

2020, Human, Social, and Political Sciences, Pembroke College

On the first day of school in 2015, I walked past hundreds of refugees camping in Keleti Railway Station - an unlikely sight in Budapest. This was my first impression of the power of politics. I saw how my own government denied its moral and legal obligations to help people for political interests, based on false economic reasoning. Soon, a law was passed forbidding organisations to support refugees, illuminating the chasm between legality and morality and prompting me to delve into the subject of civil disobedience. Exploring this topic in an essay, I found Thoreau's approach too radical and likely to result in chaos, but I felt reinforced in my position that we cannot ignore our conscience. I concluded that in some situations, engaging in civil disobedience is not only a question of morality but one of necessity when traditional channels of democratic representation are undermined. Wanting to discover how such fundamental dilemmas can inform good governance and civic participation in politics, I decided to study social sciences at university.

To prepare for this journey, I have been attending the Milestone Institute, a centre of advanced education for three years, taking 13 courses such as Anglo-Saxon Philosophy, Political Thought, and Welfare Economics. Given my initial experience, I came to focus on two topics: politics from below and their representation in the media, and the economics of migration. I examined the former during my internship at Index, Hungary's most prominent news website and as a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs press team, observing how the unfolding situation in Hong Kong came to be narrated through different lenses. These encounters highlighted the enormous influence of news on the public, which De Botton in *The News: A User's Manual*, goes so far as to compare to the role of religion, a claim that seems exaggerated. While I think that Swift in his *Political Philosophy*, should have mentioned that a critical reception of information on the part of citizens is a condition for a well-functioning democracy, I believe recent debates on fake news is cultivating an aware generation of media consumers. Spurred on by the exploration of media bias, I wrote an essay on the economic effects of immigration in an effort to fact-check populist political discourse. Here, it became clear that most claims about immigrants 'stealing jobs' and putting pressure on public services fail to take into account the demand they generate through spending. This work came to be shortlisted and received a commendation in the economics category of the John Locke Institute essay prize. I learned to think critically about similar issues by participating in MUN. Having founded my school's MUN club, I attended five conferences and won an honourable mention and an outstanding delegate award. This hobby also helped me examine economic issues from multiple viewpoints, for example by representing Russia's protectionist stance in the WTO. I argued, in line with Stiglitz, that protectionism is a reaction to the uneven international trade regulations, an effort to protect domestic workers. My most important experience with academic research was interning at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences RECENS group, assisting in a project that explored applications of network science to historical events. As part of this project, I developed a study examining how nations formed diplomatic networks at the beginning of the 20th century with the best intentions, but the creation of

two stable alliances actually facilitated the outbreak of the Great War. The application of structural balance theory, my subsequent working paper and presentation to the research group in December 2018 was an accomplishment I am still proud of.

Exploring social questions and fundamental moral dilemmas, then coming up with policy answers is what I hope to achieve by studying social sciences in the United Kingdom, which continues to be a hub for innovative thought.