

“

Debate is a cover-story: never having to be honest about your true intentions while pretending to be open-minded.

...

But really, from Oxbridge to courts to government, we can easily see it's not a debate, it's a war.”



**It's Not a  
Debate  
It's a War!**

**Nina Power**

*O thou Powers of England, though thou hast promised to make this People a Free People, yet thou hast so handled the matter, through thy self-seeking humour, That thou hast wrapped us up more in bondage, and oppression lies heavier upon us; not only bringing thy fellow Creatures, the Commoners, to a morsel of Bread, but by confounding all sorts of people by thy Government, of doing and undoing.*

– John Taylor, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* by Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, 1649.

If only there had been a proper revolution in this country, where the aristos and landowners had been dispatched and dispossessed once and for all. Despite the best efforts of our utopian political ancestors, we are stuck with exactly same bastards who made everyone's lives a misery hundreds of years ago. They have the same names, own even more of the land, go to the same schools and universities and believe they have a God-given right to govern, pilfer and demonise everyone else. Their traditions are as nauseating as they are cruel: bloodsports, class war, incarcerating the poor, not to mention polo, finishing schools, up-turned collars and smashing up restaurants for fun.

One thing the ruling class loves above all else is 'debate'. Although the rule of law came about as a consequence of the bourgeoisie getting sick of being thrown in jail by whimsical aristos, today's elites, all of them, know that the law is always on their side, regardless of whether they are really old school feudal elites or only posh since the last 300 years. Debate is class war, as determined by *them*. 'Debate' is what future arms dealers are taught to engage in, how future prime ministers are taught to eradicate all residual human feeling, how judges are able to sleep at night and how the powerful are able to pretend that the normal running of things is in any way 'fair'. When the 2011 Eton entrance exam asks 13-year-old boys to hypothesise being Prime Minister and to defend the shooting dead of protesters, we catch a glimpse of this taught moral flexibility:

*The year is 2040. There have been riots in the streets of London after Britain has run out of petrol because of an oil crisis in the Middle East. Protesters have attacked public buildings. Several policemen have died. Consequently, the Government has deployed the Army to curb the protests. After two days the protests have stopped but 25 protesters have been killed by the Army. You are the Prime Minister. Write the script for a speech to be broadcast to the nation in which you explain why employing the Army against violent protesters was the only option available to you and one which was both necessary and moral.*

But unfortunately for everyone else, this kind of imaginative exercise doesn't remain hypothetical for very long. These people move from volatile scenario on page to violent action in real life without ever encountering people who might have reason to protest, protected as they are by gated communities, boarding schools, poorly-treated nannies, private education, money to burn, member's clubs and, above all, money, assets and private property. Being trained to argue *anything* so long as it preserves the existing order is the definition of law as practiced by the state. The moral flexibility that private schools and debating societies teach *is* the rhetorical lubricant that ensures that the ruling class will always win. No one else will ever win 'the debate' because the entire purpose of debate is to prevent anything truly disruptive from happening, all the while masking real violence from being seen. While Britain brutally colonised half the globe, its posh young men were learning to equivocate over glasses of sherry. Just as the police are trained to regard members of the public as dangerous, incomprehensible beings best handled at the end of a baton, so the people who give them orders are trained to eliminate all normal human feeling. The notorious hierarchy and cruelty of British boarding schools is no coincidence: how else to treat the rest of the world as inferior without having internalised a hard, intractable kernel of inhumanity inside your soft young self? Debate is merely one disciplining technique among many, but it's a technique that runs all the way up from school to court to parliament.

If anyone deviates from the 'rules', that is to say sees the debate-form for the sham it is, or takes to the streets, displacing the imposed 'platform' for the construction of a new order, then the true face of all those who defend 'debate' is revealed: suddenly those who are most powerful pretend that they are under siege by those who are 'unreasonable' – we see this lately at universities where those with bigoted views pretend that they are forced to pull out because of the menace of protest, to cities when politicians responding to the riots fall over themselves not to understand why people might resent being killed and harassed by police officers who never suffer any consequences.

Debate is a cover-story: never having to be honest about your true intentions while pretending to be open-minded. Debate dissociates argument from passion; phony talking-points from real life. There are multiple things we do not agree about – and we also disagree with the way in which you want us to say it. The narrowness of the debate-form allows those with power to dictate the boundaries of 'reasonable' discussion and ignore (or police) everything that happens outside it. But really, from Oxbridge to courts to government, we can easily see it's not a debate, *it's a war*.