

Three women in jumpsuits appeared from nowhere at the front of the council office queue.

The man behind the desk said, "Er. I think this gentlemen was before you."

"You were all before us", said one of the women. "That's just the problem. And you made a right mess of things. We're from the future, and we've come to register to vote."

"Oh. I might have to call my supervisor. I haven't dealt with this before."

"Well, you better get used to it. A lot more of us will be arriving soon. We thought we'd beat the rush."

"You do live here, I take it?"

"Yes, I live here, just not now. I'm up on the hill. It's the only bit that doesn't flood. Here's my passport."

He opened it. It said, "Good morning. Cuthbert Brewster, European citizen. Date of birth 10th January 2153. No criminal record. No diseases."

He took out a calculator.

"Sorry. You're minus 139 years old. You have to be 18 to vote."

"That's ridiculous. I'm from 2177. I'm 24 then. So I'm old enough to know what's good for me. And let me tell you, what you people are doing right now isn't good for me at all."

"I'm sorry. You can only vote for things in your own time. I mean, I won't be travelling to the future to vote in your elections."

"You don't need to. You're still having your say in our time through the things you did. It's only fair we should have a say in your time."

"But aren't there more of you in the future than there are now? You'll outnumber us."

"That's democracy. But don't worry. We'll go back to the future after we've voted and done some sightseeing. There are lots of things we'd like to see for real that we've only seen in 2D. Hopefully, they might still be there when we get home, but it'll be nice to have some ussies if they're not."

"I think I'll have to book you an appointment."

## Should Time Travellers Have the Vote?

This sci-fi fantasy is a way of asking the serious question of how much weight the interests of future generations should have in present political decision making.

Put it this way: barring some mass extinction within the next few generations, which our worst efforts seem unlikely to cause, people who are not here yet outnumber us. So in all decisions that have permanent effects, we are in a minority. Add to that the science (the science done by scientists, that is) telling us that the consequences are apt to be more severe for future generations than our own. To swap space for time, it's rather like people in England voting for what should happen in America – taxation without representation – as environmental degradation and the costs of mitigating it will all be borne by future generations without a vote.

Here's an exercise to explore attitudes to stewardship, a concept both biblical and environmental about looking after nature. Any children who are in uniformed groups or do DofE will be familiar with the idea that when you leave a campsite, it should be as you found it. Which of these captures how we should leave the planet? Which looks likely at the moment?

As we found it.

As we would have liked to find it.

As the next generation would like to find it.

So that the next generation can put it back to how we found it, if they want to.

A bit better than we found it.

So that when you add up the good things and the bad things we leave, future people won't wish they could swap with us.

So that it's not going to get worse.

There's nothing we can do about it.

So that the next generation can leave it the same way we did

It doesn't matter because we won't be here.

We don't have to worry too much because people in the future will be richer and have better technology, so they can put it back how it was.