

The Quantum Essays: Where are the checks on entropy in ...

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This is another in the [Quantum Essays series](#). Like most of the others, this one arose from discussions between my wife, Jacqueline, and me.

This one [follows from yesterday's essay](#), which asked the same question as this one does, except with regard to the USA. It seemed the obvious thing to do to follow on and ask the same question of the UK.

Other essays in this series are noted at the end of this post.

Entropy is not a metaphor; it is a law. Systems that close upon themselves decay. In the *Quantum Essays* series, I've argued that equilibrium, which is the point at which no energy flows, and where nothing moves, is indistinguishable from death. Life depends on openness: on continuous exchange, on tension between order and uncertainty, on the courage to allow contradiction.

A living society, like a living organism, must absorb new energy whether from debate, from dissent, or from renewal. The moment it stops doing so, it begins to die.

The United Kingdom, like the United States, is in danger of that death. Its feedback loops are failing. Its institutions, like Parliament, the courts, the media, and its universities, are closing in upon themselves. Each now appears to resist, rather than release, the energy that sustains democracy. Entropy is rising.

Westminster: a system closed to energy

Once, Parliament was the epicentre of the national argument. It was noisy, frustrating, often ridiculous, but alive. It was a mechanism for converting social energy into political motion.

Now, it is an echo chamber. The government speaks, the opposition mumbles, and the

chamber itself has become a stage set for a form of democracy already half-remembered, with party whips closing down anything that really resembles dissent, innovation or disagreement. Real power now lies elsewhere, in think-tank networks, amongst corporate lobbyists, with unelected advisers, and the closed logic of the Treasury and the Bank of England.

There is no longer an open flow of ideas between the governed and those who govern. The uniformity of background of so many politicians, and the propensity of those with just one degree - the Oxford undergraduate course in politics, philosophy and economics - is the clearest indication of that. The result is that policy is designed to pre-empt debate rather than invite it. A living democracy has been replaced by a managed one, and management is always the prelude to equilibrium.

The civil service and the courts: from neutral energy to containment

The civil service was once a conduit that translated political will into social function. It now behaves like an insulator. At least at a policy level, and most obviously in the actions of the Treasury, it now appears to resist change and expend its energy on self-protection. It has become a closed system designed to preserve stability at all costs, even when that stability means decline.

The courts, meanwhile, have been neutralised. Judicial review, once a live instrument of accountability, is now being curtailed under the banner of “efficiency” whilst ministers rail against “lefty lawyers” and “woke judges.” The effect is deliberate: it is to frighten the law into silence, and to close one more loop of feedback between the state and society.

When truth cannot reach power through either administration or law, entropy advances.

The media: the thermodynamics of managed perception

The BBC was for a while the beating heart of civic energy in Britain. It was the envy of the world. When I was young, it was supposedly the one media source on which everyone could rely. Its role was to inform, challenge, and connect. In other words, it translated the noise of public life into coherence. That is no longer the case.

Browbeaten on all sides, but most especially by the political right-wing who dominate its news media output, it is now paralysed by fear of its own shadow. Deference has replaced courage. Balance has been redefined as neutrality between truth and falsehood as if each is of equal worth, making a mockery of the very idea of supposed impartiality.

Private media, meanwhile, is not open but is owned by oligarchs, offshore entities, and ideologues. Its energy source is outrage; its output is designed to spread confusion, misinformation and mistrust. The press that should hold power to account instead generates static noise, ensuring that citizens can no longer distinguish heat from light.

When the media system closes, which happens when it reports without context, critiques without courage, and entertains instead of informs, then democracy loses its sensory system. It becomes blind to itself. That is political thermodynamics in action: it is the collapse of signal into noise.

Our universities: retreating from the public sphere

British universities were once engines of innovation and renewal. They produced knowledge, but also moral argument, social imagination, and dissent. They connected thought to life. Their openness, encouraged by their expansion in recent decades, opened the possibility of critical thinking to many.

Now, most are managed as corporations, and not as communities. Their internal bureaucracy has replaced curiosity, as many working in such places know all too well. Meanwhile, market logic has turned research into tick-box exercises in output and reputation management and the social sciences and humanities - always the disciplines that generate moral energy - are being cut back or closed down.

Academics resort to speaking in code, fearing the wrath of politicians or donors, having seen the reaction to those who have dared express opinions deemed unacceptable by the media. Students are trained for compliance, and not citizenship, not least because they are told they are consumers with an entitlement to a pre-packaged product that will supply them with definite answers and a lifelong guarantee of higher earnings. In thermodynamic terms, the system has reached steady state: there is motion, but no flow. Everything circulates, but not a lot changes. Entropy is triumphing.

The suppression of dissent: controlling the flow of energy

Entropy rises fastest when feedback is forbidden. The UK's recent political trajectory has been toward control through the policing of protest, the criminalisation of assembly, and the regulation of speech. From the recent Public Order Act to the use of counter-terror powers against climate and Gaza activists, the message is clear: dissent is noise to be dampened, not energy to be harnessed.

This is the British equivalent of the American NSPM-7: a quieter authoritarianism, enforced through procedure rather than proclamation. But the physics is the same. A system that suppresses feedback, whether it is protest in the streets, investigative journalism, or academic freedom, closes itself to renewal. It begins to cool. It slides toward equilibrium.

The attack on satire follows the same pattern. Mockery has always been a form of energy, a way of releasing tension and exposing absurdity. Yet in today's Britain, comedians are warned off politics, and the BBC has seriously trimmed its satire budget while promoting panel shows that deliver obedient wit. Laughter has been brought under control.

The monarchy and the manufactured illusion of order

The UK's final illusion of stability is its monarchy, an institution that pretends to embody continuity, while actually enforcing stasis. It provides symbolic equilibrium: a permanent centre around which decline can orbit. But as with all equilibria, the cost is to vitality.

When monarchy becomes the ultimate reference point and when it substitutes ritual for renewal, it absorbs the energy of politics into pageantry. The result is thermodynamic stagnation: the country appears to move, yet nothing in it truly changes.

The remaining quantum coherence

Despite all this, small pockets of openness persist. Independent journalists still investigate. Campaigners still organise. Local communities still practice care in the face of abandonment. These are the quantum points of coherence, the flickering sites where new energy enters the system.

In physics, coherence can regenerate order from chaos. In politics, it is the same: courage, creativity, and compassion can briefly align and generate new possibilities. The question is whether those moments can link up and whether scattered acts of civic energy can overcome the gravitational pull of the closed system surrounding them.

The choice before us

The UK institutional system of Parliament, Whitehall, the media, and universities has entered a state of managed decay. Its institutions confuse control with strength. Its culture mistakes compliance for civility. But as the Quantum Essays remind us, equilibrium is death.

A living democracy must be uncomfortable. It must tolerate uncertainty, dissent, and laughter. It must draw energy from difference, not fear it.

If Britain is to remain alive, it must reopen itself: to challenge, to imagination, to care. Otherwise, the system will complete its slow movement toward equilibrium — and discover too late that stability and death are the same thing.

Other essays in this series:

- * [***The Quantum Economics series \(this link opens a tab with them all in it\)***](#)
- * [***The Quantum Essays: Observing and Engaging***](#)
- * [***The Quantum Essays: Quantum MMT: The wave function of sovereign spending***](#)

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