

“So this is what true communion feels like.”

— Dr. Alan James, *The Motion*



THE MOTION

By Christopher Chen
Directed by Hana S. Sharif

ON THE FICHANDLER STAGE
MAY 6 – JUNE 14, 2026

CONTENTS

The Play • Meet the Playwright • Heard at First Rehearsal • The Oxford-Style Debate
The Motion on the Table: “Ban Animal Testing Now” • What is Epic Theatre? • Three Big Questions • Resources

The Play

The motion on the table is “Ban Animal Testing Now.” Four scholars gather for a fierce debate on animal rights. Advocating in favor of the motion are **Dr. Alan James** and **Professor Lily Chan**, while **Dr. Sarah Matthis** and **Professor Neel Bharara** argue against it. What begins as a heated debate spirals into an alternate reality. As the world around them transforms, the four debaters strive to find connection as they collectively wrestle with what it means to be human.



Meet the Playwright

Born and raised in San Francisco, Christopher Chen explored a range of artistic forms prior to playwriting, including poetry, short stories, film, and music. His initial introduction to playwriting occurred in college at the University of California, Berkeley, where he joined the Asian American sketch comedy group, Theatre Rice. Eager to direct, he wrote his first play with the ensemble and discovered his love for playwriting, drawn to an artistic medium that seemed to combine all others. Now an Obie Award-winning playwright, Chen’s career continues to grow in theater and, more recently, film and television. As a playwright, Chen experiments with new techniques to surprise his audiences, describing his plays as “magic acts.”



CHRISTOPHER CHEN

Intelligence Cubed

In *The Motion*, Intelligence Cubed is a fictionalized version of Intelligence Squared, a media company that hosts debates and discussions with great minds from around the world. Intelligence Squared debates follow an Oxford-style format and are known for introducing dialogue between opposing sides, making for a more dynamic debate. A fan of the Intelligence Squared podcast, playwright Christopher Chen was inspired by the civil and thought-provoking nature of the debates.



Heard at First Rehearsal

“ I’ve been a fan of Christopher Chen’s work for many years. I have said often that I think he is a once-in-a-lifetime voice. He is someone who is so specific in the journey, challenging form, and the characters just leap off the page and force you into perspectives and journeys that you have never experienced before.

The audience is such an active part of the journey, whether they know it or not. It is a great joy to be able to help bring this story to life with this incredible company of artists. ”



HANA S. SHARIF

The Oxford-Style Debate

The Motion begins as an Oxford-style debate, a format that features a moderator, two speakers in favor (the proposition), and two speakers against (the opposition). A key feature of an Oxford-style debate is that the audience plays an active role in determining the winner.

Although there are different variations, an Oxford-style debate can include:

INITIAL VOTE

Before the debate begins, the moderator states the motion, and the audience votes. The results from this initial vote establish the baseline for the debate.

OPENING STATEMENTS

The first speaker from the proposition presents their opening argument, followed by the first speaker from the opposition. This process is then repeated with the second speaker from each side.

INTRA-PANEL DISCUSSION

The moderator asks questions of each side. Speakers may also address one another directly.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

Selected audience members have the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers.

CLOSING SPEECHES

Each side delivers a summary argument, beginning with the proposition and followed by the opposition. No new arguments are allowed at this stage.

FINAL VOTE AND RESULTS

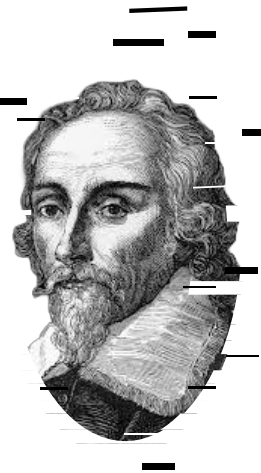
The audience votes on the motion again. The side that persuades the greatest number of audience members is declared the winner.

THE MOTION ON THE TABLE: *“Ban Animal Testing Now”*

The origins of animal testing can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans, who experimented on animals to learn more about the human body. As medical research has evolved over centuries, animal testing has played a major role in life-saving medical discoveries such as vaccines, insulin, and antibiotics. Since the 19th century, ethical concerns surrounding the treatment of animals in research have grown. Although there are increased regulations around the use of animals as test subjects, animal testing remains a highly contested topic today. In *The Motion*, four scholars debate the motion: “Ban Animal Testing Now.”



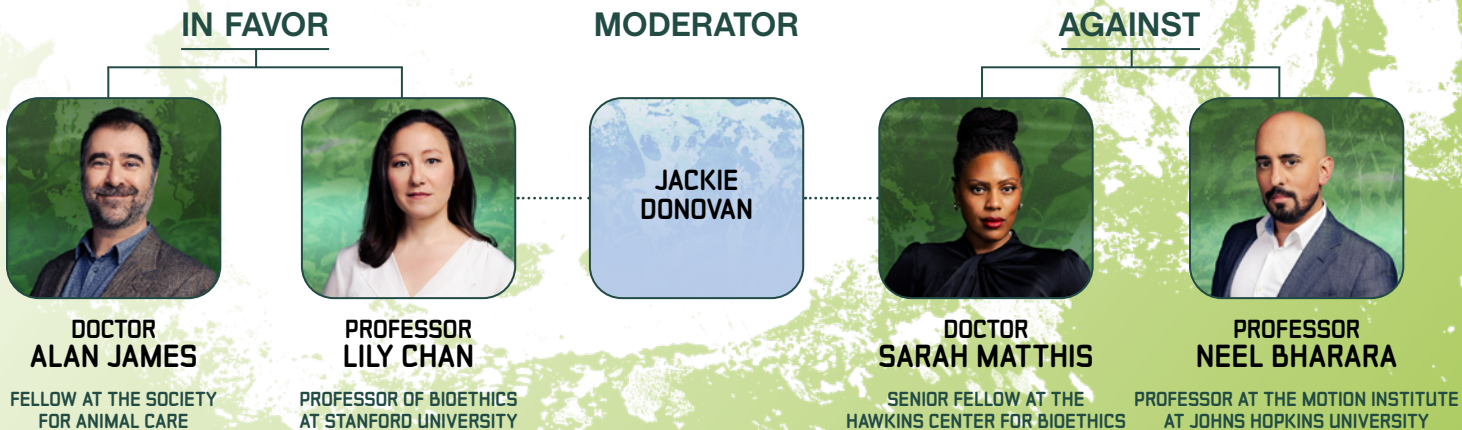
William Harvey



William Harvey, Science Photo Library.

William Harvey was a 17-century English physician known for his discovery that blood circulates throughout the human body. Before Harvey’s discovery, it was believed that the body consumed and produced blood at the same rate. To gather scientific evidence about the circulatory system, Harvey conducted experiments on live animals ranging from insects and reptiles to deer, a practice known as vivisection. His research exemplifies the primary ethical dilemma around animal testing: his experiments led to groundbreaking medical research but at the cost of dissecting live animals. This dilemma is explored in *The Motion*, as debaters on both sides reference Harvey’s research and methods to support their arguments.

Meet the Characters



What is Epic Theatre?



John Heartfield set for Bertolt Brecht's *Die Mutter* (*The Mother*), 1951, Cygnet Theatre.

In *The Motion*, the audience plays an active role in the story, a technique which is central to the tradition of epic theatre. Popularized by German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht, epic theatre is a form of theater that aims to engage with the audience through commentary and discussion, often used to explore social and political issues. A key feature of epic theatre is the “alienation effect,” that emotionally distances the audience from the play so they can consider the work’s themes objectively. One common example of the “alienation effect” is breaking the fourth wall, in which actors directly address the audience, disrupting the imaginary boundary between the stage and the audience. Rather than following a linear plot or showing strictly realistic scenarios, epic theatre constantly reminds the audience that they are watching a play.

Glossary

BIOETHICS

The study of moral and ethical issues in biology, health, and technology

BIOPHARMACEUTICALS (BIOPHARMA)

Medical drugs made using living organisms rather than chemical reactions

MOTION

The debate topic

PHYLOGENETICS

The scientific study of evolutionary relationships among all forms of life on Earth

SENTIENCE

The ability to experience feelings and sensations

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

An imagined scenario used to test an idea

VIVISECTION

Experimentation on a living animal for scientific research

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What does it mean
to be human?

2

How can different
perspectives shape
your reality?

3

What does it mean
to truly connect with
someone, even when
you disagree?

RESOURCES

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

As an audience member at the theater, **YOU ARE PART OF THE SHOW!** Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early and visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket. Ushers are there to help you.
- Before the show begins, turn off all electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, pictures, or recording.
- Food is not allowed in the theater, but covered beverages are.
- Feel free to react—your responses are part of the live theater experience. Applause at the end is always appreciated, and if you especially enjoyed the performance, you can give a standing ovation!

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