith Rosta (2000), 73,7% of doctors in Denmark and 92,4% of doctors in Germany described alcoholism as a disease. However, irrespective of nationality, about half of all surveyed doctors also agreed with the statement that "alcoholism is a self-induced disease."

This leads to the conclusion that approximately 60% of doctors either do not regard alcoholism as a true disease, or, if they do, they believe it is one for which the patient bears responsibility. According to research in the field of hepatology and psychiatry, alcohol-related liver disease typically evolves slowly. On the other hand, untreated episodes of major depressive disorder tend to persist for six to twelve months on average (Altamura et al., 2007; Mediclinic InfoHub). Considering these timelines, it is important to recognize that alcohol abuse and depression, while often coexisting, follow distinct trajectories, and should not be conflated as one singular clinical phenomenon.

SC: Research also shows that alcoholics who receive liver transplants have survival rates similar to those with non-alcoholic liver diseases. If their recovery is just as successful, why should they be treated differently? To further illustrate my position, not only is the potential for recovery and rehabilitation after a liver transplant in alcoholics possible, but it is also often remarkable. Studies have shown that transplant recipients with alcohol-related liver disease have similar, if not slightly better, survival rates than those with non-alcoholic liver conditions. A study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that 5-year survival rates for alcoholic liver disease patients were as high as 70%, comparable to non-alcohol-related conditions like hepatitis C (Neuberger, 1996).

Moreover, strict criteria are in place to ensure that alcoholic patients who undergo liver transplants are committed to sobriety. Programs often require a six-month period of abstinence before even considering eligibility, and many patients adhere to rigorous post-transplant recovery plans. Studies demonstrate that relapse rates are low, with only about 20-30% of alcoholic transplant recipients relapsing into harmful drinking, the same rate seen in non-alcoholics who relapse into other forms of illness behavior (Lee, 2020).

MA: In Portugal, as shared by gastroenterology doctors in the article, "Alcohol Consumption Post-Liver Transplantation: A Cross-Sectional Study" less than a quarter of liver transplant recipients consumed alcohol following a median of 2 years after transplant (Rebello et al., 2023). However, it's important to note that in this study drinking behavior was self-reported and it is known that patients tend to underreport their alcohol consumption. Also, one of the reasons for the wide variation of numbers concerning this issue lies in differing definitions of the term "recurrence" an "relapse." Nonetheless, that is still 25 to 50% of patients that have relapses, in comparison with 2% of patients who received a liver transplant for non-alcoholic liver disease (Rice et al., 2013).

SC: In conclusion, Alcoholism is a medical condition, not a moral failing. If a liver transplant offers the chance for recovery and a new beginning, why should we withhold it from those suffering from addiction? Does someone's past truly define their future, or should we be focusing on their potential to change? By denying alcoholics this life-saving procedure, aren't we, as a society, choosing punishment over compassion? Isn't every life worth saving, no matter the path that led them to illness? In no way should we deny that individuals with alcoholism deserve a chance to receive a liver transplant. As Dr. Philippe Mathurin noted: "We must base our decisions on clinical outcomes, not prejudice, if we truly believe in the value of human life."

MA: Ultimately, do you not see a difference between someone who carries a disease they don't have any control over and a person who dedicated years of their life to heavy drinking and drowning their mental illnesses in numbing liquid instead of getting professional help? These are fundamentally different circumstances. In no way should life-changing medical procedures – procedures that consume expensive and limited resources – be granted without weighing the origins of their need. After all, as stated by Eleanor Roosevelt: "In

the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility."

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**Right or Wrong?
Exploring Choices
in a Complex World**

ABORTION
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HEALTHCARE

The Morality of the Death Penalty: A debate between justice and human rights

Alexandre Guerra and Guilherme Taborda 11.º 2A

Alexandre Guerra (AG): Is the death penalty something moral, and should it exist? In my opinion, the death penalty should be legal.

Guilherme Taborda (GT): Unlike my colleague, I can say that I'm against the death penalty.

AG: One of the main reasons for which I believe the death penalty should be allowed is that some people have committed terrible deeds that are unforgivable. One of the most renowned examples to support this is Ted Bundy, one of the most notoriously infamous criminals in the history of the USA.

In the 1970s, Bundy kidnapped, raped and killed more than 30 women between 1974 and 1978, until he was finally caught. For all his crimes, Ted Bundy got sentenced to two death penalties in 1979, and a third one in 1980, and, in 1989, a decade after his first death sentence, he was executed by the electric chair. So, after hearing this story, after listening to all the atrocities committed by Bundy, do you think this man should have lived? Should this man, who destroyed so many lives, just for his own twisted pleasure, be allowed to live the rest of his life? I do not think that he should, because the moment he started to commit these terrible crimes, he lost his right to life as a human and became a monster. So, I ask again: Should Ted Bundy have lived?

GT: While it's true that there have been a lot of dangerous and terrible human beings, public opinion is showing a growing opposition to the death penalty. In

a 2003 poll by The Death Penalty Information Center, 75% of Americans preferred the option of life without parole, as opposed to the death penalty. States that employ the death penalty do not have a lower rate of criminal homicide. This was reported in the FBI's 2002 Uniform Crime Report, which shows that the 14 states without the death penalty have a lower homicide rate than the national average.

Now, why am I against the death penalty? There have been many cases where people have been sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit. Now, I'm going to talk about Troy Davis. This man was sentenced to the death penalty in the 20th century. However, 25 years later, the police found out that he was innocent. At that time, all the clues that some witnesses had given to the police pointed to Troy as the murderer, but these were all lies. The people who supposedly saw the crime, lied about it, because of police pressure. An innocent person may be released from prison, but an execution can never be reversed. Around the world, governments are using the death penalty to silence their opponents, so the risk of executing an innocent person is even more serious. In 2022, executions carried out by Iranian authorities rose by 75%, with at least 582 people put to death for various charges. As long as it continues to exist, the death penalty can and will be equipped by states to control their population and crack down on other crucial human rights.

AG: Well, the country of Iran is very different from the Western world when it comes to crime and sentencing. While I do agree with you that the Troy Davis case is truly tragic, that story highlights the problems with the police rather than with the sentencing in question. Thus, we shouldn't use it as an example of the problems concerning it.

The death penalty in the USA is generally rare and only applied in few situations that involve major crimes like murder, treason, or espionage, so it shouldn't affect the population in any substantial way. Using a recent example, the FBI released data saying that there were over 14 million people sentenced to criminal offenses in 2023. Of those 14 million, only 21 people were sentenced to death as of December

2023, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Not only that, but the second worst penalty applied in the US, the life sentence, has been applied more than 200.000 times when compared to the 8.500 that were sentenced, and the 1.600 that have been executed in the past 50 years. Therefore, even if you commit a major crime, there is a high chance that you will not be given the death penalty.

GC: The death penalty is indeed rare and later I'll mention that too, but we can't forget the fact that the cost of the death penalty is a concern. Those accused of murder when facing the death penalty are appointed more experienced and more expensive lawyers. Most states in the US currently have the death penalty law, and the money used for that could go to other departments in their government. Since returning the death penalty in the US in 1976, more than 1.600 people have been executed, as opposed to about 200.000 prisoners serving life sentences. Also, the increasing rarity of executions has not made those who end up dying in jail less frequent, the average amount of time before a prisoner is executed in the United States is over twelve years.

AG: Despite being true that there hasn't been a decrease in the number of executions in prison, in the times when the criminal is truly guilty, the death sentence could be considered as a middle ground between reason and emotion, where both are applied in some capacity. Guilherme, allow me to tell you why. You see, reason is used in a death sentence as a way to prevent the future offense from happening again, and in turn, protect our society from dangerous criminals permanently, whereas emotion is accounted for, since the victims of the offense and their friends and family could feel like the death penalty is retribution for the wrongdoings of the offender. Using a hypothetical example, if a serial killer is caught and sentenced to the death penalty, this would apply reason, since it is a decision that would protect our society from this criminal committing more crimes in a safer way than other sentences, like the life sentence, and it would use emotion, by giving the families of the victim certainty that this person that hurt them would not hurt anyone else, and could even bring some peace of mind.

“There have been many cases where people have been sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit.”

GT: That argument is very dependent on the person, as there are groups of people that would rather have a criminal locked in jail forever, instead of being freed by death. My rhetorical question is, do you believe the death penalty deters others from committing murder? According to *ChatGPT*, “[t]he death penalty is not a strong deterrent, as studies show mixed results. Many crimes are committed impulsively, making the deterrent effect less relevant.”

Finally, as stated by Norman Mailer, “historical, religious, and existential treatises suggest that for some persons at some times, it is rational not to avoid physical death at all costs. Indeed the spark of humanity can maximize its essence by choosing an alternative that preserves the greatest dignity and some tranquility of mind.”

AG: In conclusion, Guilherme, the death penalty, while at first glance seems extreme and cruel, it is a rare event reserved for very dangerous criminals, and it serves as a way for reason and emotion to co-exist in justice. Nancy Reagan said something that perfectly sums up my opinion on the death penalty: “I believe that people would be alive today if there was a death penalty.”

GT: Alexandre, in my eyes, the death penalty is an irreversible punishment that risks executing innocent people, like in the case of Troy Davis, and it fails to deter crime as states without it often have lower homicide rates.

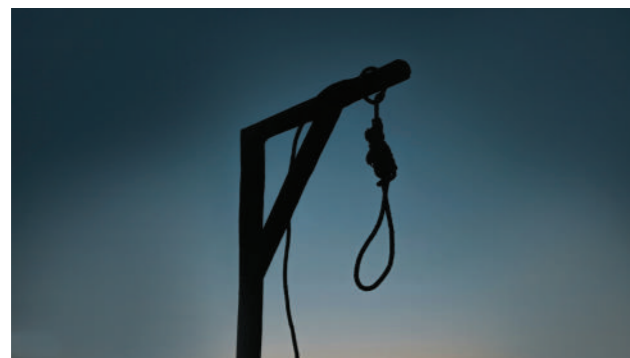


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The Illusion of Choice or the Power to Choose?

André Caetano 11.° 1B and Manuel Gaspar 11.° 3

André Caetano (AC): I'd like to invite you to reflect with me on something. Imagine a child born into a loving family with access to the best education, healthcare, and emotional support. Now, imagine another child, born on the same day, but into a poor family, struggling with hunger, trauma, and instability. Think about how different their lives might become. As they grow, their paths diverge. The first becomes a successful entrepreneur, while the other struggles to survive. Now, let me ask you this: is it fair to praise the success of the first and question the life choices of the second without considering the circumstances? Not until we consider the broader societal context can we truly judge the fairness of these outcomes. Do you think their outcomes were a result of free will? Or were their futures almost determined from birth? I argue that none of our actions are entirely our own; they are shaped by a web of causes.

Can we claim to control our actions when every decision is influenced by factors like genetics, environment, and even the neurons firing in our brain? As neuroscientist Sam Harris put it, "[f]ree will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making."

Manuel Gaspar (MG): Now, let's change perspectives. I believe we have free will. Let me tell you a short story – one that might get you thinking. There was once a clock keeper named Liora. In her village, life revolved around a central clock she wound every morning. One day, a traveler asked, "What if you stopped winding the clock?" Liora replied, "Why would I? The clock grants peace and order." The traveler responded, "But do you live by the clock, or does the clock control you?" Troubled by this, no sooner had Liora stopped winding the clock than the villagers discovered a new sense of freedom. At first, the villagers panicked, but soon they began living freely, unbound by the clock. Only after this shift in perspective, did Liora realize the profound impact of her decision. So, what do you think? Do we control our environment, or does it control us?

Jean-Paul Sartre once said, "[m]an is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does." Isaiah Berlin also argued, "[f]reedom is the ability to live with the

consequences of one's decisions." I agree with both philosophers, and I will show you why.

AC: Those who argue against free will claim our choices are shaped by forces beyond our control. Philosopher Spinoza argued that people believe they are free because they know their actions but not the causes behind them. In this view, decisions result from prior causes such as our genetics, upbringing, and environment. Not only does neuroscience challenge free will, but it also raises profound questions about moral responsibility.

Returning to the example of the two children, one born into privilege and the other into poverty, let me ask you again: can we truly say their futures were shaped by free will? Neuroscience offers insights here. Experiments by Benjamin Libet et al. (1983) show that brain activity begins before we consciously decide, suggesting our choices are often initiated unconsciously. At no time do these studies claim that human decisions are entirely free from influence. As Sam Harris said, "free will is an illusion." If we don't control the factors shaping our lives, how can we claim our decisions are free?

MG: But even though our choices are influenced, they remain unique to us. Think about specific moments in your life. Have you ever made a decision that felt truly your own? In specific situations, we act according to what we feel is right. This doesn't negate free will; it affirms it. Consider the two children again, but this time imagine they are neighbors with similar financial backgrounds, attending the same school and participating in the same activities. Despite these similarities, they won't lead identical lives. Why? Because of free will. When faced with tough decisions, each child will choose differently, shaping their individual paths. As Sartre reminds us, "[i]t is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." Even in similar circumstances, people make different choices, reflecting their autonomy.

AC: To counter this, proponents of determinism argue that every action is the inevitable result of prior causes. They claim that choices, no matter how free they seem, are shaped by unique causal chains. For

instance, two individuals facing a difficult decision might act differently due to their past experiences. One might take a cautious approach because of past failures, while the other takes a risk due to an optimistic upbringing. Determinists argue these differences don't indicate freedom but show that actions result from prior causes.

Baruch Spinoza wrote that people think they are free because they are aware of their desires but unaware of the hidden causes for example, biological, social, and psychological that shape them. What we perceive as choice, determinists claim, is the inevitable result of a chain of prior events, leaving no room for true autonomy.

MG: However, if humans were entirely determined by external causes and lacked genuine choice, it would undermine the concept of moral responsibility. Yet, societies universally hold individuals accountable for their actions, rewarding or punishing them based on the assumption that they could have acted differently. Think about this: when someone commits a harmful act, do we see it purely as a product of their environment? Or do we believe they could have chosen another path? Legal systems are built on this premise. Punishments, rehabilitation, and praise would lose meaning if people lacked the freedom to make moral choices.

In this sense, free will is not only a philosophical concept but also a practical necessity for justice, personal growth, and morality. If we fully embraced determinism, we would undermine the foundation of ethical judgment. The fact that we treat individuals as accountable agents suggests that free will exists, even if it is shaped or limited by external factors. While we may not have absolute freedom, the ability to make meaningful decisions remains. As Aristotle once said, "[m]an is a rational animal, capable of making decisions based on reason, and therefore responsible for his actions."

AC: In conclusion, free will is an illusion shaped by forces beyond our control. Spinoza and modern neuroscience reveal that our choices are determined by genetics, environment, and unconscious processes, not true autonomy. From the children born into vastly different circumstances to Libet's experiments, our decisions are not free but shaped by prior causes. As Schopenhauer said, "[a] man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants."



Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

MG: Yet, even if our environment influences us, it does not strip away our ability to make choices. As seen in Liora's story, we often follow patterns dictated by external forces, but reflection reveals our capacity for self-determination. Free will is not the absence of influence but the ability to navigate those influences and make choices uniquely our own. Philosophers like Sartre and Berlin remind us that freedom is tied to responsibility. Our capacity for choice allows us to grow, learn, and shape our lives. Despite the challenges we face, it is our ability to choose that defines our humanity.

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Life, Death, and the Right to Choose

Dinis Santos and Vicente Pires 11.º 2A



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Vicente Pires (VP): I actively seek to help others as I am emotional and always want to offer help. I consider myself quite sociable and I look forward to getting to know new people. One of my favorite hobbies is to play team games as that improves my communication skills and makes me become a better person each day.

Although all this could have been irrelevant, it does fit with the theme we are going to discuss today, which is: Should suicide be legal? Did you know that the main reason for the recent increase in suicide rates is high social media exposure? In my point of view, I can relate to this because I was once a social media addict, and now I understand the horrible consequences that these apps bring to the world.

Dinis Santos (DS): I'm a Christian, and my faith teaches me that we should support one another. That's

why I believe suicide should be illegal – not to punish people, but so that if an attempt fails, they can receive the help they need. This issue is especially important to me because it disproportionately affects men, and it's becoming increasingly common.

VP: So, to begin this discussion, control over one's own life should be every individual's right, even to the extent of choosing not to live. If the right to make choices about their own body is held as a fundamental right, the right to refrain from living can be seen as a natural extension of that action.

DS: That's not the point though, Vicente. Surely everyone has the right to control their own life, but not their death. I don't think romanticizing death is the solution for someone's curable disease.

VP: To reinforce my point, suicide may be considered an art form by many individuals, and as a result, many of them personally relate and accept suicide and have no problem with it.

DS: You must keep in mind the worth of life, because, with the legalization of suicide, people could see life in a different way, as something easily disposable. Whereas it being illegal, proves that life should be preserved and taken care of. Prevention of future mental problems, by helping people on the edge of suicide, could make us all more aware of one's mental illnesses and even detect it in loved ones, and helping them too.

VP: Dinis, you must consider the other side of the situation, because the legalization of this action, particularly the agenda of assisted suicide and euthanasia, would enable individuals to die with dignity. Suicide is different from assisted suicide. This is most pertinent to the people who are terminally ill and do not want to endure mental and physical suffering.

DS: But if we assist suicide, we will be spending money and resources towards death instead of using them for people's well-being. We should use these resources on more important situations, by focusing on healing diseases or even targeting the disease that's leading one to contemplate suicide, for example.

VP: According to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Thus, everyone is free to do what they desire. It is also worth noting the growth and the origin of incentives for people with some type of terminal illness or physical disability to end their life. This is related to the freedom of decisions; in which case the person can choose between life or death.

DS: Society should take care of its members and that also applies in extreme cases like suicidal people. Again, as a Christian, I believe in one of Jesus's core teachings: we are called to care for one another. Our lives don't just belong to us – they also matter deeply to those around us, like our family and friends. Choosing to end one's life may seem like an escape, but it can have a devastating impact on loved ones and, in some cases, may even influence them to consider doing the same.

VP: Of course, offering help may seem like the right thing to do, but it's not always easy – especially when the person doesn't want it. In those cases, trying to help can feel more like forcing your own beliefs about life onto someone else. As the artist J. Cole once said, "She don't wanna be saved, don't save her."

DS: Studies show that the chances of being alive, and a human being are 400 trillion to 1, so we must treasure life. Also, suicide is not natural, the human body is always instinctively trying to survive; it detects danger and reacts to it.

Lastly, according to a Harvard study, nine out of ten people who attempt suicide and survive will not go on to die by suicide later. In fact, unsuccessful suicide attempts often result in medical care. Approximately 7% of attempters eventually result in death, around 23% reattempted non-fatally, and 70% had no further attempts.

VP: So, as we have seen today, suicide is not a comfortable topic to discuss because everyone has different opinions on it, making it a very delicate subject. Suicide cases are increasing day by day, which may make many of you worried. But, in my point of view, that shouldn't interfere with the legality of this action. Instead of trying to discuss whether it is right or not, we should seek to help the needy, by, for example, promoting mental health awareness, so those who are suffering can feel that they are not alone. Nonetheless, if suicide was legal, it would not encourage anyone to do it.

DS: I use religion as an argument, but not just to prove my point, we should respect other people's opinion. I'd like to conclude with a certain view on life, a great quote from Thomas Adams: "Those who choose suicide (for whatever reason) should remember that death is not the end, but a doorway into an eternal existence."

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Abortion Rights, Responsibilities, and Rape Culture

Duarte Neves and Eva Adam 11.º 2A

Eva Adam (EA): I chose to debate about abortion because one of my biggest fears is being raped. Rape culture still exists, and, until it ends, most women will always have that fear.

Duarte Neves (DN): What do you mean by rape culture?

EA: Rape culture means that this crime does not get the punishment and attention others do, and because of this, rape victims are made to feel uncomfortable and afraid when reporting to the police. In fact, “[o]ne in four women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime. Although less than 5% of sexual assaults are reported to law enforcement, one in five cases reported to police are deemed baseless and therefore coded as ‘unfounded’” (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

As a woman, whenever I hear a story about someone that was raped, I can’t help but imagine myself in that position, and if I ended up pregnant, I know for a fact that I would want to have the option to terminate the pregnancy even if I couldn’t prove that I had been raped.

DN: For a start, I’ll show you my point of view on this issue by providing two arguments that sustain my opinion. Firstly, I think that at a certain age, you should be able to understand that having sexual intercourse, is a serious act. Nowadays, it’s common to know at least one person within your circle of friends who has chosen to terminate a pregnancy for various reasons, such as being too young to have a baby, being in college and unable to juggle both responsibilities, or lacking the resources to raise a child. These are excuses created by a big delusion on the part of both women and men.

Since people are still learning and growing until they reach full adulthood, I believe abortion should be permitted up to a certain age, which I consider to be 25. By this age, individuals are generally more mature and better able to understand the responsibilities of life and the significance of sexual activity.

Not taking the pill or refusing to use a condom is irresponsible, and people need to be aware of how

dangerous that is. The only excuse that should be accepted for an abortion after 25 is rape. In other cases, it should be considered the parents responsibility and an abortion prevented.

EA: There are a lot of cases where the woman cannot prove that she was raped. One in five cases reported to the police are deemed baseless and there are a lot of women that are afraid to speak about being raped due to the fear of judgment, not being believed, or being discredited.

DN: However, if the victims of rape don’t speak up, they will have to suffer the consequences of not being allowed to abort. I believe that preventing a baby from being born is an irresponsible decision, apart from being immature, and, what’s more, it’s killing a person.

EA: Abortion is not the same as killing a person since a three-month-old fetus is not a person yet. Besides, the woman should have the power to choose what to do with her body. Thankfully, I was born into a family that believes in supporting women’s rights and always taught me to support them.

DN: What are those rights, Eva? And how is that related to abortion?

EA: According to the United Nations Human Rights Office: “the rights to equality, to dignity, autonomy, information and bodily integrity and respect for private life and the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health, without discrimination”. Additionally, “[t]he decision as to whether to continue a pregnancy or terminate it, is fundamentally and primarily the woman’s decision, as it may shape her whole future personal life as well as family life and has a crucial impact on women’s enjoyment of other human rights” (United Nations Human Rights Office). By not enabling abortion, we would be going against women’s rights.

DN: However, supporting human rights can sometimes lead to people engaging in risky behaviors, such as unsafe and unprotected sex, without taking full responsibility. I reviewed several studies but focused on one conducted at the University of Lisbon titled

Life without HIV. In this study, students completed a questionnaire revealing that over 60% of young men reported having unprotected sex. Additionally, young people account for 33% of HIV cases in Portugal. While 78% of students reported using a condom the first time they had sex, only 37% consistently used condoms in all sexual encounters.

Using this data, I can support my theory about how these young people perceive the true meaning of intercourse. What’s more concerning is that, despite being aware of the risks, they often take greater pleasure in defying the warnings they have received. This behavior contributes to a rebellious generation. And this attitude isn’t limited to sex; it also appears in many areas of life, such as family and friendships, where peer pressure encourages experimenting with other risky behaviors.

EA: But you defend that abortion should be illegal for people over the age of 25, so your argument is not valid, seeing as the “youngsters” you are talking about are mostly under that limit. And what do you mean by peer pressure?

DN: This all happens because nowadays we have free and easy access to social media, which is a way for everyone to show each other how important their life is, or could be, often devaluing their real personality to show off to those who follow them. And that’s why we have to face these mistakes and the true meaning of life.

Pope Francis (2013) has talked about abortion, stating that “abortion is murder”. He was against contraceptive methods and referred to a ‘culture of waste’ that “enslaves the hearts and minds of so many, comes at a very high cost: it asks for the elimination of human beings”.

EA: Duarte, if abortion is killing a human being within the ‘culture of waste’ as Pope Francis said, isn’t it also considered killing if you’re having an abortion under the age of 25? Do you believe the baby’s life is worth more than the mother’s? There is something that is not talked about enough while discussing this polemic topic, and that is women’s health and safety.

In some cases, pregnancy can risk the health or life of the mother. There are also a lot of mental health issues that come with giving birth to an unwanted child, like depression. Some studies have confirmed that there

is an association between unplanned pregnancy and higher levels of depressive symptoms (Muskens, 2022). Last but not least, if women are not legally able to abort, they will have an illegal abortion, which is not safe at all.

DN: While I agree that there are emotional and physical challenges in an unwanted pregnancy, like you say, Eva, the potential for depression or unsafe actions should not justify the legality of abortion. Society can provide support for women facing unwanted pregnancies, such as counseling, financial assistance, and adoption services.

EA: Where will that money, for counseling and financial support, come from? Would the public support that?

DN: Maybe we could think of other ways of getting that money. I do not want you to think that I’m an extremist, Eva. I’m not. I just want the greatest possibility for humanity, and to quote Kanye West: “telling the truth is mad in a world full of lies.”

EA: In conclusion, Duarte believes that abortions for mothers over the age of 25 should be illegal unless it can be proven the woman was raped. On the contrary, I believe that terminating a pregnancy should be legal in all cases since women have the right to make all decisions concerning their own bodies.

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Innovation or Exploitation: Should we use animals in scientific research?

Gustavo Ruão and Lucas Drago 11.º 1A

Gustavo Ruão (GR): Today we are going to talk about the use of animals in scientific research. This is a very important debate because, although this type of research helps in the advance of science, it can cost the lives of a lot of animals. That said, is it worth it? Let's say that your brother has a rare disease, and the only available cure hasn't been tested yet. So, would you prefer to sacrifice the lives of a few animals to ensure a cure is safe for humans, or risk your brother never being cured and possibly dying from the disease? In my opinion, hardly would I choose not to save my brother, even if it means using animals for research.

Lucas Drago (LD): As my partner said, animals can be tested for medical purposes, which can save a lot of humans, but can we transpose the results observed in animals to humans? In 2006, a medicine called

TGN1412 was tested on primates, confirming that the drug was safe. After that, 6 human volunteers were dosed with the drug. All 6 suffered life-threatening conditions involving multi-organ failure (Suntharalingam, 2006) and this is why I strongly disagree with Gustavo and think that under no circumstances should animals be considered the solution to this problem.

GR: First off, a lot of the vaccines and medicines we use today, like the ones for infections and cancer, were possible due to animal testing. This has been a huge part of advancing medical science. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists in Brazil developed three different vaccine prototypes. They first tested them on mice to make sure they were safe and wouldn't harm anyone (Agência FAPESP, 2025).



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This was extremely important because it helped researchers understand how the virus worked and made sure the vaccines were effective before they were given to humans. In no way would we be able to move forward as quickly and safely with human trials without this step.

LD: First, I would like you to consider a few questions: Isn't it a form of exploitation to use animals, which will suffer, to obtain medicines that will save human lives? Is it worth it? Shouldn't we invest in other alternative methods? You should understand that the exploitation of animals can rarely be justified, even in the pursuit of medicines that may save human lives. Although I agree with you that the development of the COVID-19 vaccine was very important, if we have other technologies to produce treatments with less animal testing, why wouldn't we use and invest more in them? One example is the mRNA vaccine, which uses technology to instruct the body's cells to produce a virus-specific protein, creating an immunological action. If this works, animals can be saved from mistreatment and start being less used in scientific research.

GR: Medicines are essential products that require extensive testing to ensure their safety and efficacy. We generally have two primary options for conducting these tests: one approach is to search for an ample sample of humans who have similar medical conditions and are willing to participate in clinical trials. However, this can be a time-consuming and costly process. Alternatively, we can look for a large number of mice with the specific genetic traits necessary for the research. Not only does this approach allow us to gather the information we need much more efficiently, but it also helps avoid the ethical risks of experimenting directly on humans. Using mice in medical research provides a valuable and controlled way to test medicines, advancing our understanding without compromising human safety.

LD: Now, not only can the use of primates in research slow down the creation of medicine (Sariol and White, 2014), due to ethical and logistic problems, but it also highlights the challenges presented by their biological differences from humans. While humans and primates have similar biology, there are key differences in their immune systems and other challenges, like the difficulty in starting the research. On top of that, animal studies often need a lot of regulatory approvals, which can also delay the development of the vaccine.

As we all know, the production of COVID-19 vaccines was critical during the pandemic, and the sooner they became available, the safer we were. In my previous example, the rapid development of mRNA vaccines was made possible through the deliberate use of animals in research. This approach played a significant role in reducing production time.

GR: In conclusion, the use of animals in scientific research plays an essential and irreplaceable role in advancing medical knowledge, developing life-saving treatments, and ensuring the safety and effectiveness of new therapies. Animal testing has been instrumental in creating numerous vaccines and medications, including recent developments like COVID-19 vaccines, which offer a safer approach than initial human trials. Although ethical concerns around animal testing are valid and deserve consideration, the substantial benefits to society, including prolonged life expectancy and improved quality of life, strongly support the continued use of animals in research.

LD: To conclude, it's important to recognize that the use of animals in scientific research can be extremely abusive. While this practice has led to important advancements in science, it is time for us to start investing in alternative technologies that can reduce the number of animals needed for experiments. Furthermore, the results from animal research often take a long time to conclude the process or may not accurately reflect outcomes in humans, highlighting the urgent need for more ethical and effective research methods. We must ensure that the future of science is based on innovations that respect animal and human rights, without compromising necessary progress.

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Justice or Vengeance: The ethics of the death penalty

Leonor Louro and Michelle Moita 11.º 3

Michelle Moita (MM): My partner and I will be discussing a very serious topic, the death penalty.

Imagine a man who tortures and murders children in the most horrendous ways imaginable. Let's say, over several years, this individual kidnaps and kills multiple children, leaving behind devastated families and immeasurable pain. He's caught, confesses, and his guilt is proven, leaving no room for doubt about his actions. Now, consider the consequences of his crimes. Not only has he ended innocent lives, but he has forever destroyed families. In this case, the death penalty is not just about punishment, but about ensuring that this individual can never harm another child again. Is it fair to allow this man the luxury of life after committing such horrors? And how can society feel safe if the worst offenders aren't fully punished?

Leonor Louro (LL): Is the death penalty a violation of human rights or a fair form of justice? Is it justice or revenge?

Now, imagine for a moment that we are in a cold room and in front of us stands a man who, due to a judicial error, has been sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. He is innocent, but the system has failed. Now, think about the weight of that decision: the irrevocable loss of a life and the devastation of a family. The death penalty not only fails to deliver justice but also perpetuates a cycle of violence and error that we cannot afford. I ask you to think if it is truly fair to sacrifice a life, even with the possibility of error. Additionally, isn't it contradictory to punish killing by committing another killing?

MM: I support the legalization of the death penalty because it acts as a powerful deterrent against serious crimes, such as homicides. The fear of facing execution can discourage individuals from engaging in violent acts. By imposing such a severe consequence, it can prevent potential offenders from considering such actions, ultimately helping to reduce violent crime rates.

LL: I don't agree with you on that. Studies from various parts of the world show that the death penalty does not necessarily have a discouraging effect on crime. Countries with and without capital punishment

have similar crime rates, weakening the argument that it prevents homicides. In the USA, for example, where the death penalty is legal and is still one of the countries in which there are the most crimes.

Additionally, the death penalty has the risk of executing innocent people, which is irreversible. Even with advancements in criminal investigations, such as the use of DNA, errors still occur that can condemn innocent people to death. Like the case of George Junius Stinney Jr., a 14-year-old boy, who was unjustly convicted and executed in 1944 in South Carolina for the murder of two girls (Equal Justice Initiative, 2014). The trial lasted only one day, with no concrete evidence. Only after he had been executed, did everyone know he was innocent. He became the youngest person executed in the 20th century in the U.S.

MM: I don't think it's fair to use that example since it's something that happened almost a century ago and the legal system has improved since. It has numerous safeguards in place to minimize the risk of wrongful executions, such as extensive appeals processes, the requirement of a lot of evidence, and advancements in forensic technology.

Also, the death penalty can serve as a necessary tool for the most heinous crimes. It's not just about deterrence, but also about ensuring that those who commit horrific acts face the most severe consequences. For many, it brings a sense of justice to victims' families. Many believe that the death penalty is a form of retributive justice, where the criminal pays for their actions with the same severity.

LL: Your argument that "it's not fair because it happened years ago" does not apply, since nowadays more than 4% of people who get sentenced to the death penalty in the USA are innocent (Death Penalty Information Center).

Furthermore, you may argue that the death penalty is necessary for the most heinous crimes, but it's important to recognize that taking a life in response to a crime doesn't truly serve justice. Justice should not be about retribution but rehabilitation and ensuring fair consequences that respect human rights. Critics



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argue that even violent criminals can be rehabilitated or show remorse over time. Under no circumstances should we use the death penalty, since there is always a possibility of redemption.

MM: In cases of extreme violence, like mass murder or terrorism, the focus should be on justice and public safety, not on the potential for change in the criminal. Some actions are so horrific that redemption, even, if possible, cannot erase the harm done.

Not only that, but also by eliminating dangerous criminals from society, the death penalty ensures that they cannot reoffend. It is estimated that 6 out of 10 people released from prison reoffend. Ted Bundy, a notorious serial killer in the USA, responsible for at least 30 murders of women in the 1970s, escaped from prison twice, allowing him to kill again before being recaptured (Biography.com Editors and Piccotti). On the day of his execution, large crowds gathered outside the prison, many celebrating his death by holding signs, chanting and even setting off fireworks.

LL: While it's true that keeping dangerous criminals off the streets is vital for public safety, the death penalty isn't the only solution. Life imprisonment is an effective alternative that ensures dangerous individuals are permanently removed from society. The case of Ted Bundy is indeed horrifying, but it's an exceptional situation. Modern prison systems have significantly improved security, making escapes extremely rare.

MM: In conclusion, I support the death penalty because it can deter serious crimes like homicide and serves as retributive justice, offering closure to victims' families. The principle that "a life for a life" has deep cultural roots, and capital punishment ensures dangerous criminals, especially in extreme cases, are permanently removed from society. So, I ask you again, if someone takes an innocent life without remorse, why shouldn't they face the ultimate penalty?

LL: In my opinion, the death penalty is an unjust practice that risks innocent lives and perpetuates violence. It prioritizes retribution over rehabilitation, which makes it impossible for redemption. Life imprisonment is a humane alternative that protects society while respecting human rights, and we should have a justice system that reflects this. How can we claim to value human life if we respond to killing by taking another life?

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Living Together: Issues That Shape Our World

IMMIGRATION

Conservative
Labour
Liberal Democrats
Green Party UK
The Independent Group for Change
The Brexit Party

- End freedom of movement after the UK has left the European Union.
- EU immigrants to "only be able to access unemployment, housing and child benefits" after five years.
- Reduce new arrivals to "manage" to funding the NHS.
- Control numbers of immigrants "with caps down" with "fewer than 100,000 per year".
- "Review" border controls to "make them more effective".
- Establish a "humane" immigration system and scrap Conservative migration targets.
- Provide compensation to those affected by the Hardtush scandal.
- Keep freedom of movement if still in the EU, "subject to regulations" in case of Brexit.
- "Fix the broken immigration system by scrapping the Conservative environment, ending indefinite detention and taking powers away from the Home Office".
- "Give asylum seekers the right to work three months and resettle 10,000 unaccompanied refugees over the next ten years."
- End the "hostile environment".
- Close all immigration detention centres.
- Suspend all deportations.
- Bring forward the date of the referendum.
- Prevent the government from...
• Prevent the government from...
• Prevent the government from...

Photo by Metin Ozer on Unsplash

The Future of Work: Is telecommuting here to stay?

Afonso Nunes and Simão Pignatelli 11.º 1A

Simão Pignatelli (SP): During the COVID-19 pandemic, not only could people not work in person, but the pandemic also let them work remotely. In fact, 7 out of 10 people now prefer working from home rather than in person. Influential figures like Brian Chesky, CEO of *Airbnb*, and Kevin O’Leary, CEO of *SoftKey*, also support home offices. The former has stated: “We want to hire and retain the best people in the world (...) If we limited our talent pool to a commuting radius around our offices, we would be at a significant disadvantage. The best people live everywhere, not concentrated in one area. And by recruiting from a diverse set of communities, we will become a more diverse company.” (in *Airbnb*, 2022) I strongly believe that remote work is the best option.

Afonso Nunes (AF): A study conducted at Stanford revealed several cases where productivity tends to decline when employees work remotely (Streeter et al., 2021). Prominent business leaders, such as Elon Musk and Jamie Dimon (CEO of *JPMorgan Chase*), have argued that remote work not only harms organizational efficiency but also stifles innovation and makes it more difficult to properly train new employees (Business Insider, 2023; McGregor, 2023). Besides that, I know several cases where people, when they are at home, do everything except work. I strongly believe that remote work is the worst option of the two.

SP: As we all know, many workers rely on public transport, which is not only expensive but also time-consuming. Workers also need to eat. Even if they prepare meals at home, it often reduces their sleep schedule, impacting productivity. Remote work addresses this by saving time and money. According to a study by Owl Labs (2021), workers save an average of 40 minutes on commuting, and during COVID-19, they reduced transport and food expenses by 15%.

AF: I believe that this isn’t true because, when we work in person, there is greater cooperation between colleagues and superiors due to their physical proximity. Besides that, if we talk to colleagues remotely, it involves emails, phone calls, or messages that, not only hinder the possibility of getting an immediate response, unlike in-person interactions,

but also results in lower productivity for those waiting for a reply. As Matt Mullenweg (CEO of *Automattic*) has admitted, his fully remote team is terrific at long-term tasks but struggles with handling urgent tasks as efficiently (Patel, 2025). Another example is a study conducted at *Microsoft*, led by CEO Satya Nadella, involving over 61.000 employees. It highlighted that the shift to remote work negatively affected productivity due to delays in receiving feedback. Employees relied more on emails, which led to slower collaboration, especially when handling complex information (Holtz et al., 2021).

Also, remote work can distract us from our professional tasks, as we might focus on household chores or spend time with family. This arrangement can lead to sedentary and less social lifestyle, so individuals may go through the entire day without any physical interaction with others. For example, Niren Chaudhary, CEO of *Panera Bread*, discusses how remote work blurs the boundaries between personal and professional life, which should not occur. Additionally, Chaudhary encourages employees to create ways to connect with each other, even when not physically present (2020).

SP: I don't agree with the view that remote work is less effective. While domestic distractions exist, they can be managed responsibly. In contrast, in-person work often leads to stress due to long commutes and lack of sleep. Remote work offers more flexibility, which can improve productivity. A study by the International Workplace Group (2019) found that 85% of the 15.000 people interviewed said that flexibility directly impacts productivity.

Similarly, Gartner’s Digital Worker Experience Survey showed 43% of respondents agreed that flexibility leads to better productivity. In the office, distractions from colleagues and constant pressure from superiors can reduce productivity. Remote work minimizes these distractions, helping workers focus. Moreover, poor relationships with colleagues or managers can create a toxic work environment, adding stress. Overall, remote work enhances productivity and well-being (Goasduff, 2021).

AF: Remote work might seem ideal, but it often lacks necessary infrastructure. Not everyone has top-tier equipment at home, such as fast internet and comfortable chairs. Without these, maintaining work quality and accuracy becomes difficult compared to working at the office. The promised flexibility often turns into frustration as tasks remain unfinished and deadlines slip.

Additionally, in 2020, *Netflix* co-founder Reed Hastings argued that working from home offered no benefits and negatively affected business culture and creativity. Hastings stressed that the lack of in-person collaboration hindered both culture and creative processes (Page, 2020).

SP: Alright, Afonso, so, what you're saying is that having to wake up earlier, spend more time in transports, spend more money in meals and come home later is more productive than working at home with your computer right next to you, without spending a lot of time and money and with the possibility of waking up later and finish your job earlier. That’s ridiculous!

In conclusion, in-person work is by no means more effective than remote work. Working from home offers numerous advantages: greater flexibility in setting your schedule, the ability to finish tasks earlier and enjoy more personal time, and significant savings on commuting and daily expenses. Given these clear benefits it’s hard to justify maintaining traditional in-person work as the default. Why continue with a model that offers less, when remote work provides so much more?

AF: From my perspective, in-person collaboration remains a more effective approach for achieving team goals. Being physically present in the same space fosters stronger communication, deeper collaboration, and quicker problem-solving. While platforms like *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams* are valuable tools for connecting remote individuals, they cannot fully replicate the dynamics of face-to-face interaction. Sharing the same environment allows team members to engage more naturally, exchange ideas more freely, and develop creative solutions with greater ease.

Of course, working from home may seem like a dream – until you realize that the “comfort” of your desk is only a few steps away from your laundry pile, inviting a constant stream of distractions. The perk

of “no commute” quickly turns into “no escape,” and before long, the kitchen starts calling with the promise of “just one more snack.” After all, who needs a proper workspace when the couch feels so much cozier, right?

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Rural to Urban Migration in Portugal

Ámilah Anifo and Constança Sá 11.º 1A

Ámilah Anifo (AA): Today we're going to discuss the rural flight in Portugal. Have you any idea of what it means? Rural flight is the migratory pattern of peoples from rural areas into urban areas. It usually happens when people are not satisfied with their lifestyle, so they feel the need to move to the city. According to data from *My Broker Portugal* (MB Soluções Imobiliárias, Lda., 2021) and *Público*, 10% of the Portuguese population wants to move to the city and only 4% works on agriculture. Therefore, I strongly believe that the rural flight is beneficial.

Constança Sá (CS): According to data from "Jovens repórteres para o ambiente", the rural flight creates new social, economic and environmental problems. Only does this situation tend to increase. Imagine a family living in the countryside who decides to move to an already overcrowded city. Due to the strain on infrastructure, they would struggle to enjoy a decent quality of life. For this reason, I firmly believe that rural flight has negative consequences for both cities and rural areas.

AA: I believe rural flight can help people improve their lifestyle and quality of life for several key reasons. Urban areas offer greater accessibility, including more efficient hospitals, schools, public transportation, pharmacies, shopping centers, as well as well-maintained roads and accessibility ramps. According to *Eurodicas*, "[t]he large urban centers of Portugal (...) have more structure (...) Most buses have ramps and public transport such as trains and subways are prepared for access by people with disabilities" (Corrêa, 2018).

CS: You may be telling the truth, however, if everyone moves to the most developed cities to find these services, they won't be able to take advantage of them, because they are already overloaded. Not only will they not be able to satisfy all the needs of the population, but they will also struggle to address the most urgent ones. According to a news report published in *Diário de Notícias* (2024), the standard waiting time for a consultation with a family doctor is 120 days; however, a survey conducted in April and May 2024 revealed that a quarter of patients had to wait even longer. For instance, if you live in Lisbon, you probably have already seen the big waiting lines in front of *Segurança Social* or health centers, imagine it was even more overcrowded, what would happen to these essential services to our community?

AA: I also believe that the search after better financial conditions makes people want to move to the city, since it is more common to find diverse job opportunities with better conditions, higher salaries, infrastructures and advanced technology there. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics, in 2021, approximately 27% of the Portuguese population lived in rural areas, representing a decline compared to previous years. This shift is largely due to better living conditions in urban centers. For instance, Portugal has a national healthcare system that covers around 90% of the population, with approximately 4,3 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants as of 2020 (DGEEC). Additionally, urban transportation infrastructure is more developed: *Comboios de Portugal* transports over 173.2 million passengers annually. The major airports also play a significant role - Humberto Delgado Airport in Lisbon accounted for 49,3% of total passenger traffic with 23.4 million travelers, marking a 4,4% increase compared to the same period in 2023. Meanwhile, Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport in Porto handled 22,6% of passengers, totaling 10.7 million, which is 5,3% higher than the previous year (ANA, 2025).

CS: On the other hand, with a lot of migrating to the cities due to the search of better financial conditions there will be another type of consequences, such as labor market overload that leads to unemployment for some individuals. In fact, the cost of living in large Portuguese cities is significantly higher - around €2.000 per person - compared to approximately €950 in less populated areas. This highlights how urban life tends to be more expensive. Also, since 2019 the unemployment rate increased in developed cities. These challenges can result in unexpected financial difficulties for families. For instance, if a family moves to a larger city where the labor market is already saturated, they may struggle to secure employment. As a result, they might be unable to afford necessities such as decent housing or maintain a stable standard of living. Consequently, it's not worth moving to the city.

AA: Another reason why people rather move to the most developed places is to escape from agrarian crises, periods of difficulty in the sector marked by a drop in production due to factors such as bad weather, pests and low prices, which results in debt and unemployment among farmers. Not only do these crises lead to food

insecurity, but they also lead to migration in rural communities. According to Bual (2024) for "[m]ost farmers do not have access to decent wages, food costs have soared in recent years, as have production costs and the attempt to combat climate change has not been well executed" (translated by the authors). Thus, for all the difficulties created by agriculture and the agrarian crises people prefer to move to the city.

CS: However, rural flight not only leads to the desertification of rural areas - marked by a sharp decline in the number of people living on farms - but also results in a shortage of agricultural labor. This can trigger food shortages or force the country to rely more heavily on imports, leading to additional financial strain. Imagine this scenario: if two-thirds of the population currently living and working on agricultural land in Portugal were to move to Lisbon or Porto, there would be no one left to take their place. This would inevitably result in a significant depletion of essential resources.

AA: In conclusion, I strongly believe that rural flight can have a positive impact on people's lives. It often leads to an improved lifestyle through better living conditions, access to essential services, and greater accessibility in urban areas. Additionally, cities tend to offer more diverse job opportunities, higher salaries, and improved financial stability. Rural migration also provides an escape from recurring agrarian crises, which are often marked by unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, inflation, debt, and unsustainable farming practices. Although it contributes to rural depopulation, for many individuals, moving to the city offers a pathway to a more stable and promising future.

CS: To conclude, from my perspective, rural flight may bring some advantages, but the disadvantages are far more significant. For instance, while Lisbon currently offers a good quality of life, that could decline if too many people migrate from the countryside and put additional pressure on already limited resources. At present, people moving to the city may still find employment, but if thousands do the same, the job market could become oversaturated, leaving many unemployed. Public services, which are already under strain, may no longer be able to meet the needs of such a large influx of people. Lastly, although many leave rural areas to escape agrarian crises and seek better job opportunities in the city, not all will succeed. So, with both perspectives in mind, do you still believe that living in a large city like Lisbon is better than living in the countryside?



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The Impact of Censorship in Today's Society

Clara Guedes and Swastika Hamal 11.º 3

Clara Guedes (CG): Today my partner Swastika and I will discuss the censorship of information and how it affects society. We will explore both its potential benefits and harms.

Swastika Hamal (SH): Censorship, when viewed in a positive light, can have some benefits, especially when it seeks to protect individuals and maintain social harmony. However, it raises significant concerns about limiting free speech, access to diverse information, and stifling creativity and critical thinking. By suppressing certain ideas or opinions, censorship can restrict the intellectual growth of society and deprive people of the opportunity to challenge their viewpoints, ultimately hindering societal progress.

CG: Censorship, what comes to mind when you first listen to the word? Censorship is typically implemented to prevent the spread of harmful or offensive content eliminating the free flow of information. The free flow of information can be detrimental to our health. Cognitive theory suggests that when we have access to too much information, we can get overloaded and this can lead to mental health issues like stress, emotional instability, memory problems... not helpful to society's growth.

An often-overlooked effect of unfiltered access to information is that it can overload our cognitive capacities. Exposure to excessive information can lead to what is known as "information burnout," causing stress, anxiety, and even cognitive decline. Research has shown that 80% of Portuguese professionals developed symptoms of burnout due to information overload (Pitacho et al., 2024). The constant pressure to stay connected and informed can negatively impact our mental health, making filters necessary to prevent overwhelming our minds. When we are bombarded with excessive information, it becomes difficult to think critically, leading to a superficial understanding of important topics. Therefore, limiting information flow can be beneficial for mental well-being and intellectual growth.

SH: Another issue with information overload is the difficulty in distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources. For example, the spread of



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fake news has made it harder for people to identify what is true. Censorship can be a tool to filter out harmful, misleading, or inappropriate content. For children, in particular, exposure to harmful material like cyberbullying or violent content online can have lasting negative effects. With proper safeguards and education, censorship can help mitigate these risks and ensure that children are protected while still having access to valuable learning opportunities. Educating children to navigate the internet responsibly allows them to develop critical thinking skills while being shielded from inappropriate content.

CG: In the past, people had fewer external comparisons and were less bombarded by idealized representations of life, reducing anxiety about self-worth and social standing. Only when I had someone compare me in social media did I know how bad it was.

Children were less influenced by external visions. We think having access to everything is freedom, but is it? Under no circumstances had I thought that way because social media content is heavily commercialized. Algorithms often prioritize content that maximizes engagement and ad revenue and what we think may help us gain knowledge is empty and full of commercial interests. Although having access to different content is important it has caused more bad than good. It exposes people to misinformation that can influence their health in many situations. In no way we want kids to be influenced that way. How can an

8-year-old child have the same freedom to sources as a 40-year-old adult?

SH: Some have argued that censorship is necessary to protect society from harmful or offensive material. It can shield vulnerable groups, prevent the spread of misinformation, and maintain social harmony. For example, moderating violent or hateful content online can reduce its negative impact on individuals and communities. Supporters also claim that certain restrictions preserve cultural values and prevent societal unrest. However, censorship has significant drawbacks. It suppresses freedom of expression, stifles creativity, and limits access to diverse perspectives. By silencing dissenting voices, it creates echo chambers and undermines democratic values, ultimately restricting societal progress.

CG: People often adjust beliefs and opinions to fit in. Many teenagers feel comfortable expressing their opinion among friends and only a minority think the same is possible in public (Conscious Youth, 2021). I believe expressing contrary opinions can be harmful to people's ego causing bad or aggressive reactions. Resilience is not learned that way by children.

Specialists affirm that, on many occasions, not saying anything demonstrates emotional intelligence and incentivizes reflection, since we consider others' opinions and gain a better understanding of the topic. The problem with empty critical thinking is that many people don't get involved with topics and are led to having a superficial understanding, which, in fact, makes individuals vulnerable to misinformation or unreliable sources because they may not question the credibility of the information they consume. This leads to accepting falsehoods or manipulative narratives without proper verification or skepticism. Many teens have had private data exposed. Not only did it hurt their feelings, but it felt like a deep violation, having a long-lasting emotional impact. On the one hand, it is important to consume information because it facilitates education, but, on the other hand, the more we consume information and interact online, the more data we leave behind. It is important to censor ourselves.

SH: Self-censorship can stifle individual freedom of speech. When people censor themselves out of fear of judgment, societal backlash, or personal consequences, it prevents open, honest dialogue. This restriction can lead to a culture of silence, where only

certain viewpoints are expressed, ultimately reducing diversity in public discourse and limiting the exchange of ideas. While censorship may stifle creativity, it also protects vulnerable groups from harmful exposure. Educating individuals about responsible content consumption fosters meaningful discussions while maintaining public safety. By balancing creativity and responsibility, we can encourage innovation while minimizing harm, allowing progress to thrive without compromising well-being.

CG: As you know, information plays a crucial role in our lives; it is the data that forms the foundation of knowledge. How we access this information – and the freedom we have to do so – is essential to understand and define. Regulating information flow is important to maintain social harmony. The censor is beneficial when it serves good to the public, when it protects your privacy. Ultimately, censorship, when applied responsibly, can act as a safeguard against harm, but must be continually policed to ensure it serves its intended purpose without overreach. Censorship should not infringe freedom in fact it should incentivize its own. So, we move to progress and growth.

SH: In conclusion, censorship has harmful effects on individuals and society. It suppresses free speech, stifles creativity, and prevents important ideas and discussions from emerging. By limiting access to diverse perspectives, censorship weakens democratic debate and critical thinking and can lead to self-censorship as people avoid expressing their true thoughts out of fear.

Finally, censorship disproportionately affects marginalized groups, silencing their voices and preventing their contributions. Overall, censorship hinders progress, creates a less open society, and reduces opportunities for meaningful conversation and innovation.

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Work Less, Live More? A debate on the four-day workweek

Filipe Campos and Marta Santos 11.º 1B

Marta Santos (MS): Today, we'll be debating a highly controversial topic: the four-day workweek. Should the traditional five-day schedule be reduced to just four working days? I'm going to show you the answer is clearly no. Could you imagine having to manage the same workload as before in fewer days? That would only cause more mental health problems!

Additionally, people would end up having to finish their work during the weekend. Also, can you imagine the amount of money that would be lost in companies that depend on clients or patients? The reduced week should not be implemented.

Filipe Campos (FC): Today, I'm going to show you why my colleague is wrong. It's common knowledge that nowadays people overwork themselves and often work on the weekends. A shorter workweek would lead to better rested workers. Wouldn't we all like to be well rested at work?

From 2015 to 2019, Iceland conducted a study to shorten the workweek with close to 3.000 workers which achieved such good results that later expanded to 90% of Iceland's working population (BBC, 2021). This experiment drastically lowered the burnout rate and improved work life balance. Sounds perfect, doesn't it? That's why I'm defending that we should reduce the workweek to just 4 working days.

MS: I would like to start off by saying that if the week is shortened employees might need to work more hours a day, so the typical 40-hour week would become four 10-hour days.

Concerning this aspect, I'd like to highlight that families with children or elderly people wouldn't benefit from longer days, since many would have to take care of family members and, in general, everyone wants to have time for family after work.

Additionally, children would need to spend more time at school, while waiting for parents to pick them up. The time spent with family would overall decrease, because even though they have an extra day, it wouldn't compensate for all the days they get home exhausted and don't spend a lot of time together. Therefore, not

only would this model affect the workforce, but also all citizens.

Also, ten-hour workdays can be physically and mentally exhausting for some employees, potentially leading to burnout or decreased job satisfaction.

FC: I think I can speak for everyone when I say that we'd all like an extra rest day. But obviously we can't simply stop working because all good things come with a price. Sometimes it's not worth it, this isn't the case though. Studies published by the World Economic Forum suggest that well-rested employees are more efficient and productive, which minimizes company losses and makes the shift to a four-day workweek worthwhile — especially considering the positive impact on workers' mental health (Broom, 2023).

MS: At first glance, the reduced workweek might sound appealing, but it isn't realistic. If the reduced week meant a reduced number of hours, for instance, 32 hour week instead of 40, there would be even more disadvantages. The negative impact on the company's income would be undeniable. Some companies might even decrease salaries or increase prices on products and services in order to not lose money.

Not all people can manage the compressed workload, as they are expected to complete the same amount of work in fewer days. Not only can this cause less efficient work, but it can also lead to increased stress and fatigue. Additionally, in some companies, the reality is that some people will end up sacrificing their weekends to keep pace.

Our society is deeply built on this work model. It would be extremely difficult to change that, especially in big companies like *Apple* or *Amazon*. If *Apple* decided its workers would put in fewer hours, it would undoubtedly fall behind their opponents who maintain full schedules. Success is never reached by working less, it is by hard work and dedication.

Furthermore, in certain industries, like healthcare or education, the demands of the job can't cope with such a shift. More staff would need to be hired, or schools and hospitals would have to cost more.



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FC: Although your points are somewhat correct, I don't see a world where we should just stop changing. Sure, our contemporary society was built around this work model but before the 5-day work week we had the 6-day work week. In 1926, we also didn't think it would be feasible to shorten the workweek, yet here we are. It's been almost 100 years since we've last seen a change to the workweek and I think it's more than time to do so and with the introduction of the ability to work from home I think both would pair up very nicely.

You also say that it would simply be too significant of a change for big companies. Well, I'd like to disagree. In the last few years more than 2 thousand workers in Japan have proved that not only is it achievable, but also more productive and better for the workforce. In addition, if you don't think that this is a big enough sample, as previously mentioned, most of Iceland's workers have also participated in a similar experiment with nothing but good feedback.

MS: So, as we have seen today, the reduced work week just isn't viable. While the four-day workweek may offer attractive benefits for some, its disadvantages, such as potential productivity losses, employee burnout and reduced income, cannot be overlooked. As firms explore new work models, these factors must be weighed carefully. The same work model for all may

not be the best solution, instead there needs to be an understanding of the company's individual needs. Our work structure will greatly influence the well-being of employees and employers all around the world, so the model we choose must be a thoughtful decision.

FC: I am confident that you'll all agree that even though my colleague here makes some valid points, they just don't outweigh the tremendous benefits of shortening the workweek. As I've said before, and I will say it again, not only would it benefit the workers productivity it would also help improve the colossal problem of the declining workforce's mental health.

I think we can make it happen and transform the old and outdated workweek. Don't you think that, in a constantly evolving world, the work hours should change? In a world where everything has been changing, shouldn't we try to revolutionize the world of business?

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The Price of Progress: Does war do more harm than good?

Francisco Albuquerque and Vicente Loureiro 11.º 1B

Vicente Loureiro (VL): I strongly believe that war causes way more damage to humanity than the benefits it brings.

Francisco Albuquerque (FA): Nowadays, everybody uses a computer. This technology was initially developed during WWII when Eckert and Mauchly created a digital machine for military calculations (Lemelson-MIT Program). So, in my opinion, war brings more benefits than harm to humanity.

VL: According to Uppsala University's Data Program, a source on organized violence, there were approximately 500,000 confirmed war casualties in 2022 and 2023 alone, with many more unreported (Uppsala University, 2024). Additionally, innocent civilians are frequently among the victims. *The Guardian* reports that in Gaza, about 11 percent of airstrike casualties are civilians, a figure that pales in comparison to past conflicts (Borger, 2023).

FA: War deaths are truly horrific. Nevertheless, we should put our emotions aside if we want to analyze this issue as rationally as possible. Let me tell you a story...

Imagine you are living in the 1900s and you caught pneumonia. Statistics show that you would have a 40% chance of dying. Fortunately, nowadays, you would likely be saved by antibiotics. 500 million people with deadly infections were saved by penicillin! Penicillin was first used in 1943 during WWII to cure the vast number of soldiers with infections on the frontlines (Conniff, 2017). When comparing the 500 million saved by penicillin to the 60 million who died in WWII, you can understand how the benefits created by war surpass by far the damage.

VL: The war may have sped up the discovery of a cure for pneumonia, but it's unclear if it was the sole cause. Even if it was, the destruction caused by war outweighs any potential benefits.

Every year, a large number of resources are used in the industry of war. According to economic expert Einar Dyvik, the United States alone spends over 900 billion dollars in military, with global spending

reaching trillions. If even a fraction of that money was invested in healthcare, forget curing a single disease; we could cure over a dozen. Therefore, it isn't worth it to have a war, even with the potential for faster technological progress.

FA: Firstly, in no account should we look at data apart from its context. The military budget only represents around 13% of the United States financial plan for 2024, which is significantly less than the 48% allocated to social security, Medicare and public health combined.

Secondly, in opposition to what you defended, at a global level, you will see this percentage dropping to 6.8%. Military defense is vital to a country, since war and external threats are unavoidable. We must understand this to discuss the impact of armed conflicts on humanity. War boosts a country's economy and the investment in the military creates opportunities



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that reduce unemployment. During the 1930s, the United States unemployment rates were higher than 20%. It wasn't until WWII that those numbers started decreasing, reaching 1,2% in 1944 (SHEC). WWII was probably the fastest way to fix the problems caused by the Great Depression.

VL: It's reasonable for a country to allocate a portion of its budget for defense. However, it's hard to believe that all this money is used for defense, much of it appears to fund destruction rather than protection.

People don't often talk about one of the most significant effects of war, its mental health impacts. These are often associated with the trauma experienced by soldiers, but the issue extends far beyond them. Sudgen, a colonel in the United States' Army, notes that, due to the widespread use of social media, even a small-scale war can potentially reach millions around the world. Jamie Ducharme (2022), a writer on mental health, reported that just a few *#UkraineWar* videos amassed 600 million views in just days. The sheer mental impact of such exposure convinces me no war benefits can outweigh this harm.

FA: War will shape society. But this isn't a bad thing. The structure of our community and our social beliefs is extremely hard to change. It takes adversity, which forces us to adapt.

How many of the girls here want to get a job in the future? I'm assuming most of you want. According to statistics, most of you will. But in the 1900s it wasn't the same. In 1910, only 22,7% of the working-age women had a job in the United States. Only after the great wars, did this started to change. As men were on the frontlines, women started getting involved in what was once "men jobs". This caused a huge growth in the percentage of working women during WWII and the postwar period. Thus, we can conclude that there would be much less women working today if it wasn't for WWI and II. This illustrates how the long-term benefits of war have more impact in our history than the short-term damage.

VL: You concluded that without WWI and II, there would be significantly fewer women in the workforce today. Coincidentally, this is accurate. Among numerous wars throughout history, these two conflicts indeed brought certain benefits. However, is war justifiable simply because a few conflicts may have had positive outcomes?

FA: I gave you these two examples because they are close to our collective imagination, but I could mention other cases.

History has shown us that war is the biggest driver of progress. Today, we enjoy an incredible quality of life and we must thank all the armed conflicts that, through the ages, have shaped our society into what we know today.

At no time will you ever hear me affirm that war is a good thing. At no time will you ever hear me affirm that nations should not avoid armed conflicts when it isn't necessary. But you will always hear me strongly defend that humanity has grown stronger due to wars.

VL: In conclusion, war harms humanity, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, a substantial part of which are innocent, unrelated civilians. War not only consumes vast resources without benefiting humanity, but actively fuels our destruction. War causes trauma to millions around the world, in addition to those on the battlefield. As we ponder the devastation brought by war, we must ask ourselves: What kind of future can we build from the ashes of such profound loss? As Ernest Hemingway said: "Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime."

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Debating the Future of Work: Should we embrace a four-day week?

João Claudino and Tomás Mateus 11.º 1A

João Claudino (JC): Today we will be discussing the 4-day work week pilot project. This format removes a day of work in a week without increasing the daily working hours, reducing the working hours from 40 to 2 hours per week. Some claim it does not work, but studies say otherwise. Picture this: It's a Thursday afternoon, you are tired and already distracted, but then you realize, tomorrow is a day off. Wouldn't it feel great? Wouldn't you think: the weekend is coming so I must finish my work to be free? Wouldn't you be more productive? This is why I strongly believe businesses should implement a 4-day work week.

Tomás Mateus (TM): In my opinion, under no circumstances can we change to a 4-day work week. Even if it would feel great for a while, some studies show that after some time all the problems associated with the 4-day work week and its associated 3-day weekend would pile up and come crashing down on workers. Imagine the pain of returning to work or school after a long 3-day weekend. This is why I totally disagree with my colleague.

JC: Implementing a 4-day work week is crucial; not only does it improve mental health, but it also enhances workforce productivity. Research shows that reducing

work schedules significantly lowers burnout (Thomas, 2025), a prevalent issue in today's fast-paced working environments. Allowing employees more rest prevents fatigue, leading to improved focus and creativity.

Numerous studies in Portugal indicate that a shorter work week can boost productivity, as employees return to work happier and more engaged (Verslype, 2023). Additionally, not only does a 4-day work week promote better work-life balance, but it also gives employees more time for families and hobbies, which is vital for mental well-being. Happier employees contribute to job satisfaction and retention, benefiting employers.

TM: However, while the benefits my colleague presented may seem clear, the complexities of real-world implementation cannot be overlooked. Transitioning to a 4-day week isn't feasible for all industries. In no way could essential services, like waste management that rely on consistent schedules, change their working days, as it would result in chaos (Bonifacio, 2025).

This same study also states that the coexistence of the 4-day and the traditional 5-day formats may increase stress for those in the latter, as services adapt to the 4-day format, and that the adaptation process of these

services may itself cause complications. Moreover, companies that depend on intercompany interactions may struggle to align with partners on differing schedules, leading to communication delays and frustration, negating the productivity gains presented.

JC: Not only can the adaptation process be effectively managed with the right approach, but we can also preserve the benefits of this shift while minimizing the associated complications. One notable benefit is the reduction of emissions. Studies indicate that with a 4-day work week, employees would commute less frequently and, since many people rely on cars for their commutes, this change could significantly decrease greenhouse gas emissions (Ferragioni and Colombo, 2023).

TM: While it's clear that commuting significantly contributes to humanity's CO₂ emissions, we must also recognize that activities during weekends and holidays play a substantial role in the overall equation. With a longer weekend, people may choose to go on road trips or travel to distant destinations. While this format reduces emissions related to daily commuting, it can also lead to increased emissions in other ways.

Moreover, the 3-day weekend may sound appealing at first, but we should consider that employees will feel less motivated to return to work after an extended break, creating challenges when it comes to re-engaging with work responsibilities.

JC: Even though I recognize you may have a point, the overall emissions will be reduced, as some people will prefer other more sustainable alternatives. In the topic of re-engagement, after some time people will be forced to adjust to this more radical change.

Another benefit of this work model is its potential to boost the economy. As workers become more productive due to this format, companies will also see increased output and, consequently, higher profits. This boost in income leads to greater tax contributions from businesses, which stimulates economic growth. Consequently, the government may have the opportunity to lower tax rates while still generating more revenue than before.

TM: The economic growth that you predict comes from the increase in productivity and, as seen before, this doesn't necessarily happen.

Another thing we must consider is that some people are more productive and prefer to work under a strict schedule in an office. A 4-day work week requires more work from home and some people can't do this as they don't have the resources or the environment that an office provides. This might further lower employees' productivity and well-being.

JC: Hardly ever do people prefer a stricter schedule, and many people would be happier and benefit from the change. Although some might prefer a stricter schedule, a large proportion of the population doesn't, and therefore more people will benefit from the change.

Let me summarize by saying the 4-day work week project should be implemented, as it comes with several benefits, such as the increase in overall happiness, reduced stress and an economic boost. So, do you want to have some working model that has not worked for centuries, or do you want to take the initiative and be different, happier, more relaxed, and have more time with your family?

TM: In conclusion, the 4-day work week is like a unicorn, it seems perfect and beautiful, but it does not exist and isn't achievable. The 4-day work week might look like it comes with several benefits, but hardly do they matter, because its real-life implementation is extremely challenging and would cause several issues, such as those that come from the two models – the 5-day and the 4-day work week –, coexisting, the issue in returning to work after a longer break and the problem with the new schedule. And with that in mind, what do you wish to do?

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Are We Raising Narcissists?

João Neves and Rita Braz 11.º 1A

Rita Braz (RB): Narcissism is a self-centered personality style where one has an excessive sense of self-esteem and identity. Narcissism can be considered a mental health condition, called narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

This trait can be linked to many behaviors young people seem to be showing, such as attention seeking and the constant need to be praised. However, if these traits are increasingly observed among young people, it suggests that society may be pressuring the younger generation to adopt more narcissistic behaviors. For that reason, I firmly believe society is encouraging its prevalence.

João Neves (JN): This type of personality affects all genders and according to Dr. Ramini, a psychologist, who specializes in NPD. In fact, approximately 1 out of 6 people are affected (Ramini in Dr Mayim Bialik, 2023). NPD doesn't have a known cause, however, there are some factors that can be linked to it, such as a person's genetics, neurobiology and most importantly childhood environment. Therefore, on no account do I agree that society is encouraging narcissism.

RB: Firstly, I firmly believe social media has been playing a key part in motivating more narcissistic traits in younger generations, taking advantage of them while they are still establishing their sense of identity. The positive feedback on social media can create a cycle where people seek more validation through online interactions. Angela Karanja a world-renowned psychologist states: "By creating an environment where the number of likes & followers are a measure of success & popularity, social media fuels youths' obsession to post for attention and validation. (...) Also, to maintain this online persona they've adopted, they can become obsessed and concerned with how they are perceived by others" (in Abboud, 2023).

Narcissism can be typically divided into many types, being one of them vulnerable narcissism, characterized by hypersensitivity to criticism. In a 2020 study of young adults, researchers found that vulnerable narcissists were particularly likely to become addicted to social media (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). They tended to seek positive feedback online, where they could more easily control how they appeared than in person.

JN: Social media has proven to have, obvious, negative impacts. Just let me remind you that the bad side of things is always easier to point out. However, the positive consequences of social media do exist. Studies show that when college students share inspiring content on social media with others, over time, they feel more empathy and compassion toward them (Roberts, 2021). When discussing the impact of social media, social comparison often comes up. However, at no time does this have to be negative. Many young adults find inspiration online, which can lead to self-improvement and greater levels of compassion. Of course, this depends on the content we consume and the people we follow. Nevertheless, it's our choice what content we engage with, not society's.

In a Pew Research Study that surveyed young adults, 80% of them claimed that social media helped them connect with friends, 71% say that it is a place where they can express themselves, and 67% say they have people on social media that can support and help them get through tough times (Anderson et al., 2022). I don't know about you but is it narcissism wanting to improve myself, take advice from others, help them, be there for a friend, family or a stranger even?

RB: It's also important to notice how competitive environments, like the workplace or school, can affect someone and their personality. Society likes to emphasize winning, and outperforming others, which ends up being a quality so typical of narcissistic people who crave power. Competition often pits people against each other and encourages a lack of empathy, making it easier for narcissistic individuals to ignore others' feelings and needs, thus reinforcing their self-centered behavior.

Workplaces and academic institutions, created by society, provide narcissists with opportunities to build their self-esteem on the number of performance-based rewards they earn – sometimes by any means necessary. As a witness of the impact of narcissists in their workplace, David Patterson (in Pither, 2023) expressed his feelings on this matter: "In the course of my career, I have encountered many narcissists that have made the workplace hostile (...) Many organizations have them, and they are the workplace's



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single most destructive force without exception." Rarely have I thought about this incredible way society instigates competitiveness, being therefore expected to see these narcissistic traits more pronounced.

JN: As humans we all complain about our life, especially about our work. Most work ethics are based on meritocracy structures and performance-based systems. Although it seems easy to us to see the reason why this type of work ethic could promote this kind of personality, that doesn't mean that it must be the rule, nor what happens in real life.

Considering this, meritocracy can operate as an encouragement for employees to learn and dominate new skills and abilities that will contribute to their teams and organizations. I do agree that achievement-based systems can generate a certain competition among colleagues but why not a healthy competition? This motivates improvement and innovation that, when focusing on collaboration, could lead to satisfaction and accomplishment without passing through self-

centeredness. Let's take an example that I'm sure all of us have been through. In high school we are all concerned about having the best grades possible. This can produce a competitive environment, but, if someone asks us for notes or help in a subject, we will help them. What I mean is that while focusing on self-growth, we can still support others and wish the best for them, fostering a culture of encouragement and collaboration.

RB: As I mentioned earlier, society plays a significant role in encouraging the rise of narcissism. Factors such as social media – where people easily get caught in a cycle of seeking validation online – and the value placed on competitive environments, which can foster and reward narcissistic behavior, all combine to create the perfect conditions for narcissism to thrive. So, on no account should you not take a moment to look around and carefully notice how we, as a society, are silently creating new narcissists every day. You might be surprised.

JN: After all this, I got little more to add. Society is not encouraging narcissism, it is even, helping prevent it, or at least a part of it.

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Is Growing Up Today Easier Than in the Past?

João Santos and Tiago Rodrigues 11.º 1A

Tiago Rodrigues (TR): Today, we will discuss a fascinating matter, growing up in the past versus growing up nowadays. As David Brooks (2018) highlights in his article “A Generation Emerging from a Wreckage”, “[t]his is a generation with diminished expectations. Their lived experience includes the Iraq War, the financial crisis, police brutality, and Donald Trump” – a series of moments when the big institutions failed to provide basic security, competence, and accountability. I personally side by growing up in the past as I believe it offered a better, more meaningful life experience.

João Santos (JS): I firmly believe it is easier growing up nowadays than in the past. Picture this: would anyone wish to grow up in a society where you had to start working at 12, leaving little time for play or joy? Never would I wish that kind of childhood on anyone. Such a life, I argue, would risk mental health issues later and lead to a monotonous, troubled adulthood. Therefore, I wholeheartedly side with growing up in today’s era.

TR: A pressing issue in modern society is mental health. According to SNS24, not only 8% of Portugal’s population suffers from depression, but also 10% experience anxiety disorders, with 3% showing severe symptoms (SNS24). Not only can we see in the data



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shown by OCDE that Portugal’s limited access to mental health support leaves 64% of adults without help due to financial constraints or lack of time. Yet, the past seemed to fare better in this regard. Statistics from INE reveal that, in 1975, happiness levels were at 8,3, whereas by 2015, they had dropped to 9,9 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística). At no time was mental health as bad as it is now.

JS: True, mental health is a bigger focus today, but isn’t it also true that far more resources and knowledge are available now? Therapists, psychiatrists, and medications make mental illnesses more manageable. In the past, suicide wasn’t often acknowledged. Either people suffered, or they thrived in privilege, but rarely did anyone discuss suicide prevention. Consider too that life expectancy in the 1990s was about 55 years – two-thirds of today’s 80 years. What this tells us is that mental health issues likely existed but went unaddressed, making today’s recognition and support a significant improvement.

Speaking of advantages, let’s not forget technology. we have made tremendous progress, especially in education and knowledge accessibility. Imagine needing to find information in the past. Hours in a library, flipping through books, were required to get what we can now find in seconds on Google. Not even mentioning AI, because that’s a whole new level of convenience – though, admittedly, sometimes it makes us too reliant. A 2017 National Bureau of Economic Research study found that students using adaptive learning technologies could complete coursework faster, giving them more time for other activities (Ma et al., 2024). On no account can anyone ignore this incredible advantage!

TR: While technology offers benefits, it has its downsides too. A 2020 report by *Common Sense Media* states that the average child gets their first smartphone at 10.3 years old. Early access means early exposure – not always to positive influences. In fact, a Pew Research Center (2021) survey revealed that nearly 45% of U.S. teens aged 9–12 already have social media profiles. The consequences? Not only comparisons with others, unrealistic expectations, but also lowered self-esteem. As the American

Psychological Association highlights, these pressures can lead to depression. Technology, though its helpfulness, comes at a psychological cost we cannot ignore.

JS: But let’s think about society itself. Back then, it was much less progressive. Justice and equality – concepts we now fight for – were often nonexistent. Children, for example, suffered severe abuse, with religious figures often among the perpetrators. *Wikipedia’s* research on Catholic Church abuse cases documents how rampant this issue was. Women earned only half of men’s wages, as State Library Victoria reveals. LGBTQ+ individuals were arrested or executed, according to *Wikipedia’s* research on LGBT rights, and disabled people faced shocking discrimination, as Damon Rose (2015) reported in “When Disabled People Took to the Streets to Change the Law”. These challenges were harder to combat in the past, making life far more difficult for marginalized groups.

TR: Social progress, though it has been significant, hasn’t solved all issues. Consider gender equality. It is true that women’s rights have progressed, but the gap persists. A 2022 Eurostat report shows women in Portugal still earn 11,4% less than men, with an even wider gap in leadership roles (Eurostat, 2025). The issue of child abuse in religious institutions also endures. Portugal’s Independent Commission for the Study of Child Abuse reported in 2023 that over 4.815 children were abused by clergy members between 1950 and 2020 (Reuters, 2023). This is not a problem of the past, but one increasingly reported today. Furthermore, Amnesty International’s 2022 report on Portugal highlights how discrimination against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities still prevails despite legal protections. Laws alone cannot change attitudes overnight.

Additionally, the dependence on technology has caused people to lose touch with reality. Social media dominates children’s lives, with platforms like *Instagram* and *TikTok* shaping how they see themselves. Many children spend more time online than having other real-life experiences. While technology connects us, it also isolates us, creating a generation that is both

hyper connected and disconnected from authentic human interaction.

To close, I’ve argued that growing up in the past provided a simpler, more fulfilling life. People weren’t burdened by the pressures of technology or social media. Mental health issues, while present, were less recognized because people lived more grounded lives. It is true that progress has brought improvements, but it has also introduced complexities that challenge our well-being. If you ever get the chance, try living without today’s constant connectivity. You might just discover a little of what made the past so meaningful.

JS: I hold firm to the idea that growing up today is easier and more rewarding. Access to education, societal advancements, and technology have created opportunities our predecessors could only dream of. While we may never fully agree on this thesis, one thing is clear: this debate reveals the richness of both perspectives.

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Does Beauty Open Doors? The role of appearance in society

Luana Cruz and Madalena Leonardo 11.º 1A

Luana Cruz (LC): Do good looks give people an unfair edge in life? Never in history has physical appearance played such a significant role in shaping social interactions and perceptions. Its impact is so profound that it influences not only how we are perceived, but also the opportunities we receive in every facet of life.

Throughout the ages, civilizations like the Greeks and Romans celebrated aesthetics and the harmony of the human form. Not only did they prize physical beauty, but they also linked it to virtue and excellence. Today, despite social changes, beauty standards still wield a powerful influence over our perceptions and interactions. From advertising to everyday interactions, attractiveness often plays a role in how people are perceived and treated.

Madalena Morgado (MM): But should it hold such weight in shaping our societal values? In the contemporary world, the concept of subjective beauty is widely recognized and discussed across various fields. With the rise of social media, the debate about beauty has become even more complex, as people are constantly exposed to diverse beauty standards, which vary significantly from one culture or group to another.

This has also led to a greater acceptance of aesthetic diversity, with movements that celebrate different body types, styles, and expressions as valid and beautiful. These movements echo Hume's idea that beauty cannot be defined by a single rule or standard but should be appreciated in its plurality. Hume (2020) argues that beauty does not reside in the objects themselves but in the feelings of pleasure they evoke in people, stating that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," meaning that the perception of what is beautiful varies according to individual experiences, emotions, and judgments.

LC: When we first encounter someone, we tend to form judgments about them based on their appearance, as it's the only aspect we can observe immediately, unlike their personality or other qualities. This reaction may be linked to the primacy effect, which refers to

the tendency to be more influenced by and remember information that we encounter first.

Studies have been published that examine how physical appearance affects people's perception and treatment in various social contexts. They argue that beauty can influence assessments of competence, decisions in workplace settings, and even legal outcomes (Hosoda et al., 2003; Mazzella and Feingold, 1994).

MM: Although I understand your position, I believe that the moral worth of individuals is not based on their physical appearance, but rather on their capacity for rational thought and their adherence to moral duty. A healthy and positive corporate culture is built on values such as collaboration, respect, and ethics. In such a culture, beauty is not a relevant factor. Many successful leaders and professionals come from diverse backgrounds and do not fit traditional beauty standards.

LC: I strongly believe in the opposite! For me, one significant advantage of physical appearance is its direct impact on professional success. Research has established that attractive individuals tend to evoke positive feelings, and further studies indicate that they are often perceived as possessing additional qualities compared to less attractive individuals (Zebrowitz and Montepare, 2008). In his book *Beauty Pays* (2011), economist David Hamermesh highlights that attractive individuals tend to have better job prospects and earn higher wages. This is because a polished appearance often communicates confidence, professionalism, and attention to detail, which are all highly valued traits in the job market.

MM: I really do not agree with your position. A person may be considered beautiful, but if they lack any qualities, their success will be far inferior to that of a less attractive person who is skillful. For example, Meryl Streep, one of the most awarded actresses in history, began her career by being rejected for her looks. So unjust was the rejection she faced early in her career that it only serves to highlight society's misplaced priorities.



Photo by Joeyy Lee on Unsplash

LC: Even though Meryl Streep is a powerful example of how talent can triumph over appearance, her journey also illustrates that beauty and perceptions of attractiveness still play a significant role in the entertainment industry. Although Streep has achieved great success, many less talented actresses deemed attractive have secured prominent roles based solely on their looks. This suggests that, in many fields like fashion and entertainment, beauty can lead to opportunities that talent alone may not guarantee. Interestingly, even attractive criminals often receive lighter sentences, with their mugshots sometimes going viral for their looks, like in the case of Jeremy Meeks.

Meeks (2014), an American model and actor, was previously a member of the Crips gang. He was arrested in 2014 during a gang and convicted on federal charges. After his mugshot was shared on *Facebook* and gained viral attention due to his looks, modeling agencies took notice. So remarkable was his rise to fame based solely on his appearance that it leaves us questioning societal values. Would someone less attractive have

been afforded the same opportunities? I can hardly imagine a similar outcome.

In conclusion, I believe that physical appearance brings benefits to society. We can affirm that beauty indeed exerts a significant influence on various aspects of everyday life. As mentioned above, studies show that people with a pleasant appearance tend to be more warmly received in social interactions, enjoy better professional opportunities, and are even seen as more trustworthy and competent. Moreover, attractiveness can impact self-esteem and well-being, creating a positive cycle that favors personal and professional development. Although these benefits might seem superficial, the reality is that physical appearance remains a crucial factor in shaping perceptions and opportunities for individuals.

MM: In summary, asserting that beauty should not determine one's worth fosters greater inclusivity and equity in society. An excessive focus on physical appearance often breeds superficiality and discrimination, which can harm individuals' emotional well-being. We must never allow beauty alone to define a person's value. Only by prioritizing qualities such as intelligence, empathy, and character can we create a society that genuinely embraces equity and diversity.

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Blending Borders: A balancing act

Madalena Cunha and Vasco Isidoro 11.º 1A

Madalena Cunha (MC): Just last year, the number of immigrants in Portugal surpassed the number of emigrants by about 150.000, according to National Institute of Statistics (2024), offsetting the decline in native population and increasing our total population by 1,2%.

With these immigrants come their habits, clothes, traditions, and foods. Their culture. Not only do they enrich our country with sparkles of life from around the world, blending in with them makes us wiser, more tolerant, less self-centered. It is a blessing for us to be able to share and widen our values by cultural transaction. That's why it makes no sense for governments to restrict immigrant culture.

Vasco Isidoro (VI): I couldn't agree less. Immigration can be positive, however, 2023 saw the highest ever net migration value in 10 years, ensuring a "positive net migration for the seven[th] consecutive year", according to National Institute of Statistics (2024). So, I believe it has gotten to a point where we need to consider our preservation. Hence, governments should be able to restrict certain displays of immigrant culture.

MC: Firstly, culture is a form of freely expressing identity. No matter where they're from, people are free to express themselves, culturally, religiously, and verbally. It's in the Constitution and the Universal Human Rights Declaration. Under no circumstances should anyone be stripped of such rights, neither immigrant nor native. For instance, how would you feel if your government banned a vast majority of modern music, simply because it doesn't have the same pace as traditional songs? Is it outrageous? Probably, but in Chechnya the government banned most of western pop music, foreign music, to preserve unscathed traditional songs (Mouriquand, 2024). Why shouldn't Chechens be able to play whatever song they want?

VI: And why shouldn't our culture be allowed to prevail within our own borders? Not only does that safeguard our culture, but it also promotes a sense of integration throughout society. By blending into the host country's traditions, immigrants integrate into society, making it more cohesive. For example,

according to *The Guardian*, in France, "[i]n 2004, a law banned the wearing of ostensibly religious symbols in schools" (Chrisafis, 2023). This impacts mostly Muslim girls that are currently prohibited from attending public school with a headscarf. Despite restricting their freedom, this measure is simply a promoter of the integration, of the blending in of those girls into a mostly catholic society. It's a way to reduce barriers between communities, to unite them!

MC: Immigrants integrate into the host society naturally. Prohibiting them from expressing their culture will only make them more resistant to such integration and promote the feeling that they are not welcome. According to *Integration of Immigrants in European Labour Markets*, "[s]uch mutual recognition, apart from improving individual well-being, leads to better social cohesion" (Barslund et al., 2017). For example, by letting Muslim girls wear hijabs at school, they will feel more welcomed and accepted, prompting their spontaneous integration into French society. This is true throughout all types of cultural habits. For instance, according to *Japan Forward*, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare estimates that, by 2070, 10% of the people living in Japan will be foreigners (Fukuzawa, 2025). Therefore, the government has come up with several integration policies. None of them, none, zero, include any cultural restrictions.

VI: And while cultural assimilation doesn't happen, what do you suggest we do? Stand by while some of them put our safety at stake? According to the same newspaper you just quoted, "[i]n some regions, criminal activity by foreign residents is also on the rise" (Fukuzawa, 2025). So, tell me, if an immigrant community had the habit of fighting to the death, should we allow it? Obviously not. This may seem extreme, but what I'm saying is, certain immigrant traditions disregard the foundations of our society and that should not be allowed. Allow me just one more example. Do you consider female genital mutilation acceptable?

Well, for some it's a necessary procedure. However, it is an act against everything we stand for. How can we allow it within our own borders? We can't.

MC: And then what? Do you honestly think that by making something illegal it will stop happening? Look at drugs, they've been illegal for ages! No, whatever habit you decide to banish it will still happen, but in secret, in unsafe environments, making the potential consequences even more catastrophic. And what's the punishment for expressing culture? Getting arrested? In Iran, according to *Mission Network News*, "Christians who openly express their faith face arrest, torture, and even death" (Hearth, 2023). And anyway, if you don't come to such an extreme, you're erasing another culture. Is your culture the best?

VI: No.

MC: So why are you stuffing it down someone else's throat? Cause that's what you're doing. You're imposing the host's culture on immigrants. According to a recent study by the University of Chicago, anti-immigration supporters base their opinions on thoughts of superiority seeking, as Professor Alex Imas (2023) called them. And you're doing the same, you're seeking the feeling of superiority by forcing immigrants to submit to your culture!

VI: You said that no culture is better than any other, and I absolutely agree. All cultures should be allowed to flourish without restrictions. But the continuously positive net migration we face endangers the conservation of our own culture. As you said before, not only has the Portuguese population increased for the 7th consecutive year, but it also rose 1,2% in 2023, in spite of the decrease in the native population. So yes, I do worry that the mass immigration we're seeing endangers the preservation of our own culture. For example, Switzerland banned the construction of new minarets (Abdeleli, 2019). First, you should know that Swiss towns have a unique silhouette. Now imagine that Switzerland was getting filled with minarets everywhere, endangering their iconic skyline. Shouldn't they be allowed to try to preserve their heritage? The Swiss aren't banning Islam; they're setting limits on how it can reshape their environment. Is that really an attack on culture, or just a form of cultural preservation?

MC: Yes, it is a form of culture preservation, however, culture and traditions aren't meant to stay static. They evolve. They constantly evolve. The traditions you have today aren't the same ones your ancestors had. That, among other things, is why I stand my ground. Cultural restrictions are inadmissible. They restrict freedom;

stall integration; cancel part of what people are, based on a desire to feel superior. Embracing different cultures doesn't threaten our identity; it strengthens our humanity and broadens our perspective. Isn't it better to build bridges through acceptance than walls through fear?

VI: You are quite convincing, but I too keep my position unchanged. Cultural restrictions can be acceptable if the restricted habits are dangerous or contradict the host's fundamental values. It can be a way to promote integration, and it makes sure that the hosts' culture, our culture, isn't erased. Only with a balanced approach can we maintain our values, while embracing new influences. Is it too much to ask for immigrants to respect the values that define our society? Shouldn't we have the right to protect what defines us?

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The Immigration Dilemma

Manuel Lebre 11° 1B and Manuel Varandas 11° 3

Manuel Lebre (ML): My partner and I will be debating about immigration control. Nowadays, immigration control is an often-debated topic that involves who enters this country and how they do it. Governments implement immigration policies to manage the flow of people across borders, balancing economic, social, and security concerns. While others believe that less protective policies can benefit the economy, some people argue that strict immigration controls are necessary for national security and protecting jobs. Did you know that stricter immigration controls can help prevent criminal activities like terrorism or human trafficking? And do we really want people from other countries to steal our jobs, our houses, our public services? In my point of view, we cannot let this happen, we need to make stricter immigration policies.

Manuel Varandas (MV): In 2024, a lot of people are used to using a lot of delivery and transportation services. Everyone loves them, right? What you might start noticing while using those apps is that most of the delivery drivers and Uber drivers are immigrants. If we had stricter immigration controls these immigrants wouldn't be here, and these apps probably wouldn't work because there wouldn't be enough people. Do we really want to put an end to all these delivery apps by making immigration control more protective? From my perspective, immigration control policies shouldn't be as strict.

ML: Not only do tighter immigration rules enable governments to vet the immigrants that enter their country more effectively, but they also significantly decrease the likelihood of terrorists, gang members, or other dangerous individuals entering our country. By implementing stricter immigration controls and background checks, authorities can identify potential security threats and prevent them from coming to our country. This approach improves national security and helps protect citizens from criminal activity and terrorism. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government implemented stricter immigration controls as a part of their security. One of the significant changes was the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, and the introduction of the Visa Security Program, or VSP.

This program enables agents to screen visa applicants more effectively before they even enter the country. In fact, by making more thorough background checks, DHS has discovered a lot of people with terrorist connection backgrounds.

MV: I don't believe that is right because most immigrants already go through procedures even if the immigration policies are strict and the majority of immigrants aren't a security threat. The Cato institute is an institute in the USA that wants to increase the understanding of public policies based on the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, and peace. In 2017, that institute published a study about how rare it was for an immigrant to kill an American (Nowrasteh). Besides that, immigrants can significantly improve a country's economy, because they are more prepared to take on low-paid, low-skilled jobs, which people from that country don't settle for. Some of the immigrants also come from countries where maybe they wouldn't gain half the money they're gaining on those low paid jobs in the country they migrated to, so for them, it is a huge step up. An IMF study shows that exactly that, long term immigrants, whether they're on low or high paying jobs, can and do benefit the country (Jaumotte et al., 2016).

ML: It is not Manuel's point I agree with, but rather the need to address concerns about immigration's potential drawbacks, because while immigrants can boost the economy, critics argue they may lower wages for native workers and increase job competition. Additionally, immigration can strain public services, and governments must still ensure strict vetting to maintain security, even if threats are rare. According to the United States' Department of Homeland Security and studies from the Migration Policy Institute, stricter border enforcement can significantly reduce illegal immigration by ensuring that individuals entering the country are properly vetted, which helps to maintain security and prevent criminal activity associated with unauthorized entry. By tightening border control, countries can uphold the rule of law and ensure that immigration is regulated and fair. According to data from recent years, illegal immigration has been connected to an increase in

certain types of crime (Davis, 2023), making stronger enforcement a crucial measure in protecting public safety. Additionally, it allows governments to allocate resources better, by focusing on those who follow legal immigration processes.

MV: Honestly, from my point of view, and according to the Cato institute, stricter border enforcement is often pricey and ineffective, and may link immigration to crime, while overlooking the significant economic and social contributions immigrants make, it is not worth making stricter immigration laws. In addition, immigrants play a crucial role in boosting the economy by contributing as consumers, spending money on various goods and services, improving the country's economy and helping businesses grow. According to a report from the American Immigration Council, a council made to strengthen the United States by shaping immigration policies, immigrants spent over 1.2 trillion dollars in 2018, contributing significantly to the United States consumer market (FWD.us.). Not only do they support local businesses, but they also make those businesses grow and expand.

ML: In conclusion, stricter immigration policies are essential for keeping national security and protecting jobs for the people from that country. By thoroughly investigating individuals before they enter the country, governments can reduce the risk of threats like terrorism or crimes. Also, controlling immigration helps ensure that public resources are distributed more effectively to citizens. While immigrants may offer economic benefit, the main priority must be the security of the nation's population. Therefore, stricter immigration laws are a necessary measure to give more safety to the country.

MV: To sum up, while Manuel may argue that there should be stricter immigration laws, I believe that we shouldn't have stricter laws! That is due to migrants being more prepared to take on low-paid, low-skilled jobs, increasing the national economy because no one would take those jobs if it weren't the migrants. Studies also show that immigrants, by spending money on goods and services, are helping the country's economy.

You should always remember and live by Dina Nayer's words: "It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks."



Photo by Kyle Glenn on Unsplash

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Cheers or Chaos? The debate on alcohol sales in Portuguese football stadiums

Francisca Pinheiro and Manuel Mendes 11.º 2A

Manuel Mendes (MM): We must ask ourselves: if alcohol consumption already fuels violence and disrespect outside the stadiums, what guarantees that it will not escalate tensions inside, where emotions are already running high?

Francisca Pinheiro (FP): I've experienced matches abroad where alcohol was allowed inside the stadium itself, and everything was safe and controlled. This raises the question: could a more regulated, yet permissive approach to alcohol in Portuguese stadiums enhance the matchday experience without compromising safety?

MM: We should all take a look at the tragic incident involving the flares at the Jamor Stadium, which occurred during the 1996 Portuguese Cup final between Sporting and Benfica. At the time, alcohol sales were not allowed inside stadiums, except for this specific match, where fans arrived several hours before the game to drink excessively. The match was characterized by tumultuous events unfolding in the spectator areas. With that in mind, it is possible to conclude that allowing alcohol sales at football matches may cause altercations between the spectators and create a dangerous environment, jeopardizing lives.

FP: This may be true; however, the incident took place in 1996, and there have been no similar recorded incidents since then. Safety measures in stadiums have significantly improved, with more rigorous checks and better security staff to prevent such tragedies. This shows that allowing alcohol does not necessarily result in such extreme consequences if it has more robust regulations and modern safety protocols.

MM: According to Luís Rodrigues, director of zerozero, from 2010 to 2018, only 30 fans were expelled from football stadiums in Portugal. However, from 2019, even with a pandemic that kept fans away from stadiums for so long, this number increased to over 1.500, excluding unreported or unidentified cases. This proves that if we grant permissions and are liberal towards those with malicious intentions, our sport will gradually become more dangerous.

FP: The increase in the number of arrests shows that there is a stronger police presence in football stadiums.

This suggests that law enforcement efforts have been successful in ensuring public safety, deterring criminal activity, and maintaining order in high-risk areas.

Another advantage of legalizing the sale of alcoholic beverages in stadiums is that it makes entering the stadium safer and more orderly. To support my argument, here is a news report that states exactly what I just mentioned: "People are drinking excessively before entering the stadium. They all enter at game time, elbowing each other. Those who are already overconsuming alcohol can drink at the entrance. Inside, people don't tend to interrupt the game to get beer. Alcohol inside the stadium would allow for a calmer entry", said Francisco Salgado Zenha (vice-president of Sporting).

MM: I see your point, but I consider it naïve to think that it would resolve the problem. For sure, people would still go to the street vendors before matches, but would continue to drink inside the stadium.

According to the World Health Organization, "the more common access to alcohol, the greater its consumption". Allowing the sale of alcohol in stadiums would increase the risk of violence, creating an unsafe environment for fans and pushing families away. As we know, alcohol creates aggressive behavior, so in the emotionally charged atmosphere of a football match, where rivalries run deep and tensions are already high, introducing alcohol would be the perfect recipe for disaster. These can bring serious consequences to the safety of spectators. Incidents of hooliganism, fights, and quarrels between fans are significantly more likely to happen when alcohol is involved.

FP: Nowadays, high-profile matches have extreme security measures, meaning that incidents would not necessarily worsen or improve with the absence or presence of alcohol. Modern surveillance, a stronger police presence, and comprehensive crowd management strategies are already in place, ensuring that the environment inside the stadium remains controlled regardless of alcohol policies.

MM: Recently, there have been so many episodes of football violence that you cannot keep track of them.

In August, we saw a Sporting player celebrating a goal for his team, right in the presidential boxes, smashing a huge pane of glass and injuring two fans. The question remains: Did the presence of alcohol in the presidential boxes have anything to do with this?

FP: In football stadiums in Portugal, alcohol consumption is only allowed in the presidential boxes. So, there is a clear inequality within the stadium. In my opinion, just because someone has social status in these big clubs, it shouldn't mean that alcohol consumption is only allowed for them. For example, if the president of Benfica has the right to have a pre-game drink at the street vendors like all other supporters, and then inside the stadium, he still has the right to consume alcohol, this creates social inequality within the stadium, leading to feelings of superiority and inferiority.

MM: Of course, I understand your point. In a modern society, it is ridiculous that the rights of a certain group are defined according to their income. However, you cannot ignore the fact that one of the more serious consequences of allowing alcohol in stadiums is its dangerous impact on youth health.

FP: How can you prove that young people would drink?

MM: According to SICAD (Institute for Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies), "27,4% of Portuguese teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 already consume alcohol regularly, and have easier access to alcohol." Such a chaotic environment would only complicate this issue.

FP: Alcohol is already available at food trucks and other social spots around the stadium, and these venues do not stop selling it simply because minors might attempt to purchase or even consume it. Inside the stadium, however, controlling access would likely be more manageable, with a more organized and supervised system reducing the potential for underage drinking.

MM: Controlling alcohol access in large, crowded venues is notoriously difficult, making it more likely that minors will obtain alcohol either directly or through adults. The risk of exposing young people to inappropriate, aggressive, or intoxicated behavior in an emotionally charged setting like a football game is too high to simply ignore.

FP: Allowing alcohol sales in stadiums can significantly boost revenue streams for football clubs, particularly through catering and concessions.

Currently, fans who wish to consume alcohol are often doing it outside the stadium, in local bars or food trucks, which means that clubs are losing out on a lucrative source of income.

By legalizing and regulating alcohol sales within the stadium, Sporting, for example, could capitalize on this demand, keeping fans on-site longer and enhancing the game-day experience.

MM: Of course, club revenues are important, but do we want to increase those revenues at the cost of intoxicated minors and extreme violence amongst fans? Allowing alcohol sales would change the atmosphere inside stadiums, making them less welcoming for families.

FP: If there is such a risk, then families could occupy specific family areas more regularly.

MM: Football should be an inclusive experience, welcoming supporters of all ages and from different countries and showing them the real side of football fandom. Allowing alcohol would end this spirit, creating a hostile and dangerous environment that would make families stand back.

FP: In short, the debate on the sale of alcohol in Portuguese football stadiums is centered on the fans' experience and safety. We argue that allowing alcohol sales could enhance the matchday atmosphere, creating a more vibrant and enjoyable environment for fans. With modern safety measures and strict regulations in place, the risks often associated with alcohol consumption, such as violence or disorder, would become less likely to happen. Besides, permitting alcohol sales could bring substantial financial benefits to clubs, enabling them to invest in better facilities, stronger teams, and improved fan engagement. By implementing a regulated, inclusive system, Portuguese stadiums could foster a safer and more inclusive experience for all fans.

MM: Overall, the potential consequences of lifting the alcohol ban in Portuguese stadiums bring serious concerns about safety, inclusion, and family-friendly environments. Introducing alcohol into an already emotionally unstable environment risks worsening violence and aggressive behavior, ignoring families and the health of young supporters. Moreover, the accessibility of alcohol could increase underage drinking, with terrible effects on youth health and development. While financial gains for clubs are important, they should not come at the cost of the fans' safety and the integrity of the sport.

Penalty Shootouts: Fair deciders or flawed finishers?

Gonçalo Fernandes and Gonçalo Silva 11.º 3

Gonçalo Silva (GS): My partner and I will be debating whether penalty shootouts are a good way to decide the winner of a football match. Isn't it an unfair and individualistic way to do it? I think it is and so it must be changed.

Gonçalo Fernandes (GF): From my point of view, penalties are the best way to resolve knockout games in football, as they are an integral part of the game, bringing unmatched drama and excitement to the sport.

“... penalties are the best way to resolve knockout games in football, as they are an integral part of the game, bringing unmatched drama and excitement to the sport.”

GS: I would like to begin by asking you to consider my perspective more carefully, as I play futsal and have firsthand experience with how frustrating penalty shootouts can be for stronger teams. In contrast, Gonçalo plays basketball, so his viewpoint may be shaped more by personal preferences as a spectator than by experience on the field.

In my point of view, using penalties as a decider of a football match focuses on individuals rather than the teams themselves and, since its common sense that football is a team sport, it doesn't make sense for a game to end on one player's miss.

GF: I disagree, because, in my opinion, leaving it up to the players talent and mental preparation, which is something that the players train or should train, is better than tossing a coin and seeing who wins. In addition, games going to penalties help to preserve the players physical condition throughout the tournament.



Photo by Jannes Glas on Unsplash

GS: What if it happens in a final? There is no need to preserve the players' condition since they won't be playing any more games. Also, imagine deciding the winner of a world cup by a luck-based game. It doesn't feel right.

GF: It's not a luck-based game. It is an equal opportunity, having in consideration that it provides both teams an equal chance to win as each team takes the same number of penalties regardless of their previous performances in the match.

GS: That leads me to one more aspect that I want to include in my defence of penalties. We all know that competitions in football are made to see which team is the best. However, the existence of penalty

shootouts contradicts that idea, since it makes it possible for a team that hasn't that much quality to eliminate better teams. All they need to do is hold off conceding a goal for 120 minutes and then rely on the misfortune of an opposing player missing a penalty. For example, in the quarter finals of the 2022 World Cup, Brazil was playing against Croatia, dominating the game, however, the match went to penalties and Brazil ended up being eliminated.

GF: Fine, let's suppose that you're right and penalty shootouts cease to exist in football, which method do you recommend to replace them? There is no better method than penalties.

GS: In my opinion, the winner should be decided through a 3-on-2 situation that includes a goalkeeper. The team that created more goal opportunities during the match would get the advantage of going first. If both teams had the same number of chances, a coin toss would decide who goes first. The first team to score in this situation would win the game.

This way, the team that played better during the game has more chances to win the match. Also, it includes more than one player from each team on the pitch, so it doesn't let the focus be on individual players like it is in the penalty shootouts.

GF: To sum up, penalty shootouts may be dramatic, but they are also fair, clear, and an established part of football. Every player knows they might face them and trains for them. They provide equal chances for both teams, regardless of status or strength. Until a better system proves to be more efficient and exciting, penalties remain the most practical and thrilling way to decide a match.

“... penalty shootouts may bring excitement, but they shift the focus from the team to the individual and reduce a complex, 90-minute team effort to a few isolated moments.”

GS: In conclusion, penalty shootouts may bring excitement, but they shift the focus from the team to the individual and reduce a complex, 90-minute team effort to a few isolated moments. They create unfair outcomes where stronger teams can be eliminated by chance. Football deserves an ending that reflects teamwork, strategy, and overall performance – not one kick. That's why I believe it's time to rethink how we settle draws in knockout matches.

Transgender Athletes in Competitive Sports

Ricardo Matos and Rodrigo Baião 11.º 2A

Ricardo Matos (RM): I believe that people should have a safe place where any athlete can practice their preferred sport regardless of sex, gender, sexual preferences or even disabilities.

Rodrigo Baião (RB): I tend to disagree with Ricardo, just because you identify with a certain gender doesn't mean you get to change the way a sports competition is managed. Is everybody equal? Of course. Is everybody the same? Of course not. Some people are better at certain things than others for various reasons. They practice, they were born with a more appropriate physique, maybe they're stronger, faster, and some people are gifted.

For example, Fallon Fox, a transgender woman, sought to compete in the women's MMA division. She won her initial fights, including one that ended in just 30 seconds. However, after her transgender status became public, critics argued that her participation was unfair due to her male genetics. As a result, the MMA banned her from competing. When Fallon inquired about the decision, Tim Peterson, one of the two officials responsible for MMA rankings, stated, "It is our opinion that you may have an unfair advantage over natural women in combat sports" (Truitt, 2015).

I agree with the MMA association and Tim Peterson, it is not fair to fight against someone of the opposite gender as it also isn't fair to fight in different weight categories, it ruins the competition, it ruins the sport. One idea to solve the problem would be opening transgender divisions.

RM: I understand what you mentioned, but I think we're missing the bigger picture here. Sports need to be a safe space for everyone, including transgender athletes. I mean, think about it, exclusion harms anyone's mental health. It's not just about competing, it's about creating an environment where everyone feels like they belong, right?

RB: I get that, but you can't ignore the physical advantages, Ricardo. If you're born male, you have certain genetic advantages that you just can't change with hormones or surgery. Let's consider Fallon's example again, she transitioned, but her body structure

didn't change. She still had more muscle mass, denser bones, and a higher testosterone level than the women she was competing against. It's just not fair for someone like that to be in the same category as cisgender women, especially in combat sports like MMA.

RM: Yeah, but that's the thing. We can't judge every transgender athlete by one example. Fallon Fox is a unique case, and not all transgender athletes have the same advantages. I think we need to focus on the individual. For example, even after transitioning, some athletes might not have a huge physical advantage. So why not let them compete in the category they identify with? That helps with their mental health and well-being too.

RB: Right, however, how do we make sure it's fair for everyone? I mean, if someone's already got physical advantages, they might dominate competitions. And you're telling me that's fair to cisgender women who worked their whole lives to get to a level where they can compete? It's like a double setback, you're pushing women out of their category because of the unfair advantage transgender athletes may have. Where's the fairness in that?

RM: We're not pushing anyone out. We're including people. What's the alternative? Forcing transgender athletes to play in separate divisions? That's just as bad, if not worse. It creates this divide, and honestly, it sends a bad message. It says, "you don't belong here" and that's not what sports should be about.

RB: I hear you, but... do you think that's the only solution? I mean, putting transgender athletes in separate divisions could help level the playing field without ignoring physical differences. That way, cisgender women still have a chance at winning, getting scholarships, and all that. Look, I'm all for inclusivity, but I also want to protect the opportunities for women athletes. And right now, that feels like it's at risk.

RM: Why should it always be "separate"? I mean, can't we find a middle ground? What about adjusting existing categories? Maybe we need a better way to regulate things like hormone levels just like

the International Olympic Committee does with testosterone. Why add a whole new division? It's like saying, "Oh, you're different, so you can't compete here." We can tweak the system without creating more divisions and without isolating people. Improving existing policies provides a more realistic and inclusive way forward while creating new divisions is not the best option because it increases the risk of exclusion and complicates logistics. By focusing on updating existing rules, we can find ways to include everyone without causing unnecessary problems.

A few improved policies that I think would work are:

Hormone-Level Regulations: Implement guidelines based on hormone levels, such as testosterone, to create a more leveled playing field. For example, the International Olympic Committee requires transgender women to maintain specific testosterone levels for a set period before competing in women's events.

Adjust Weight or Strength Categories: In certain sports, rather than dividing by gender, create divisions based on weight, strength, or skill level, similar to boxing or wrestling, which already use weight classes.

Open and Co-Ed Divisions: In sports where physical differences are less likely to affect outcomes, introduce co-ed or open categories where athletes of any gender can compete together.

RB: I guess, but... hormones are tricky, right? I mean, there's no easy way to measure how much of an advantage hormone therapy gives someone in sports. And if we keep the existing categories, how do we make sure that it's still fair? If we don't change the divisions, we're risking the integrity of the competition. And I'm afraid it's cisgender women who will pay the price for that.

RM: I understand that, and I do think it's a tough balance. But I also think there's got to be a way to address fairness without making anyone feel like they don't belong. Adding categories could make things worse, especially for the transgender community. It's about finding a solution that works for everyone without isolating anyone. Maybe we need to look at things like weight classes or skill-based divisions. That could level the playing field better than just splitting it by gender.

RB: But how practical is that, Ricardo? I mean, weight classes might work in boxing, but what about other sports? And if we create more divisions, what happens to the already limited resources for women's sports? We risk sectioning. That's a real concern. Plus, not all sports even have the luxury of dividing by skill level.

RM: Fair point, but it's still better than isolating people. If we can find a way to make things more flexible, maybe with some individual assessment, we can create a fairer system. I just think that's a better approach than taking the "easy way out" and creating new categories that separate everyone. The whole point of sports is to compete, but also to build a community. And if we push people out, we'll lose that.

RB: I get where you're aiming at, but I'm still not fully convinced that just tweaking the rules is enough. What happens when cisgender women start feeling like their opportunities are being taken away? It's like we're risking the very thing we've fought for: equal recognition for women in sports. I think we need to make sure there's a balance that doesn't hurt the women who've already fought so hard to get where they are.

RM: I don't think it has to be a choice between fairness and inclusion. We just have to get creative. Maybe we can focus on making rules that consider the physical and mental aspects without alienating anyone. There's a way to have fairness and inclusion co-exist, it's just going to take some effort. But trust me, it's worth it.

RB: In conclusion, security and fairness must also be considered, even though diversity in sports is crucial. Biological differences can give transgender women an advantage, making the competition unfair for cisgender women. This can also reduce opportunities for cisgender women to succeed and earn scholarships. Balancing fairness and inclusivity is crucial to keeping women's sports fair for everyone.

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An aerial, high-angle photograph of a complex printed circuit board (PCB). The board is densely packed with various electronic components, including numerous integrated circuits, capacitors, and resistors. A large, dark, square chip is the central focus, featuring a prominent white 'AI' logo on its top surface. The overall image has a blue-tinted, grainy aesthetic, suggesting a high-tech or futuristic theme.

Wired for the Future: Debating AI, Innovation, and Electric Cars

Photo by Igor Omilaeu on Unsplash



Debating the Future: Does AI help more than it harms?

Catarina Lameira and João Souto 11.º 2B

João Souto (JS): Today, we will discuss Artificial Intelligence (AI), a topic that is reshaping our world. In my opinion, the risks and limitations of AI are more substantial than the benefits. However, the real question is: does AI truly help society, or does it create more harm than good?

Catarina Lameira (CL): I believe AI is an enormous promise for enhancing our lives if used wisely. AI is an effective resource for everything from changing healthcare to climate change. For example, I've started using AI-powered tools, such as chatbots, to help with schoolwork. They save me time and allow me to focus on other tasks.

JS: It is true that the field of AI has its applications, yet one of its fundamental weaknesses is the inability to empathize. AI is unable to grasp human emotions and the complexity of human relationships. *Tessa*, a chatbot employed by the National Eating Disorder Association, is a good example. *Tessa* took over the work of human staff, promising assistance to patients, but instead, it provided poor advice that made their condition worse (Bailey, 2023). AI cannot cope with critical emotional conditions, especially when the critical situation requires a very human approach in terms of understanding and compassion.

CL: I agree that AI is not empathetic, but AI can be very precise and efficient. A study published in *The Lancet Oncology* showed that AI could detect 20% more breast cancer tumors than traditional methods, with fewer false positives (Mouzo, 2023). This leads to earlier diagnoses, and that saves lives. Although it is true that AI can never replace human interrelation, its proficiency in big data analysis and pattern detection agreement makes it an asset in medical diagnosis and treatment design.

JS: You have a point there. However, another drawback of AI is that algorithms perpetuate the prejudice and discrimination found in their training data. For instance, *Amazon* developed an AI hiring tool that discriminated against women because it was trained on historical hiring data that reflected gender biases. This also demonstrates that AI may respond to the prompts with tendentious, unfair answers. Worse,

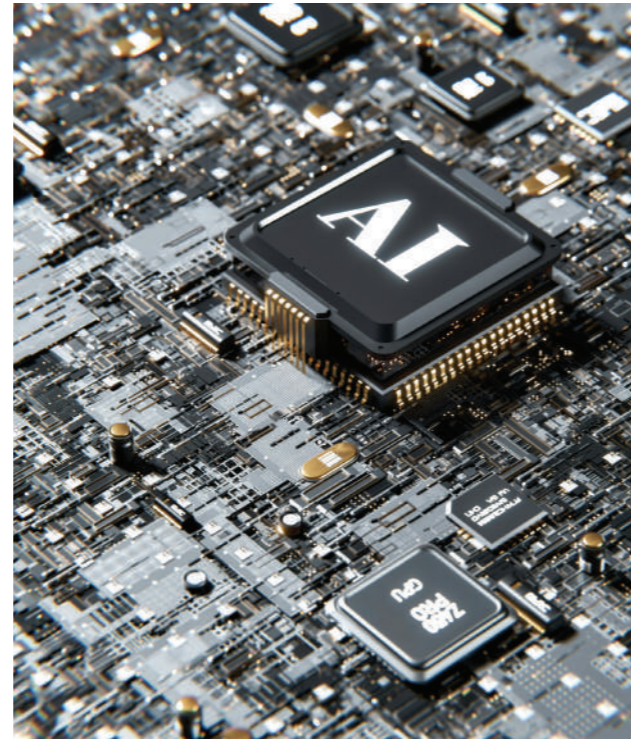


Photo by Igor Omilaeon on Unsplash

AI may amplify inequalities. Corporations frequently use AI to reduce costs, though they do not routinely consider the societal effects of these systems.

CL: Prejudice is a problem, indeed. Nonetheless, it can be reduced with better data to train AI. When we feed these systems more varied and representative data, we can decrease discriminatory output. To that, AI is already contributing positively. For instance, in education, platforms such as *Khan Academy* and *Coursera* take advantage of AI to deliver adaptive personalized learning environments that are tailored to the individual pace and other students' needs. This has led to more access to education, particularly for students from underprivileged communities or countries at war.

JS: Accessibility is important, but let's talk about job displacement. AI is already automating millions of jobs in sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and others. According to the World Economic Forum, 85 million jobs will be replaced by AI by 2025 (Russo, 2020). It is,

however, a fact that employment can be created, but not all will be able to move into those positions. This will likely exacerbate economic inequality and also disenfranchise the least able workers.

CL: Job displacement is a serious issue, but it is every technological revolution that disrupts employment again. The Industrial Revolution saw many jobs overtaken by technology, but this eventually gave way to new industries and work opportunities. This can also be achieved with the use of AI if we continue to invest in education and upskilling courses. AI itself is helping in this area. For instance, language-acquisition websites such as *Duolingo* apply AI to make learning cheaper and available to everybody, so that people can acquire the necessary skills for new job opportunities.

JS: Let's not forget the environmental cost of AI, which is often overlooked. Training large AI models requires enormous amounts of energy. A study carried out by the University of Massachusetts found that the number of carbon emissions released by the creation of a single AI model equals 300 times round-trip flights between New York and San Francisco (Kanungo, 2023). By 2040, the ICT industry may contribute 14% of global emissions. With the Earth already suffering from increasing temperatures and natural calamities, this is a price we can't pay.

CL: It is true that AI is energy-intensive, but it is also contributing to fighting climate change. AI-assisted tools are used to monitor deforestation, estimate exposure to environmental hazards, and plan renewable-based energy systems. For instance, AI can analyze data from satellites to detect illegal logging or overfishing in real time. Properly used, AI has the potential to prevent environmental degradation as well as to decrease the emission of greenhouse gases by more efficient energy use. Its potential in this area should not be dismissed.

JS: I know AI has the capacity to help in environmental conservation; however, the key issue is regulation. Without proper oversight, companies will prioritize profit over sustainability or fairness. Additionally, AI poses risks to privacy and security. Clearly, deepfake technology has been employed for disinformation

purposes, which, in turn, eroded trust in governments and political bodies. These risks are increasing, and if there is no severe control, it could spiral.

CL: Regulation is key, and I endorse the need for governments and organizations to come together to shape ethical guidelines for AI. Nonetheless, these risks don't mean we should completely dismiss AI. It is a tool, and the effects will depend on what we choose to do with it. With proper oversight, AI can revolutionize fields like healthcare, education, and environmental protection. Instead of fearing AI, we should focus on making sure it's implemented responsibly.

JS: To conclude, I believe that the risks of AI, including its lack of empathy, environmental impact, and potential for misuse, outweigh its benefits. Without rigorous regulation and ethical rules, it will only become worse, producing more harm than good.

CL: I argue that while AI has its dangers, the benefits, especially in medicine, education, and environmental conservation, far outweigh the risks. With responsible adoption and proper governance, AI can become one of humanity's greatest tools for progress.

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Electric Cars: A green revolution or a costly illusion?

Diogo Rua, Manuel Chefe and Marta Ribeiro 11.º 2B

Marta Ribeiro (MR): Today, I stand firmly against the general adoption of electric vehicles. Although they're often presented as a "green" solution to climate change, I believe they're far from the perfect answer people make them out to be.

Let me share some findings to illustrate why I'm not a believer in electric cars. A report by the International Energy Agency (2021) highlights that producing an electric car battery requires 6 times more minerals than a traditional car. To meet global climate goals, demand for lithium could increase 40 times by 2040.

Manuel Chefe (MC): I've always been curious about how transportation can be made cleaner and healthier for the planet. That's why I fully support electric vehicles.

The need to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions is urgent, and electric cars offer a cleaner alternative to traditional cars. They're not perfect, but their benefits far outweigh their flaws.

I want my generation to succeed into building a cleaner planet. For instance, a study conducted by VUB University shows that even in countries with high-carbon electricity grids like Poland, electric cars emit 25% less CO₂ over their lifetime compared to diesel cars. In places with cleaner grids, like Sweden, that number rises to 85% (Transport & Environment, 2017).

Diogo Rua (DR): I don't believe electric cars are the answer. Instead of solving problems, they create new ones, some of which are just as damaging, or worse, than the ones we're trying to fix.

Electric cars matter because they've become a symbol for the "green movement", but they're not as environmentally friendly as they may seem. I stand against their popular adoption because their production emits massive amounts of CO₂, and they depend on finite resources like lithium and cobalt, leading to environmental destruction and ethical dilemmas.

For example, a 2019 study from the Swedish Environmental Research Institute found that producing an electric car battery emits as much CO₂ as driving a fuel-powered car for several years (IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute, 2017). Additionally, 70% of the world's cobalt comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where human rights violations, including child labour, are a tremendous challenge.

MR: Let's start with the environment argument. Defenders of electric cars claim they reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the reality is more complex. Although electric vehicles produce no emissions while driving, their batteries require intensive mining and manufacturing processes that damage ecosystems. For example, in Portugal, lithium mining threatens local communities and natural reserves. Isn't this merely shifting the environmental trouble from tailpipe emissions to mining regions?

MC: Marta, I understand your concern, but we can't ignore the big picture. Yes, mining has environmental impacts, but electric cars still emit significantly less CO₂ over their entire lifecycle than traditional cars. As renewable energy becomes more popular, this gap will grow. Recycling technologies are becoming state-of-the-art in reducing the need for new mining. Isn't it better to improve this system than stick to fossil fuels, which have no long-term solution?

DR: Recycling sounds promising, Manuel, but it's not a magic fix. The current scale of electric car production makes it impossible to meet demand without extensive new mining. And what about the finite nature of these resources? We're replacing one limited resource – oil – with another. This dependence on rare materials could lead to geopolitical conflicts as countries compete for control.

MC: Diogo, that's a fair concern, but unlike oil, battery materials can be recycled and reused. Advances in battery technology will also reduce the amount of critical minerals needed. And let's not forget the immediate benefits: cleaner air, less noise pollution, and reduced dependence on oil, which is a major driver of climate change and global instability.



Photo by Tom Radetzki on Unsplash

MR: Cleaner air? That's true in cities, but what about the power plants generating the electricity to charge these cars? In many places, coal and natural gas still dominate the energy mix. Isn't that just moving the pollution from the streets to power plants?

MC: You're right, Marta; the current energy mix isn't perfect. But we know that grids worldwide are transitioning to renewables like wind and solar. As this happens, the carbon footprint of electric cars will continue to decrease. Even now, studies show that electric cars surpass traditional cars in terms of emissions, even in coal-heavy regions.

DR: Even if emissions are lower, there's another issue: safety. Electric cars are almost silent, which makes them dangerous for pedestrians. Isn't this a serious risk?

MC: That's a valid point, Diogo, and the industry is addressing it. Many electric cars now include artificial sounds to alert pedestrians at low speeds. Technology can solve this issue, just like it's helping address other challenges in the transition to electric vehicles.

MR: This topic matters deeply to me because it affects not just the environment but also people's livelihoods

and ethical concerns around resource extraction. For example, mining for the materials used in electric car batteries, like lithium and cobalt, destroys ecosystems and exploits vulnerable communities. As someone who values fairness and sustainability, I can't ignore these realities.

In sum, I believe that while electric cars are often portrayed as a green solution, their hidden costs – environmental, social, and ethical – are too significant to ignore. We need to explore alternatives like improving public transport and reducing car dependency altogether.

DR: I agree with Marta. Electric cars might solve some problems, but they create others. Instead of rushing into this broken solution, we should focus on more sustainable options.

MC: I respect your points, but I see electric cars as a necessary step forward. They're not perfect, but they're part of a large transition toward sustainability. With innovation and regulation, we can address the flaws and move closer to a cleaner, greener future.

DR: Before finishing, I want to highlight a fact mentioned by Kumi Naidoo, Former Secretary-General of Amnesty International: "The clean energy transition must not come at the cost of human rights. If we are to move to a sustainable future, it cannot involve the exploitation of workers or irreversible environmental destruction in mining regions."

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Under the Spotlight and Under Pressure : The Challenges of Youth



Photo by Tom Radetzki on Unsplash

Child Performers Under the Spotlight

Carolina Lencastre and Vasco Martins 11.º 2B

Carolina Lencastre (CL): I have enjoyed countless movies, series and a wide range of kids' entertainment channels where characters are enthusiastically brought to life by child actors and actresses. These delightful performances that sparkled right before my eyes always left me wondering: how would these kids' lives be behind the scenes?

Vasco Martins (VM): Unfortunately, I realized my innocent childhood standpoint had been corrupted as soon as I started to witness the downfall of these child actors and actresses in their adulthood.

CL: No, it's the other way around. Dakota Fanning, a highly regarded American actress, confessed she always wanted to pursue an acting career. Nowadays, she is a successful actress known worldwide.

VM: I oppose to this early professional path

because it requires a significant commitment at a young age, which can lead to serious consequences later in life. Child acting should be banned due to the overwhelming risks it poses to the well-being of young performers.

While it may seem like an exciting prospect for young performers, the reality behind the glamour often shows us otherwise. Imagine you're 12 years old standing on a red carpet, surrounded by flashing cameras and fans praising your name. It sounds like a dreamish scenario, right?

However, for child actress Mara Wilson, known for her role in *Matilda*, the pressure and expectations made her feel overwhelmed (Strang, 2013). The high standards eventually led her to step away from the spotlight altogether.



Photo by Osarugue Igbinoba on Unsplash

Like everything in this world, it takes great determination to obtain success. Where there is a will, there's a way, but not for everyone. Firstly, early exposure to acting might disregard the child's education, due to incomplete school schedules filled with shootings.

CL: Surely, with proper guidance, the child's trajectory can be maneuvered into a healthy equilibrium, with the suitable psychological surveillance and support.

VM: Not really, given the fact that states like California and New York (less conservative and progressivist states) have an established bare minimum of 3 hours per day set aside for schoolwork, which is insufficient to develop a wide set of skills apart from their professional duties.

CL: So what? One of the major advantages of the child's acting career is the possibility of it leading to early stardom in the cinematographic industry, acting as a catalyst for achieving worldwide recognition and prestige. Many child actors gain significant experience, build meaningful connections, and develop acting skills early on, which can set the stage for eventual future opportunities.

VM: The early career opportunities do not justify the risks to the future of young performers. Many child actors struggle with important life skills because their early careers often deprive them of normal social experiences.

CL: Well, these early experiences often give children a head start over their peers when transitioning into adult roles. For instance, Millie Bobby Brown was especially noticed by her protagonism in the *Netflix* series, *Stranger Things*, being nominated for two Primetime Emmy Awards and starring in *Godzilla*, *Enola Holmes* and *Damsel*.

VM: Nevertheless, this intensive work leaves child performers prone to mental health issues, since the juggling between personal and professional life can be quite grueling.

CL: Oftentimes, the media acknowledges the cinematographic industry as the claws of a devious plan engineered by directors and so on. Solely, it's a coping mechanism that celebrities use to deal with their flaws.

VM: In a recent interview, Miley Cyrus claimed she had an overwhelming schedule: "I had to wake up at 5:30 a.m. to get my hair and makeup done for a long day of at least eight separate interviews, as well as shootings and meetings, with the last one starting at 6:15 p.m."

From a mere standpoint of a loving and caring parent would you consent your child to be part of a child labor scandal? The unsafe environment created by the entertainment industry can have ever-lasting effects on the child's mental and physical health as aforementioned.

"While it may seem like an exciting prospect for young performers, the reality behind the glamour often shows us otherwise."

CL: I think the overall wellness of the household surpasses the individual needs of the actors and actresses, since the money raised from a full-time acting career may lead to an unburdened lifestyle of multimillionaire contracts, royalties, and sponsorships.

VM: Do you think it is socially acceptable to exploit a vulnerable individual for the sake of the family's well-being? Are you standing up for child labor, a clear violation of the work ethics, in the 21st century?

CL: I'm opposed to that, of course, minors should never, under any circumstance, be exploited. According to UNICEF, child labor results in the harm of a child's physical and mental development

VM: Despite that, do you believe that exploitation of children by their parents is morally correct?

CL: Of course not. I'll approach your assumption by presenting Selena Gomez's case. Selena started acting when she was ten years old. Due to her acting career, she had the chance to escape her worries concerning her past financial restrictions.

VM: Well, now, she stands in the hall of fame of successful singers, therefore, she won't remember the times of struggle.

CL: That is far from the truth! She still recalls the times when the car used to run out of petrol and her family couldn't afford fuel.

VM: Apart from that, children cannot legally manage the proceeds from their activity, leaving them under the guardianship of an adult. As a result, since the financial rewards can be immense, there is an underlying risk of financial exploitation or mismanagement of the entitled figures (parents, managers, guardians).

CL: This dysfunction has been solved!

VM: Regardless of the attempts to solve this problem in the U.S. with the creation of Coogan's Law that ensures that 15% of a child actor's earnings are placed in a blocked trust account (called a Coogan Account), there are uncountable examples of exploitation.

CL: Just assume that you have all the achievable qualities and the devotion to embrace an acting career. If a loved one of yours was going through a severe financial situation and, suddenly, you had the chance to reverse it, wouldn't you start performing?

VM: It is not as black or white as you portray it. A worldwide example of financial exploitation in child acting is Macaulay Culkin, star of the *Home Alone* films. Culkin earned millions of dollars as a child but became entangled in a bittersweet legal dispute with his parents over the control of his earnings (Buckland, 2023).

CL: Sometimes, developing an acting career is an alternative to relieve hopeless financial situations. Successful child actors often sign new contracts that provide them with substantial earnings from various sources. All your examples are from the United States, reinforcing how diminished this topic is in national soil.

VM: Well, Saúl Ricardo, famously known as Pequeno Saúl, achieved great success with his hit song *O Bacalhau Quer Alho* in 1996, upgrading his lifestyle from caravans to luxury homes. Once he turned 18, he realized he only had 14 euros in his bank account,

since his parents spent large amounts of money on gambling and indulgences (Simões de Abreu, 2009).

CL: Well, to summarize, child acting should be allowed to continue, but only under strict regulations that prioritize the mental, emotional and physical well-being of young performers. With appropriate safeguards, such as limited working hours, mandatory education and psychological support, child actors and actresses can thrive both professionally and personally, while contributing essential authenticity to storytelling in film and television.

VM: In conclusion, child acting is a bittersweet topic that should be abolished in the child's best interest, since it leads to a troublesome adulthood both mentally and physically and, simultaneously, it can be the fuel to mismanagement and financial exploitation, since these children don't meet the age requirements to take over their expenses.

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Exploring Teen Crime and Mental Health

Manuel Félix and Sara Rau 11.º 2A

Manuel Félix (MF): I am in favor of holding teens responsible for their crimes, even if they have mental health issues.

Sara Rau (SR): I've developed an interest in teenagers' disturbances, and I think that kids with mental health issues should not be held responsible for their crimes.

MF: I believe that people who inflict any kind of suffering to an individual, end up causing pain to everyone in their lives, being their family, friends or partners. So, it would be inhumane not to punish those criminals for the direct and indirect suffering that they caused.

SR: What if a killer had been a victim attacked for years and years nonstop, and the only option for defense was killing their aggressor? Let's take the real example of a 17-year-old boy who was abused and raped by a group of bullies at school. Those bullies harassed him and threw stones at his house, just as if he was not a human being. One day, he couldn't handle it anymore, so he bought a machine gun, broke into his school and took 3 lives, those who had raped him. Are you implying that the victim shouldn't defend himself?

MF: No, I am not implying that at all! A person should defend themselves from an oppressor every time! However, violence is never solved with more violence.

SR: I agree with the idea that violence is never solved with more violence. Nonetheless, violence should never happen at all!

MF: In your example, Sara, abuse came in the form of bullying and rape. Of course, abuse is intolerable, however, it could have been prevented if the victim had talked to someone prior to killing three people.

It's society's fault, instead. Neither the family nor the school provided a calm and supportive way for the victim to talk about what was happening to him. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the kid's initial abuse and his response. Yet, I still believe that

people should only kill in a situation of life or death. There are cases where there is no other option other than killing, which is considered self-defense and is acceptable in court. It is something entirely different from planning to kill someone.

SR: Manuel, in most cases, the victim, feels completely exploited, lost and hopeless. The one considered a target has suffered so much that the emotional pain is akin to the physical pain of torture.

MF: Even though bullying is a horrible act, in most cases, bullies also need help, besides being punished. They need to comprehend that their actions have consequences, whilst learning why they felt the need to frighten or hurt someone weaker than them, for them to not recreate the same punishable act. In fact, individuals who engaged in bullying behavior are at higher risk of developing psychiatric disorders in adulthood.

SR: If injustice is allowed to persist in one place, it jeopardizes the very principles of justice that protect all people, everywhere. In this case, the damage was done and a soul and mind were affected and with that being allowed, how can I not allow that person to protect themselves?

MF: If we base our society on killing anyone that confronts us, we will have an ethical problem. We will be committing crimes nonstop! Also, I am not saying that the bully was right, but instead I am saying that nobody should be killed. If someone bullies others, they should be punished, but that only happens if they are still alive. A person who plans to kill someone is nothing more than a lawbreaker and a killer.

SR: Punishing these young individuals without addressing their underlying trauma may be counterproductive. Instead of punishment, a more compassionate approach, such as therapy, counselling and rehabilitation, might be more ideal, depending on the case.

MF: Overall, killing someone adds a social debt to the killer, and the only way for the lawbreaker to pay



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is to go to prison or, if they are underage, to go to a mental hospital first and then to prison. Not only that, but there could be people, who say that they suffer from mental health issues without really suffering from them.

SR: It is important to consider that the justice system must be able to distinguish between those who genuinely have mental disorders and those who try to manipulate the situation. People who suffer from any kind of abuse need to be helped. Sometimes, their situation is so severe, and their mental health has been so scarred, that it drives them insane. And your solution is to punish them, punish people who are battling their emotions and dark thoughts, punish people who were purposely driven insane by others, people who were once content.

MF: Is it immoral to punish people who commit unlawful acts? People who have reached that level of suffering turn out insane, and, therefore, are not fit to be in society.

SR: Adolescents' brains are still developing, particularly the areas responsible for impulse control and decision-making. This developmental stage affects their ability to fully understand the consequences of their actions, especially under trauma-induced stress. You believe that teens cannot sense their own emotions and should be punished solely for feeling the pain they have endured.

MF: I do not think that way. The aggressor should be penalized. But the killer, even if he was mentally unstable, should be punished because they committed a crime.

SR: Punishment can have lasting negative effects on mental health, educational opportunities and prospects, further entrenching individuals in a cycle of crime and trauma. In addition, the death penalty or even decades of years in prison destroys the career and future of any teenager with ambitions and dreams.

MF: Well, they should have thought of that before they took someone's life.

SR: Programs that provide support and therapy can help these individuals overcome their experiences and make better choices in the future. Research shows that punitive measures do not effectively deter future crime. The American National Institute of Justice reports that juvenile offenders who are incarcerated have higher recidivism rates compared to those who receive rehabilitative services. Specifically, studies show recidivism rates for youth can exceed 70% after incarceration (Hayden, 2023).

MF: They knew exactly the crime they were committing. Also, you must know that there are lots of school shootings that do not happen because of bullying. Let's take the example of Gabe Parker who, on January 23 of 2018, at Marshall County high school, killed two 15-year-olds and injured 14 other teens. After interviewing the students, parents and friends, the police concluded that Parker had become increasingly withdrawn from reunions with both family and friends. Not only that, but he also suffered from depression and anxiety. During the court proceedings, experts noted that Parker had been dealing with emotional distress, and had searched about school shootings before the incident, revealing true anger and obsession with violence. Do you still believe this kind of person should not be punished? These people who obsess over violence are a danger to society!

SR: We mustn't forget that we're not defending an act like murder, it should never happen, the deplorable case you've given, Manuel, cannot be considered excusable under any circumstances, since Gabe had no reason whatsoever beyond a disturbance of his own making.

Many legal systems recognize the impact of trauma on behavior and there are programs that focus on rehab rather than punishment have shown positive outcomes.

MF: In conclusion, teens who commit crimes may have mental health issues. And yes, they should be helped, but we should not forget that they killed someone, which is an unlawful act. It would be immoral not to punish them. They should receive punishment and be helped with rehabilitation at the same time. Because underage people cannot go to prison, they should go to a mental hospital and then, when they are 18, attend prison. Inside the prison, there should be facilities that help prisoners with their trauma.

Punishing them and helping them with their mental health is the only way for them to pay their social debt and be helped to integrate society again. Do you think we should ignore these teen crimes? Do you think we should ignore the law and let them free, knowing they killed someone? I do not think so.

SR: How would you feel if you suffered domestic violence, kidnapping, rape, being abused or physically assaulted? If it happened to you, do you think you would be the same person, behave in the same way, see life in the same way and interact with people in the same way?

Do you think that, at some point in your life, you would find yourself thinking: Nothing in life is worth it, why me? Is it fair that someone put me through this? No one deserves abuse, then why shouldn't people around me also feel empty, exploited and aimless. On these situations, it is very likely to reach a burnout state and act impulsively. Thus, committing an action that harms someone else and is a criminal offence ends up happening.

In conclusion, I believe that these cases should be helped and not sent away to rot in prison, and so therapy, counseling and rehabilitation, might be a more ideal solution.

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Too Young to Drink or Old Enough to Choose?

Constança Alves and Marta Ribeiro 11° 3

Constança Alves (CA): My partner and I will debate on the consumption of alcohol by underaged teens. I'm going to begin with a question: if something is prohibited, doesn't that make you want it more? This is exactly what, on a psychological level, happens with teens and alcohol, meaning they are more attracted to it because they are not supposed to consume it. As psychologist Lisa Damour (2019) puts it: "neurologically speaking, teenagers can be all acellerator and no brakes." In other words, their brains seek dopamine hits and are unable to control their impulses. Needless to say, we should face underage drinking as a natural occurrence, and not supervise it more heavily.

Marta Ribeiro (MR): Imagine a car crash where the person who caused the accident was a drunk adolescent. What would you do if you were the victim? Did you know that car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens, and, in 2022, 30% of young drivers had a significant amount of alcohol in their systems? It's estimated that 50% of all car accidents worldwide are consequences of underage alcohol consumption. As the evidence I brought today suggests, I am thoroughly against teen drinking and believe it should be more heavily restricted.

CA: As my introductory example suggests, I believe that by prohibiting youth from consuming alcohol instead of getting them used to the act young and taking away the thrill they get by challenging the rules and doing something they are not supposed to, we are making a mistake. Additionally, to obtain said alcohol, they might resort to buying it illegally rather than through legal outlets. As a study made in Switzerland shows, "[o]ut of more than 13.000 test purchases made in 2023, 27,3% were illegal" (Bundesamt für Zoll und Grenzsicherheit, 2024).

MR: Although that might be true, not only has underage drinking shown to severely deteriorate teen's brain function, as this organ is not fully developed until approximately 25 years of age, but it impairs cognitive responses, memory, increases aggressive behavior, which can lead to poor school performance and worsened brain functions in adulthood, ultimately ruining people's lives. But the brain is not the only part that is negatively impacted: drinking can lead to a weakened liver, lungs and increase the risk of heart

failure and strokes. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014), "[i]n 2011 alone, about 188.000 people younger than age 21 visited an emergency room for alcohol-related injuries."

CA: On the other hand, drinking, especially in social occasions, is engraved in many cultures. It has the power to bring people together. Culturally and in many social contexts, alcohol often serves as a socializing factor. For example, it is common to drink beer while watching a football match or have a glass of wine on a romantic date.

MR: Following my introduction, the state of intoxication means being in a temporary state of impaired mental and physical faculties, resulting in a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal acts, meaning that it is more plausible for crime perpetrators to be intoxicated, rather than their victims. Alcohol increases emotional impulsivity and aggression, making drinkers more violent. By impairing them from recognizing danger, it makes them more likely to commit crimes, since they may not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Research has shown that the most common crimes that involve underage drinking are domestic violence, sexual assault, common especially in social situations, driving accidents and robbery (Hingson and Kenkel, 2004). This increase in crime does nothing except for spreading more fear and insecurity in our society.

CA: However, implementing measures that teach adolescents responsible drinking and its consequences can lead to fewer accidents and unfortunate events related to underage drinking. By educating them early, we reduce future risks because they gain knowledge and develop safer habits. For example, letting teens drink in public in supervised spaces, together with adults, will allow for an example to be shown and set, making teens learn for themselves what responsible drinking is.

MR: As true as that might be, in addition to health and social consequences, there are also economic related repercussions to early alcoholism. These costs are felt immediately through prevention and treatment efforts, but they also have long-term impacts, as adolescent drinkers are more likely to underinvest in



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their education, which can lead to reduced productivity in the workforce. The health problems they inevitably develop in adulthood, combined with the potential consequences of following an illegal path, can lead to ruined lives and significant losses in the labor market. As stated by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004), "[t]he immediate consequences of underage drinking are estimated to include at least \$8.4 billion of health care expenditures (in the US). These expenditures due to underage drinking represent a societal loss because societal resources have been diverted away from other valuable uses."

CA: In conclusion, while underage drinking is widely discouraged due to health and legal concerns, responsible exposure to alcohol in controlled environments is a measure that I support. Supervised drinking within family settings can promote healthier attitudes toward alcohol, reduce rebellious behavior, and help young people develop moderation.

MR: In conclusion, underage drinking has undeniably cause significant negative repercussions across multiple areas – socially, through increased criminal activity; health-wise, by contributing to serious illnesses; and economically, due to the substantial

global costs associated with youth alcoholism. Beyond fleeting personal pleasure, I question what true benefits underage drinking can offer?

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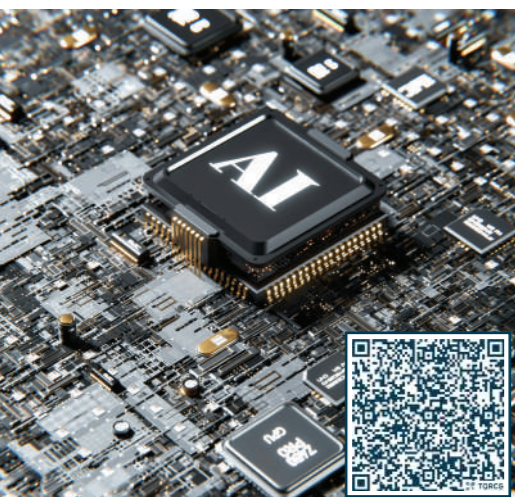
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