

CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING

National Senior Stretch

2026

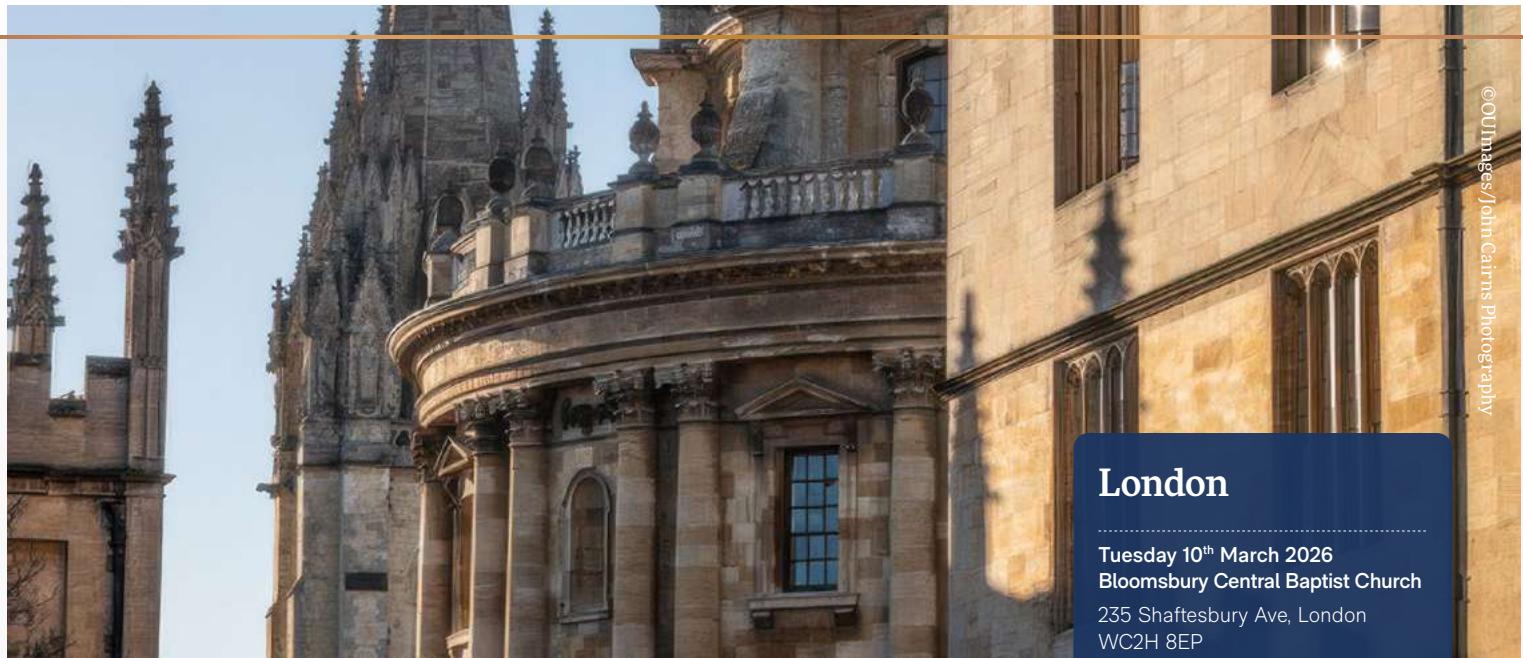
Years 10–13

NURTURING BRILLIANCE

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About



National Senior Stretch

Join the thinkers! Step into a day of big ideas and lively debate.

Senior students will grapple with timeless puzzles that have challenged great minds from Plato to Machiavelli — exploring questions of truth, love, courage, and what it means to live well. More than just abstract theory, this is philosophy in action: learning to follow the logic, question assumptions, and test ideas that touch every part of human life.

This study day is not about memorising information. We work at the conceptual level to explore intellectual foundations and equip students with a deeper understanding. It's about taking an interdisciplinary approach to the fundamental ideas that underpin our understanding of the world, ourselves, and others. We bring to you the kind of intellectual stimulation previously only experienced by the students of Oxford and Cambridge. **We bring Oxbridge to you.**



London

Tuesday 10th March 2026
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
235 Shaftesbury Ave, London
WC2H 8EP

Oxford

Wednesday 11th March 2026
Oxford Town Hall
St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1BX

Liverpool

Wednesday 28th April 2026
Merchant Taylors Girl's School
Liverpool Rd, Crosby L23 0QP

What to expect

Keynote Speakers: Engage with renowned experts and visionaries who will share their insights on unlocking your potential.

Peer Networking: Connect with gifted students from diverse backgrounds, exchange ideas, and forge lifelong friendships.

Discussions: Participate in thought-provoking discussions on contemporary issues and global challenges.

Critical thinking and Problem solving: Explore new ideas and develop strategies for real-world challenges.

London Programme

09:45 DOORS OPEN

Escaping the Cave: Why Plato's ideas Still Shape the World

10:30-11:20
JULIE ARLISS

Plato remains one of the most influential thinkers in Western philosophy, shaping ideas about reality, knowledge, ethics, and the pursuit of truth. His exploration of justice, truth, and the nature of reality challenges us to look beyond surface appearances and question the world around us. This talk will introduce Plato's key concepts, including the Theory of Forms, his famous *Allegory of the Cave*, and his ideas on justice, the soul, and the ideal society. Understanding Plato's philosophy nurtures critical thinking, challenges assumptions, and encourages engagement with life's most profound questions. By learning to think deeply and independently, students embark on their own philosophical journeys, inspired by Plato's enduring insights.

The Science of Music, the Brain, and Healing

11:20-12:10
DR. CHRIS O'NEILL

Why does music move us so powerfully? Why does a single song awaken a memory thought long lost, or transform our mood in an instant? Philosophers since Plato have debated the place of music in human life. Is it mere entertainment, or something closer to a form of knowledge, shaping the soul itself? This talk will ask: what does music reveal about who we are?

Drawing on research from evolutionary psychology, this talk will explore how music has helped our species survive, and how music has been used across history for healing and ritual. Neuroscience now reveals how music affects the brain — releasing dopamine highs, reawakening memory in Alzheimer's patients, and helping stroke survivors learn to speak again. From its effects on disorders of memory, mood and movement, we'll look at what modern research tells us about **the healing power of music today**.

Learn what the research says about music in our everyday life - how the music we choose can sharpen our focus, soothe our stress, and improve our mental health. What does that say about the hidden connections between emotion, reason, and our shared ancestral human culture? Are we, in some sense, made for music? This session will invite you to reflect on music not merely as a soundtrack to our lives, but as a philosophical puzzle: a scientific marvel, a profound source of meaning, and one of the most powerful forms of healing we possess.

12:10-12:30 BREAK

What is Courage? An Oxford Approach

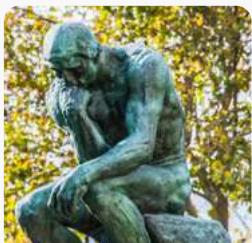
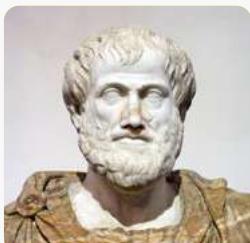
12:30-13:15
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Why does courage inspire us so deeply? Why do philosophers argue that without it, no other virtue is truly possible?

From the earliest thinkers to modern psychology, courage has been seen as something essential to human life — the strength that allows every other good quality to stand. Yet its meaning is far from simple. Is courage about bold action, or patient endurance? Is it forged in extraordinary moments, or discovered in the choices we make every day?

In this session, students will be shown how ideas about courage have evolved from Aristotle's account of it as the foundation of the moral life, through Aquinas' focus on steadfastness, and into modern perspectives that explore resilience and personal growth. More importantly, they will be equipped with the tools to think for themselves about what courage is and why it matters.

This session will invite students to grapple with the timeless question *What is courage?* and to test how it speaks to their own lives. They will be challenged to think laterally, question deeply, and push beyond surface-level answers. Together, we will explore how courage has been understood in different traditions, and what that reveals about fear, freedom, and human flourishing. Most of all, students will be encouraged to reflect not only on how to understand courage, but on how to become a person of courage.



London Programme

13:15–14:00 LUNCH

Slow: Why Thinking Well Still Matters

14:00–14:50
MIKE GRENIER

When machines can think faster than we can, speed is no longer a mark of intelligence.

This session explores “slow” as a philosophical metaphor for the kinds of thinking that resist automation: careful judgement, intellectual humility, moral reasoning, and the courage to dwell with uncertainty. Revisiting ideas first raised over a decade ago, students are invited to test them against the realities of today’s AI-driven world.

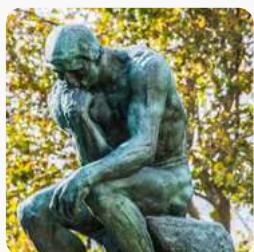
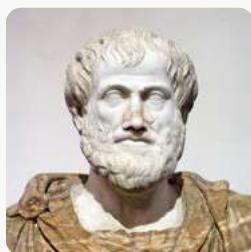
Aimed at high-attaining and more able learners, the talk challenges students to ask whether the most important forms of intelligence are precisely those that cannot be rushed — and what it now means to think well, rather than quickly.

The Great Debate

14:50–15:45

This House believes that human beings are ruled more by fear than by love.

Be honest — what really makes people tick? Is it love that inspires kindness, loyalty and creativity, or is it fear of failure, rejection, or embarrassment that actually drives us on? Think of exams, deadlines, parents, teachers... are we motivated more by passion or by panic? In this lively end-of-day debate, students are invited to step up, share their views, and lock horns over which force truly rules the human heart — love or fear. Expect sparks, laughter, and some surprisingly sharp philosophy.



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Escaping the Cave: Why Plato's ideas Still Shape the World

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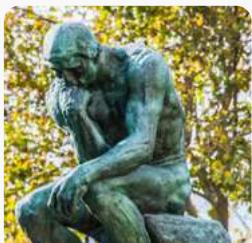
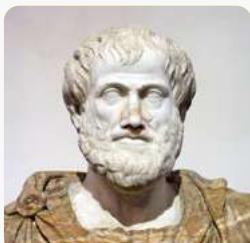
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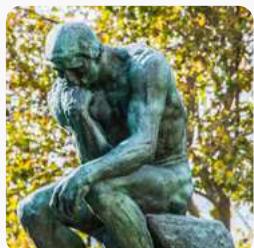
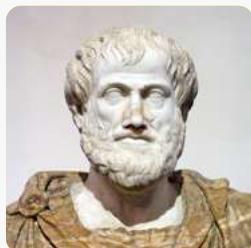
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Liverpool Programme

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Renaissance Love: Through the Bedroom Keyhole with Machiavelli

13:30–14:20
DR. CHRIS O'NEILL

For centuries the name 'Machiavelli' has been a byword for cunning, ruthlessness, and political manipulation. Shakespeare cast him as a villain, and history remembers him as the man who advised rulers it is "better to be feared than loved." Yet Machiavelli was far more than a writer of political strategy. He was a diplomat, a comic playwright, a passionate correspondent, and — in his own day — as famous for his views on love and marriage as for his insights into power. To study Machiavelli is to confront a thinker who looked human nature in the eye, without illusion, and asked awkward questions we still struggle with today.

Through his letters, comedies, and the legal records of his time, we can peek "through the bedroom keyholes" of Renaissance Florence. What we find is both fascinating and unsettling: love, marriage, and gender were viewed in ways that challenge many of our modern assumptions.

This session will invite students to grapple with the philosophical puzzle: what do these Renaissance perspectives reveal about love and marriage today? Is Machiavelli's no-nonsense take on human behaviour a cynical dismissal of romance, or a clear-eyed recognition of human nature? And how far have our ideas about love, marriage, and gender really moved on?

By turns funny, sharp, and sometimes shocking, this inquiry opens up a world both distant and disarmingly familiar — a chance to test our own ideas against the provocative insights of the Renaissance.

The Great Debate

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Speakers



Julie Arliss — Julie Arliss is an outstanding educator dedicated to nurturing brilliance through a holistic approach. At Thriving Minds, she equips talented students with essential tools to cultivate critical thinking, analyze complex problems, and innovate. Her philosophy encourages questioning the status quo, exploring new ideas, and developing real-world solutions. Emphasizing mentorship, Julie ensures students benefit from the wisdom and support of inspiring educators, fostering not only academic excellence but also compassionate, socially conscious individuals.

Julie is a Farmington Scholar at Harris Manchester College, Oxford and coordinates major projects for the Ian Ramsey Centre, including a \$3.6M initiative in Central and Eastern Europe, and various outreach programs for schools. As the Founder and Head of Academy Conferences, she has reached over 30,000 students and 4,000 educators across the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. Julie's notable projects include "Accelerating Insight" and "Philosophthon Expansion," funded by the Templeton foundations.



Dr. Christopher O'Neill — Dr O'Neill is a fellow of Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford and is a polymathic thinker. He is a psychologist, registered psychotherapist and trained counsellor. He initiated the large-scale MYRIAD research project in Oxford University investigating resilience and well-being in young people. He has forty years' experience of working with students and staff in schools and is an exceptional educator.



Mike Grenier — is an esteemed educator and advocate of the Slow Education movement. Mike studied English Literature at Oxford University and holds a PGDE from Edge Hill University. With a notable tenure as House Master at Eton and his current role as Deputy Head, Mike has firsthand experience in the transformative power of education. He passionately argues against the corrosive effects of micromanagement in children's lives, akin to the philosophies behind the Slow Food movement.

Mike founded the UK Slow Education movement in 2012, emphasizing deep, meaningful learning and strong student-teacher relationships. He champions a reflective approach to education, urging us to reconsider our haste in teaching. Mike's work extends to various state schools in the Thames Valley through Eton's outreach programme. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from a pioneer in educational reform and discover the benefits of a slower, more thoughtful approach to learning.



"Philosophy Day was such an inspiring experience! The sessions really challenged how we think about the world and pushed us to question things we usually take for granted.

I loved how we explored controversial topics in a way that made us follow the logic before forming opinions.

The speakers were funny, engaging, and made complex ideas so clear. It wasn't just about learning — it was about thinking deeply, debating, and leaving with more questions than answers!"

Connect with us on social media to stay updated and interact with fellow attendees.



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Registration



BOOKING PROCESS

All bookings must be made by schools, not by individual participants. To secure your place, please fill in the booking form and select your preferred venue. You will have the option to pay online (recommended) or request an invoice. We understand that school administrative processes can take time, so to avoid missing out, you are welcome to pencil in your numbers by contacting Tony at headoffice@academy-ltd.com. Our events fill quickly, so we recommend reserving your spots as early as possible.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

The cost is £38.50 per student, with one free staff place provided for every group of 12 students

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION

For bookings and payments made before January 25th 2026 the cost is £35. Registration includes access to all conference sessions and networking.

EVENT TIMINGS

Please note that event timings and content may vary slightly. Full details will be provided closer to the date of the event. We look forward to welcoming your students to this inspiring day!



**BOOKINGS AND PAYMENTS ARE
COMPLETED ONLINE AT:
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“I particularly liked how we explored controversial topics. The day pushed me to think critically and justify my opinions.”

Philosophy Day 2026 promises to be an extraordinary experience that will ignite curiosity, challenge assumptions, and inspire a lifelong love of learning. Register today and prepare to think deeply and unlock your full potential!

**Academy Conferences PTY**

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Tel: +44 7979 524277

Email: headoffice@academy-ltd.com

www.thrivingminds.org

