

THE *EUTHYDEMUS*  
OF PLATO

in a free and modernised version  
by C.A. KIRWAN

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Socrates  
Crito  
Euthydemus  
Dionysodorus  
Ctesippus  
Cleinius

appears as

Professor Hempel  
Professor Pratt  
John Lucas  
Richard Sykes  
Donald Clemons  
'Valerie Stevens', read by  
Carlotta Sherwood



271a PRATT. Who was the person you were talking to at the Student Center yesterday, Mr Hempel? There was such a crowd round him that I couldn't get within earshot, but I caught a glimpse of him over their heads and I thought he must be a newcomer to Princeton. What's his name?

HEMPEL. Which do you mean, Mr Pratt? There were two of them.

P. The one I mean was sitting two away from you on the right, on the other side of  
b Professor Stevens' young daughter—she's grown up, you know; not much older than my girl, but she is well-developed and really good-looking.

H. That was Mr Lucas; and the one sitting on my left was a colleague of his, Mr Sykes. I was having a discussion with both.

P. I don't know them. They are scholars, I take it, and from abroad? What country do  
c they come from, and what's their field?

H. They are Englishmen from Oxford, and they have been living over here for some months, since they had to leave Oxford. As for their field, I should venture to say, though it sounds ridiculous, that they are experts in many subjects. I  
d never knew before what a real all-rounder was, but these two, I believe, would be a match for anybody—even that New York professor who wins all the

272a money on TV. They actually make regular television appearances in their own country and command a high salary, I understand. Both are also excellent linguists and classics teachers. And more recently they have completed the picture by mastering philosophy, so that now there is hardly a scholar in the world who can outwit them. Do you know it is said that they can refute *any*  
b statement, true or false? As a matter of fact I am thinking of putting myself in their hands—they claim to be able to make anyone as smart as they are in quite a short time.

P. Yes, but don't you suppose you might be too old, Mr Hempel?

H. No, I am not afraid of that, because evidently these

272b techniques can be picked up very easily. They themselves have only been  
c philosophers for a few years. I *am* worried, though, in case I get them a bad  
name, as I did for poor Mrs Willis who teaches me the piano. Her younger  
students used to snigger and call her rude names, you know, and I shouldn't  
like the same to happen to these Englishmen; indeed they might refuse to enrol  
me for that very reason. What I did in Mrs Willis' case was to persuade other  
d faculty members to take lessons from her too, and I shall try to do the same  
again. I hope you will join me yourself, and perhaps we should take along  
your daughters as a bait: they might smooth our way.

P. I've no objection to that. But tell me first about the Englishmen's philosophy; I'd  
like to know what I am going to learn.

H. That is easy. I listened hard to yesterday's conversation, which I will do my best to  
e repeat. By good luck I happened to be sitting where you saw me in the  
Student Center, alone. I was just thinking of going when something told me to  
wait, so I settled down again with a paper. Soon afterwards in came Sykes and  
273a Lucas with a party of graduate students from a seminar, all discussing  
philosophy. Then in a moment or two I noticed young Valerie Stevens in the  
doorway; she was with a crowd of boy-friends, including one called Don  
Clemons—an able but rather hot-headed chemical engineering student.  
b Valerie saw me sitting alone, and came up and joined me, on my right as you  
said. At the same time Lucas and Sykes saw *her*, but at first they continued  
talking together, glancing up at us from time to time; while I kept my eyes  
firmly on them. Then they moved over to us, Lucas sitting beside the girl,  
Sykes next to me, on my left; and the others grouped themselves around. We  
introduced ourselves, since we had hardly met before, and then I turned to  
c Valerie to explain to her what a reputation these two had in classics; at which  
they exchanged glances and laughed. The conversation went something like  
d this:

273d LUCAS. You know, we don't bother much with classics now.

HEMPEL You don't, Mr Lucas? May I ask what was the attraction which lured you away?

L. Morals. He have worked out a streamlined high-pressure course—it is something quite new.

e H. For heaven's sake, let's hear about it. When did you take up this study? I always considered, as I said just now, that you were first-rate classical scholars, and I used to report as much of you. You were expected in the Classics Department here, I know. Forgive me if you now have a new project; my remark must have seemed ill-mannered and simple-minded. But look, is this true? One  
274a can hardly believe that you have made an important advance in that subject.

L. You may take our word for it, we have.

H. Then I congratulate you. This may be the most important thing since relativity. Tell me, do you mean to teach this course, or what are your plans?

b L. That is just why we are here, Mr Hempel. We will teach anyone who wants to learn.

H. I have a hunch that everyone will want to learn who is muddled about morals—myself to begin with, and Valerie and Mr Clemons and all the rest of her friends here.

c (Clemons comes over and stands by Valerie to get a better look at her. The others crowd round.)

d ALL. Sure, we'll buy it. Let's hear your new morality, etc.

H. You will do me and these gentlemen a great favour if you will describe your course to us. Obviously it will be a big job to go through the whole thing. But I would like to know this: can you only improve the man who is already  
e convinced that he ought to learn, or can you do the same for one who is not yet convinced, either because he believes that morals cannot be taught at all or because he believes that you cannot teach them? Is it part of the same system to convince that morals are teachable and that you are the best men to teach them, or is that in another course?

274e SYKES. It is all part of the same course.

H. So you two would be the best people to inculcate a respect for intelligence and morality, would you, Mr Sykes?

275a S. We think so.

H. Well, don't worry about the rest of the demonstration, then. Just persuade this pretty girl that she ought to study philosophy and morals, and you will be doing me and the rest of us a very great favour. She is in the position I have just described, and all of us want her to improve as much as possible. Her name is Valerie Stevens, and her father is a professor in the Chemistry Department. She is quite young, and we are afraid that her interests may be turned in other directions (you know how it is with young girls) to the detriment of her education. Your visit is therefore most opportune. If you don't object, I would like you to take Valerie in hand, and put your questions while we listen.

c LUCAS. (gallantly) *We* do not object, Mr Hempel, provided that she is willing to answer.

H. Oh, she is quite used to that. These boys often come and ask her questions and talk with her, so that she is not a bit shy about answering.....

d L. Well Valerie, here is the first question: are students intelligent or ignorant?

VALERIE (blushes and looks to Hempel for support)

e H. (coming to the rescue) Don't be shy, Valerie. Answer boldly whichever you think. I am sure you will learn a lot from these gentlemen.

SYKES (leering all over his face and whispering to Hempel) I am prepared to bet you she will be wrong, whichever she says.

V. (at last) They are intelligent, I think.

276a LUCAS There are some people you would call professors, are there not?

V. Yes.

L. And the professors teach the students? No doubt you and

- 276a            these boys have science professors and English professors, and you are their students.
- V. Yes.
- L. And when you are studying, you have not yet mastered the subject which you are studying?
- V. No.
- L. Are you really intelligent, then, if you have not been able to master your subject?
- b V. We can't be.
- L. And if you are not intelligent, you are ignorant?
- V. That is true.
- L. Then you study subjects you are not master of, and you are ignorant when you study them.
- V. (assents)
- L. Then students are ignorant, Valerie, not intelligent as you thought.
- (Laughter and uproar among the philosophical group)
- c SYKES (before Valerie has recovered her poise) Now, Valerie, think of English lessons: is it the intelligent students or the ignorant ones who study best with your English professor?
- V. The intelligent ones.
- S. Then students are intelligent, not ignorant, and your answer to John was incorrect.
- d    (Renewed uproar from the cheer-group. The rest maintain an astonished silence.)
- LUCAS (sensing the astonishment and eager to exploit it) What subjects do students study—those they are master of or those they are ignorant of?
- e SYKES (whispering to Hempel) This is another good one.
- HEMPEL (to Sykes) I certainly liked your last.
- S. (to Hempel) All our questions are as baffling as that.
- H. (to Sykes) I see why you have such a reputation.
- VALERIE The subjects they are ignorant of.
- 277a LUCAS Do you speak English?

- 277a V. Of course.  
L. Expertly?  
V. Well, yes.  
L. When your English professor teaches you, does he teach in English?  
V. Certainly.
- b L. Then if you have mastered English, you have mastered what he teaches.  
V. Yes.  
L. Then you do not study with him. Only those who have not mastered English can study it.  
V. But I do study with him.  
L. Then if you have mastered English, you are studying what you have already mastered.  
V. I must be.  
L. So you gave me the wrong answer.  
SYKES. (taking the pass) John is misleading you, Valerie. Tell me, do students study to acquire mastery of their subjects?  
V. Yes.  
S. And being master is the same as having mastery already?  
V. It is.
- c S. So not being master is the same as not yet having mastery.  
V. Yes.  
S. Do people who acquire something have it already, or not?  
V. I suppose they don't have it.  
S. And you have admitted that people who don't have mastery are among the have-nots?  
V. Yes.  
S. And students study to acquire something, so they are among the have-nots?  
V. Yes.  
S. Then, Valerie, students are not masters of their subjects, and you were wrong.
- d LUCAS Now, Valerie...  
HEMPEL (interrupting) Excuse me. Don't be put off, Valerie, by the queer way they talk. Perhaps you may not appreciate what these two are trying to do with you. It is like going to your first dance: you know there is often



277d joking and teasing on these occasions. That is just what these two are doing to  
e you—dancing round you and making fun of you. They will get down to  
business later. You must imagine that you have been going through the  
preliminary stages of the party, the breaking down of social barriers, as it were.  
Wittgenstein says that the first part of philosophy is the breaking down of  
language barriers. Well, these two English gentlemen have been pointing out  
to you, what you did not realise before, that the word ‘study’ is used in two  
senses: first, of acquiring mastery of some subject of which one was  
278a previously ignorant; second, of reviewing one’s speech and actions in the light  
of this mastery. The second activity is better called research, but the word  
'study' is also used in this sense. These gentlemen have shown, what you did  
not realise, that the word is used of two distinct classes of men, those who  
know and those who do not. The second question, in which they asked you  
b whether the subjects a man studies are those which he has mastered or those  
which he has not, was of the same sort. I said they were teasing you, because  
this kind of inquiry is not serious; and it is not serious, because even an expert  
in it has no greater knowledge about how the world works. His skill is in  
tripping people up by logical distinctions, like the prankster who gets a laugh  
out of pulling a chair from under someone about to sit down, and watching  
c him collapse on the floor. You must realise that all this has been a kind of  
prank, but from now on I am sure they will show you the serious part of their  
work. I shall be urging them on, since I want them to honour the promise they  
made to display their talents as moralists—but seemingly they thought they  
d would have some fun first. Now, gentlemen, I expect you have had enough  
joking; we would like to hear your serious advice to the girl, how she is to  
apply herself to morals and philosophy. May I first show you the sort of task I  
hope to hear from you? Please do not laugh if I seem to do this in a

278d clumsy or ridiculous manner. It is only out of eagerness to see your skill  
e displayed that I venture to improvise before you. So I must ask you and your  
friends to bear with me and listen in a serious frame of mind. Now, Valerie,  
may I have your attention? Tell me, does everyone want to be happy?—but  
this is one of the ridiculous questions I was afraid of. Isn't it a silly thing to  
ask? Or does anyone not want to be happy?

VALERIE Everyone wants that.

279a H. Well then, since everyone wants it, the next question is, how can we get it? By  
having a lot of good things?—This seems a more foolish question still; the  
answer is so obviously yes.

V. I agree.

H. Well, what things do we think good? It does not need a genius to discover this  
either: everyone would agree that money is one of them.

V. Yes.

b H. What about health and good looks and the other natural assets?

V. Those too.

H. And clearly we need the right sort of parents, and we need to be influential and  
respected in our communities.

V. Yes.

H. What is left? What do you say about self-control and honesty and courage? I  
appeal to you: shouldn't we be wrong to leave these out? There might be  
argument here: what do you think yourself?

V. I think these are good things to have.

c H. Fine. And intelligence, is that a good thing to have?

V. Yes, that too.

H. Now have we left out anything important?

V. No, I don't think so.

H. (thinks) Oh, but I'm afraid we have forgotten the most important thing of all.

V. What's that?

H. Success, Valerie. Even an idiot would put that in the list.

V. You are quite right.

- 279d H. Wait. When I come to think about it, we nearly made fools of ourselves in front of these gentlemen, you and I.
- V. How is that?
- H. Because we have already included success.
- V. What do you mean?
- H. It would be foolish, wouldn't it, to say the same thing twice, by adding an item which is there already?
- V. I don't understand.
- H. Intelligence is success. Every child knows that.
- V. (bewildered)
- e H. Look, you surely know that musicians are the most successful performers of music.
- V. Yes.
- H. And that nurserymen are the most successful gardeners.
- V. Certainly.
- H. And intelligent drivers are the best at avoiding accidents, broadly speaking.
- V. Yes.
- H. If you wanted to invest your money, would you choose an intelligent broker to advise you or a dumb one?
- V. Obviously an intelligent one.
- 280a H. If you were sick, would you call an intelligent doctor or an ignorant one?
- V. An intelligent one.
- H. And isn't this because you believe you will get better results by dealing with the intelligent man?
- V. Yes.
- H. Then intelligence always makes men successful, and the intelligent man will not make mistakes. To have intelligence *is* to perform successfully, so our intelligent man has no *further* need of success. Now there is another point:
- b we agreed, you remember, that a man supplied with many good things will be happy.
- V. Yes.
- H. Would these good things make him happy if he derived no benefit from them?

280b V. No.

c H. Would he derive benefit from mere possession of good things, or only from their use? I mean, if a man had plenty of food but did not eat it, or drink but did not drink it, would we say he got any value from it?

V. Of course not.

H. If a workman possessed all the equipment necessary for his trade but did not use it, would he be any the better off by his possession? For instance, if a carpenter had a complete set of tools and an adequate supply of wood, but never did any carpentry, would we say he was getting any value from his equipment?

V. None at all.

d H. If a man had money and all the other good things which we mentioned, but made no use of them, would his possession of all these things bring him happiness?

V. No, sir.

H. It seems that to be happy one must not only possess but use good things. Mere possession is of no value.

V. Yes.

e H. Now, Valerie, is possession plus use sufficient to make a man happy?

V. I think so.

H. Proper *and* improper use?

V. No. Things must be used properly.

H. Good for you. To use a thing improperly is far worse than to leave it alone, I should think. The one is positively wrong, but the other is neither wrong nor right. Should we not say so?

V. We should.

281a H. Now, take constructional engineering. What does the proper use of building materials depend on but the engineer's mastery of building techniques?

V. (assents)

H. And the proper use of an automobile depends on the driver's mastery of the art of driving?

V. Yes

H. Then isn't the proper use of the things we were speaking of—money and health and good looks—also an art which

281b            has to be mastered?

V. Certainly it is.

H. So no matter what we want to get out of life, success and happiness seem to depend on the mastery of some art.

V. Yes.

H. We might say that assets are utterly valueless without common sense and intelligence.

V. Utterly.

H. Would a man be better off with big assets and a big business but no sense, or with a small business but some sense? Look at it this way: if he did less business  
c            he would make fewer mistakes, and if he made fewer mistakes he would be less of a failure, and if he were less of a failure he would be less miserable.

V. Yes.

H. And does a man have to be rich in order to contract his business?

V. No.

H. Or healthy, or respected, or courageous?

V. No.

H. In fact he may as well be a stuttering short-sighted imbecile.

V. Quite right.

d H. Well then, Valerie, it looks as if the things which we at first called good are not to be regarded as necessarily good in themselves. To an imbecile, who used them ignorantly, they would be worse than their opposites (because more likely to be misused); to an intelligent man, who used them sensibly, they would be much better than their opposites; but in themselves, all these things are equally valueless.

e V. I agree.

H. Now where does this argument lead? Surely to the conclusion that nothing is really good but intelligence, and nothing really bad but ignorance.

V. It seems so.

282a H. Let us consider the next point. Everyone wants to be happy, and we have seen that happiness comes from the

282a use, that is the proper use, of things. This proper and successful use is afforded by the mastery of some art. The inference is that everyone ought to try in every way to make himself as intelligent as he can. Don't you agree?

V. Certainly.

H. And when a girl realises that this intelligence, much more than money, is what she  
b ought to be trying to get out of her father and her girl-friends and boy-friends, and her neighbours and business acquaintances, it is clearly not disreputable of her to appeal for it. She must not be blamed, then, for keeping company with anyone, boy or girl, if this is what she is after. Don't you think that I am right?

V. Absolutely.

c H. But does intelligence come through instruction, or is it a spontaneous development? Here is an unexplored topic on which we have not yet reached agreement, you and I.

V. There is no doubt in my mind that it comes through instruction.

H. Good for you, Valerie, you have saved me a long investigation. Well, now that  
d you admit that intelligence can be taught, and that this is the only thing which will make a person happy and successful, you must agree, mustn't you, that everyone ought to cultivate it, and you must try to do so yourself.

V. Yes, sir, I will do my very best.

H. I am quite delighted. Now, gentlemen, you have my specimen of the sort of moral  
e discourse I want. It was perhaps a rather clumsy and tedious specimen; but I hope that one of you will now perform the same operation in a more artistic manner. Or if you prefer, take up my argument where I left off. You might explain to us whether Valerie should tackle every subject, or whether one is sufficient for virtue and happiness, and if so which. As I said at the outset, the improvement of this young girl's intelligence and moral sense is a matter which we have very much at heart.....

263c

(All eyes are on Sykes)

SYKES. Tell me, Mr Hempel, when you say you want Miss Stevens to improve in intelligence, are you joking?

H. (sensing misunderstanding) No. We are in deadly earnest, I assure you.

S. Think again, Mr Hempel; you may want to change your mind.

H. I have thought, and my mind is quite made up.

d S. Now what is it you say—that you want her to become intelligent?

H. Right.

S. Is she intelligent now?

H. Being a modest person, she at least will not say that she is.

S. And you wish her to cease being ignorant and to become intelligent?

H. We do.

S. Then you wish her to cease being the person she is and to become someone she is not. (Consternation.) Furthermore, if you wish her to cease being the person she is, you wish the person she is to cease. Odd sort of friends and admirers, to be so keen on the decease of such a pretty creature.

e CLEMONS Hey, Dick, that's going a bit far. I don't mean to be rude but, frankly, it's a lie, and you know perfectly well it's a lie, that we want anything like that to happen to Valerie.

LUCAS Why, Don, do you think people can tell lies?

C. Of course I do. I am not mad.

L. And do people in these cases say the thing about which they are speaking, or not?

C. They do.

284a L. And saying something is saying nothing other than what one says?

C. Right.

L. So what one says is one thing, not to be confused with anything else.

C. Yes.

L. Then when one says this something, it follows that there *is* a something which one says.

284a C. Yes.

L. But saying something which there *is* is telling the truth. So Dick, in saying something which there *is*, was telling the truth about you, not a lie.

b C. Yes, John, but what Dick said is not the case.

L. If a thing is not the case, is it anything?

C. No.

L. Where is it to be found?

C. Nowhere, I should think.

L. Can anyone do anything with it, if it is nothing and nowhere?

C. I should think not.

L. When a senator speaks in Congress, is he doing nothing, then?

C. Certainly he is doing something.

c L. Saying something is doing something?

C. Yes.

L. So saying something which is not the case would be doing something. But you have just agreed that it is impossible to do anything with nothing. So by your own argument no one can say something which is not the case, and Dick, if he said anything, said something which is the case.

C. That is true; but he was speaking of things in a peculiar way, not as they really are.

SYKES What do you mean, Don? Is there anyone who speaks of things as they really are?

d C. Certainly. All honest men. (becoming heated).

S. Good things are good and bad things are bad, aren't they?

C. Of course.

S. And you claim that honest men speak of things as they are.

C. I do.

S, Then an honest man will have no good to speak of worthless things, if he speaks of them as they are.

C. That's just it—he will have no good to speak of worthless things, especially if they

e happen to be philosophers. Now, do you want that proved?

LUCAS We might say that such a man will match noble themes with noble words, and reserve his frowns for impetuous



284e young men.

C. And his groans for dreary old logic-choppers.

SYKES That's an unnecessary insult, Don.

C. It's not insulting, Dick. I was just giving you my friendly advice not to stand up there and make idiotic remarks about my wanting Valerie deceased or

285a something. Valerie is the best girl in the world.

HEMPEL (pacifying) I think that since the Englishmen are willing to talk to us we

b ought to hear what they have to say without quarreling about words. They claim to have mastered the art (I don't know whether it is their own invention, but no matter) of destroying bad or stupid people by turning them into good and sensible ones. Well, if this is true why don't they use their new kind of

c destruction to abolish Valerie and make her intelligent, and after her the rest of us? If you young people are frightened, I will offer myself to the slaughter, being an older man and ready to run risks. I give Mr Sykes my permission to abolish me, boil me, do what he likes with me, provided that he turns me out a good man.

C. I volunteer too. I would submit to skinning alive (these two have done that pretty  
d well already) provided that my skin is used to make me good. Dick thinks I am angry with him, but it is not true—I merely contradicted him when he made an outrageous remark. You must not call contradiction insult, Dick; they are two different things.

SYKES You speak as if there were such a thing as contradiction.

e C. There cannot be any question of that. Do you maintain that there is *no* such thing?

S. You cannot prove to me that you ever heard one man contradict another.

C. Perhaps not; but I can hear one now—me contradicting you.

S. Will you defend that statement?

C. Certainly.

S. Is there a word for everything?

C. Yes.

- 285e S. Does the word say that the thing exists or that it does not exist?  
 C. That it exists.
- 286a S. Yes. You remember, Don, how we have just proved that no one can say that a thing does not exist: since clearly no one can say what is not there to be said.  
 C. Well? This does not stop either of us from contradicting the other.  
 S. How could we? Suppose that both of us were describing the same thing; then we should both be saying the same thing, surely.  
 C. Yes.
- b S. Or suppose that neither of us was speaking of this thing; then neither of us would mention what we were talking about at all.  
 C. True.  
 S. Then suppose that I speak about the thing and you about something else; is this contradiction? Or if I speak about it and you say nothing at all; how can a man be contradicted by silence?  
 C. (silent)
- c HEMPEL What does all this mean, Mr Sykes? I have often heard this theory put forward and by many different people, but I never cease to be bewildered by it. The existentialists make much of it, and it goes back long before them, of course. Yet it seems to me a dangerous weapon which can too easily be turned against its inventor. Perhaps you will put me out of my uncertainty on this subject. The thesis, as I take it, is simply that there is no such thing as falsehood: a man must either speak the truth or say nothing. Is that the gist of it?  
 S. Yes.
- d H. Well, if a man may not speak falsely, may he think falsely?  
 S. No.  
 H. There is no such thing as false belief?  
 S. No.  
 H. So there is no ignorance in the world. For ignorance,

- 286d if there were such a thing, would be the falsification of facts.
- S. That is correct.
- H. And this falsification is impossible?
- S. Yes.
- H. Are you saying this merely in order to be paradoxical, Mr Sykes, or do you really believe that no one is ignorant?
- e S. I challenge you to refute me.
- H. Is refutation possible if, as you argue, no one can speak falsely?
- LUCAS No refutation is possible.
- H. So I suppose Mr Sykes was not really challenging me to refute him.
- SYKES No. How can one tell a person to do what is not there to be done?
- H. I confess that I do not wholly understand these subtleties, so my next question
- 287a may be rather naive. But forgive me: you see, if it is not possible to make a false statement *or* hold a false belief *or* suffer from ignorance, then there is no such thing as a mistake. A man cannot miss doing what he does. Is that what you mean?
- LUCAS Exactly.
- H. Well, this is the naive question: if we never make mistakes in our actions or speech or thoughts, what on earth have you come here to teach? Didn't you
- b claim earlier to have the best non-specialised morals course in the world?
- SYKES Isn't this rather mediaeval? Are you proposing to remind us of what we said *earlier*, when you are stumped by what I am saying right now? I suppose you will be quoting John's publications next.
- H. Well, your arguments *are* hard to follow: they are the products of a subtle mind. I am especially puzzled by one thing—what sense do you give to this word
- c 'stumped'? Do you mean that I cannot refute you?
- S. And *I* am especially puzzled by one thing. Perhaps you could enlighten me.
- H. Must I answer before you?
- S. Surely.

- 287c H. Do you think I *ought* to?
- S. Why not?
- H. On what principle? Are we to suppose that in the experience of highly intelligent moral philosophers like yourselves problems of this sort just never arise?
- d You know intuitively what answers ought to come first, and you know that in this case it ought to be mine.
- S. Isn't this a red herring? In any case, since you acknowledge my intelligence why don't you take my advice?
- H. I must, I suppose, since you have the advantage of me. Ask on.
- S. Do things which have sense have life?
- H. Yes.
- S. Do you know of any word which is alive?
- H. Certainly not.
- e S. Then why did you ask me just now what sense I glve to my words?
- H. Because I was stupid and made a mistake. But no—perhaps words do have sense. Would you say I made a mistake? If I did not, then you will not refute me, but my argument will 'stump' you for all your intelligence. But if I did, then you were wrong to claim that mistakes are impossible—a remark which I did not have to extract from your publications. But I am inclined to think, gentlemen, that this argument has reached an impasse. Even the verbal finesse for which you show such an amazing capacity has not afforded you a means of overthrowing your opponent without being susceptible yourselves, which is the way it always was.
- 288a
- b CLEMONS You Englishmen, or Britishers or whatever you like to call yourselves, you simply amaze me. I never thought people could take such a delight in talking nonsense.
- H. (again frightened of a scene) Mr Clemons, I must repeat to you what I said earlier to Valerie. You do not understand the remarkable intelligence of these gentlemen. This performance of theirs has had no serious purpose; they merely want to tie us poor simpletons into knots, like a clever lawyer with his opponent's witnesses.
- c

288c But *we* have to cling like limpets until we can make them come to the point—then we shall see the real fireworks. Shall we ask them to begin now? And shall I once more suggest the sort of discourse I am hoping for? I will do  
d my best to continue the argument which we were pursuing earlier, in the hope that this will induce them to take pity on my serious perplexity and to become serious themselves. Now, Valerie, can you remember where we had got to? Didn't we end by agreeing that people ought to cultivate intelligence?

VALERIE That was it.

H. And cultivating intelligence is the same thing as mastering abilities, is it not?

V. Yes.

e H. What is the right ability to master? Surely the one which will benefit us.

V. Exactly.

H. And should we be better off than at present if we went around knowing where the richest gold deposits were to be found?

V. I should think we would.

H. But a moment ago we proved the opposite: a man would be no better off than before for owning all the gold in the world, even without having to dig it up. Even if he knew how to turn stone to gold, his knowledge would be without value unless he also knew how to use what he had made. Do you remember?

289a

V. Yes, I remember now.

H. It is the same with financial, medical and all kinds of ability—all are useless if they tell us to make something without telling us how to use what we have made.

V. Yes.

b H. Even if people find out how to prolong life indefinitely, they will have done nothing valuable, according to our previous conclusion, unless they also find out how to use this extra life.

V. That is true.

H. So the sort of ability we want, Valerie dear, is that

- 289b            which enables us both to make a thing and to use what we have made.
- V. Evidently.
- H. We want something more than the mastery of a technique, like mechanical engineering. The business of making a machine is quite different from the
- c            business of using it. For instance, the makers of cars and the drivers of cars are two quite different classes, aren't they?
- V. Yes.
- H. The same goes for all applied science; it involves nothing more than technique.
- V. True.
- H. Wait, what about literature? Perhaps the secret of happiness lies in mastery of the art of writing.
- V. I don't think it does.
- d H. And why not?
- V. Because I know of some good novelists who are very bad critics. I think there is the same difference between writing and appreciating literature as between engineering and driving cars. After all, it is obvious that you can be good at composition without being good at appreciation, and vice versa.
- H. Yes, this seems to be sufficient proof that writing will not make a man happy, although I did think that maybe literature was what we were looking for.
- e            You see, the novelists and journalists I meet all strike me as exceptionally intelligent people; their art has something impressive about it. And yet I suppose this is not surprising if, as I suspect, these people are really
- 290a            nothing more than confidence tricksters, operating on a grand scale. Lesser men make a specialty of deluding voters or stockholders or housewives, but writers practise their frauds on everyone who can read. That's the main difference, don't you agree?
- V. Yes, I agree emphatically.
- H. Well, what shall we try next?
- V. I have no ideas.
- H. But I think I have one.

- 290a V. What is it?
- b H. Military skill. I believe a good soldier is more likely to be happy than anyone else.  
 V. I do not agree.  
 H. Why not?  
 V. Because soldiers are destructive.  
 H. Well, what of that?  
 V. None of these destructive people are anything more than destructive. When a  
 huntsman kills the creature he has been chasing, he cannot use it for anything.  
 He has to hand it over to the cook. It is the same with theorists—
- c logicians and mathematicians and physicists—they are like huntsman too.  
 They do not make anything new, but just chase what is there already. And  
 they cannot use their discoveries: they have to hand them to the businessmen  
 and applied scientists to be used—if there is any sense in them.  
 H. I see there are brains behind that pretty face. Go on.
- d V. Yes, and soldiers are just the same. They hound some enemy till he gives in, and  
 then hand him over to the politicians, because they don't know how to use  
 their victory themselves. They are like the people who catch elephants for  
 zoos. If we are looking for an ability which brings a man happiness by telling  
 him how to make or get something and how to use what he has made or  
 gotten, then I don't see how that ability can be soldiery.
- e PRATT Did young Valerie say all that, Mr Hempel?  
 H. You don't believe it?  
 P. I hardly can. If she did, it's my opinion that she has no need to take courses, from  
 Lucas or anyone else.  
 H. Yes, perhaps the speaker was Clemons; my memory may be at fault.
- 291a P. Clemons! Nonsense.  
 H. Well, it was not Lucas or Sykes, of that I am sure. It may have been one of the  
 older people, but someone put forward those views, I assure you.

- 291a P. Yes, someone a good deal older, I should think. But did you carry on the search, and did you find the ability you were looking for?
- b H. Where should we find it, my dear Pratt? No, we made complete fools of ourselves, like children who chase rainbows—every time we thought we had caught something it always got away. I do not have to repeat the whole story; the last thing we came to was the art of government, and we asked ourselves whether that brought happiness. Well, we got into a real tangle over that, and then when we thought that the end was in sight, it turned out we were right
- c back at the beginning, and in just as much perplexity as ever.
- P. How did that happen?
- H. I will tell you. We agreed that government was the same thing as statecraft.
- P. Yes.
- H. All the other professions, including the soldier's, seemed to be subsidiary to government, since the statesman alone had the ability to put the products of the others to use. This was just what we had wanted; government might be, so to
- d speak, the nerve-centre of human progress. In the old metaphor, it seemed to provide the captain, pilot and helmsman of the ship of state, who between them could direct a nation's energies in the general interest.
- P. What was wrong with this conclusion?
- H. You shall judge yourself when you have heard what followed. This was the next
- e question: does government, taken as a whole, *do* anything for us? The answer was yes—wouldn't you agree?
- P. I should.
- H. Then *what* does it do? Suppose we take the analogy of medicine. If I were to ask you, what does the medical profession, taken as a whole, *do* for people, wouldn't you answer that it makes them healthy?
- P. I should.
- H. What about your own field—psychology? Taking them as



291e a whole, what would you say that psychiatrists do for people? Restore their  
292a mental health?

P. Yes.

H. Now consider government in the same way. Perhaps you do not find the answer so easy?

P. No, I do not.

H. Nor did we, Mr Pratt. But you do know this much, that in the case of government you must be looking for something practical.

P. Yes.

H. It must do people good.

P. Exactly.

b H. And Valerie and I had reached the conclusion that nothing is good but ability of some kind.

P. So you said.

H. None of the other many aims of government—peace, freedom, prosperity—is either good or bad in itself. To serve the useful purpose of promoting

c happiness each must contribute to the education and intelligence of the citizens.

P. Yes. At any rate, you were committed to this conclusion, according to your report of the conversation.

H. And do governments contribute to the advancement of intelligence or morality?

P. There is nothing to prevent them.

H. For all men in all walks of life? Do governments educate electricians, say, or builders in their professions?

P. No, I think not.

d H. Well what? Do you think that the practice of government contributes to the advancement of any profession but itself? If not, the question arises, what is it actually useful for? Do we want to say that it is the means by which we make people good?

P. That is an idea.

H. In what way will they be good? What use will their morality be? Are we to say merely that this morality is the means of making further people good, and

e these yet others, without ever defining what morality is? It is the same

292e            old story; we seem to be just as far or further than before from discovering what this ability really is which would make us happy.

P. You are right, Mr Hempel, we seem to have arrived at an impasse.

H. At this point I redoubled my entreaties to the Englishmen to save us by their most  
293a            serious efforts from the predicament to which our argument had led. I put to them this question: what ability must a man in fact master if he wants to be happy for the rest of his life?

P. And did Lucas oblige you?

H. He did, and his next observations were most penetrating.

b LUCAS Would you rather that I name this ability which eludes you or prove that you are already master of it?

H. Good heavens, can you do such a thing?

L. With pleasure.

H. Then let me hear your proof; this will be much easier than learning, at my age.

L. You have only to answer my questions. First, do you have any ability?

H. I have some, but it is not great.

L. Some will do. And do you think it is possible for anything both to be and not to be what it is?

c H. Certainly not.

L. But you have some ability.

H. Yes.

L. If you have some ability, you are competent.

H. Yes, up to a point.

L. Good enough—up to the point of competence at least. And if you are competent, it follows that you have the ability you need.

H. No. There are many abilities I do not have.

L. If you do not, then you are not competent.

H. To that extent I am not.

L. None the less, not competent. But you said just before that you were competent.

Thus it follows that you are a creature who both is and at the same time and in the

293d same respects is not what you are.

H. No, Mr Lucas, this is a mere quibble. First you assert that I possess the ability we are looking for. Then you defend your assertion as follows. You say: it is impossible both to be and not to be something; therefore Mr Hempel cannot be both competent and incompetent; therefore, if he has any ability, he has any ability he needs; and if he has any ability he needs, he has the ability he needs to make him happy. Is this the process of what you call your intelligence?

e L. I could not have put it better myself.

H. Well, I wonder if it is the same for yourself and our friend Mr Sykes as it is for me, because if so I cannot complain. Are you telling me that you have never possessed some abilities while lacking others?

SYKES Never.

H. Do you mean that neither of you has any ability?

294a S. On the contrary.

H. Then if you have some you have all.

S. Exactly, and so do you.

H. This is wonderful news. I suppose that all men have either every ability or none.

S. Certainly. They cannot have some and lack others; they cannot be both competent and incompetent.

H. So—?

S. So everyone who has any ability has all.

b H. This is momentous—at last I have managed to make you talk seriously. Do you really mean to tell me that you are masters of everything? What about medicine, for instance, or forestry?

S. Certainly.

H. Could you pilot an airliner?

S. I could *build* an airliner.

H. And could you do such things as count the stars, or calculate the number of particles in the universe?

S. Of course—this is merely mechanical.

CLEMONS Prove it, Dick, if you want me to believe you're serious.

- 294c S. Prove what?
- C. Listen. Do you know how many teeth John has, and does he know how many you have?
- S. Are you not prepared to accept our assurance that we possess every ability?
- C. No, I am not. If you want to prove that you are telling the truth, then here's my challenge. Each of you tell us how many teeth the other has, and then we will count, and if it appears that you know the answer we will take your word for the rest.
- d S. You may take our word without further ado, Don. This is an absurd request.
- C. (angry) Do you know what I am going to ask you next, then?
- S. Yes.
- C. Nonsense. Do you know how old I am? Do you know how old Valerie is? You don't. Listen, tell me Valerie's vital statistics to the nearest centimetre.
- S. I hardly think your questions are of philosophical importance.
- e HEMPEL Well, Mr Lucas, may *I* ask you a question? Can Mr Sykes dance?
- LUCAS Dick? Beautifully.
- H. And does his 'intelligence' enable him to keep up with all the latest developments, such as rock 'n' roll?
- L. He can do anything.
- H. These abilities you both enjoy—did you always have them?
- L. Yes, always.
- H. Even when you were children? Even at birth?
- BOTH Always.
- H. Gentlemen, this seems impossible to believe.
- 295a LUCAS Do you doubt our word?
- H. I would be forced to, had I not such a high regard for your intelligence.
- L. If you will answer some further questions, I will prove to you that, however surprising this may seem, you must admit the same abilities yourself.

- 295a H. I could want nothing better than to have this proved against me. If I am intelligent without knowing it, and you can prove to me that every ability is, and always was, mine, it will be the greatest discovery of my life.
- L. Answer my questions then.
- b H. Ask away, and I will answer.
- L. You say that you have certain abilities?
- H. Yes.
- L. And these abilities spring, do they not, from your ability-producing faculty?
- H. My ability-producing faculty? Do you mean my mind?
- L. Please do not ask questions when you are engaged in answering.
- H. But what am I to say? I am entirely in your hands, but do you want me to answer without question when I do not understand what *your* question means?
- c L. You can surely give a meaning to my words.
- H. Yes.
- L. Then answer in accordance with that meaning.
- H. But if you had one thing in mind when you asked the question, and I make my answer in accordance with a different understanding of it, you can hardly be satisfied with an irrelevant answer.
- L. I shall be satisfied.
- H. But I shall certainly not answer unless I understand you.
- L. But don't you see that this is merely an old-fashioned prejudice? Anyone can answer a question as he takes it to have been asked him,
- d H. I believe you resent my escaping your verbal traps by the distinctions I draw. But we must not wrangle, since I want to learn from you. Of course I have no practice in philosophical discussion of this sort, and you are far better at it. So
- e please carry on in your own way. May we hear the question again?
- L. The question is this: are your abilities, such as you have, afforded you by something?
- H. Yes, by my mind.

- 29Se L. Again you answer more than you are asked. My question was not ‘by what are  
296a they afforded?’ but ‘are they afforded by something?’
- H. I answered unnecessarily because I lack the advantage of your disciplined minds.  
Forgive me. Now I give the simple answer: such abilities as I enjoy are always  
afforded me by something,
- L. Is this always the same thing?
- H. Always, for such abilities as I enjoy.
- L. We can do without the embroidery.
- H. I would not wish this word ‘always’ to get us on the rocks.
- b L. That won’t get *me* on the rocks, you may be sure. To repeat, the question was this:  
is it always the same thing which affords you your ability?
- H. Leaving out the qualification I answer ‘always’.
- L. Do you mean ‘all ways’ or ‘the same way for every ability’?
- H. I mean the same way for every ability I enjoy.
- L. Why does your enjoyment have to pop up again?
- H. I apologise.
- L. We have no need for apologies. Now the next question: could you possess every  
c ability if you did not possess them all?
- H. That would be hard.
- L. You may now give vent to any exuberance you wish, You have admitted to the  
possession of all abilities.
- H. That seems to be true, if my reservations are not allowed to have force.
- L. No matter about your reservations; you had to admit, didn’t you, that every ability  
derives from the ability-faculty? You thereby conceded the possession of all  
abilities at all times, whence it follows that you had them as a child, at birth,  
d before your birth and before the creation of the earth or the solar system; and,  
by heavens, you will continue that way, if I have anything to do with it.
- H. In that case may I wish you a long and active life, Mr Lucas? And I should have  
fewer misgivings if you would enlist the support of Mr Sykes in this  
enterprise; then I am sure it will meet with success—I could not despise the  
patronage of two such intelligent gentlemen.

296e            Now would it be presumptuous of me to ask one small question? I should like to know how I am able to tell that virtue alone is unhappiness? Do I have this ability?

L . Certainly you do.

H. Just what is it that I am able to tell?

L. That virtue alone is happiness.

297a H. True enough. I have known that for a long time. But my question was different: where did I learn that virtue is *unhappiness*?

SYKES You never learnt such a thing.

H. —and am therefore *unable* to tell something?

LUCAS This will undermine my argument, Dick. If there is something he is unable to do, he can prove that he both has and lacks ability.

SYKES Yes, I am sorry.

b H. What are you saying, Mr Lucas? You do not imagine that your omniscient friend has made a mistake.

S. Just a moment; what makes you think that John is my friend?

H. Please do not interrupt, Mr Sykes. Mr Lucas was about to inform me how I can tell that virtue is unhappiness. I hope you do not grudge me this information.

S. You are dodging my question.

H. I am not a match for one of you. No wonder if I dodge your combined onslaught.

c I am not a T.H. Huxley, you know, and even he couldn't stand up against the intellectuals of the Church, who put up three objections to his theory of evolution for every one he disposed of; especially when they were aided by the scholars of a certain University, doubtless also intellectuals and as acute as their successors seem to be. It has needed the help of others, men like

d Huxley's grandson Julian, to consolidate the victory against such an opposition. Unfortunately I have no grandson to stand by me.

S. I am interested in your analogy, Mr Hempel. Perhaps you will tell me whether Sir Julian Huxley is your grandson.

H. I really believe you ask all these questions because you

- 297d grudge me the profit I might get from Mr Lucas's intelligence. Still, it will be best to answer you.
- S. What is the answer to be?
- H. That Sir Julian is the grandson of T.H. Huxley but not, so far as I know, any relation of mine. My wife Diane has English ancestors, but they are not Huxleys either.
- S. Did you say that your wife's name is Diane?
- H. Yes, she is my daughter Toby's mother. Peter, my son, is Toby's half-brother.
- S. So that Peter both is and is not Toby's brother?
- H. My dear fellow, he is her half-brother. His mother was my first wife.
- S. Then your present wife is not a mother?
- 298a H. She is not Peter's mother.
- S. Can a mother be different from a mother? Are you the same as a stone?
- H. My present opinion is that I am not, though I suspect you may prove that I am.
- S. You are different from a stone?
- H. Certainly.
- S. Being different from a stone you are not a stone, or, to take another example, being different from a coin you are not a coin.
- H. Yes.
- S. So your wife, being different from a mother, is not a mother.
- H. It appears that she is not.
- b LUCAS You see, if my mother is a mother, then your wife, being different from a mother, is not a mother, and your daughter is motherless.
- CLEMONS But doesn't the same apply to your mother? She is different from mine.
- L. Oh no, she is not.
- C. She is the same?
- L. Precisely.
- c C. I should hate to think that. But my mother is mine only, not all the world's.
- L. No. You seem to believe that the same woman can both be



298c                   and not be a mother.

C. Yes I do.

L. How? She couldn't be tall and not tall, or human and not human, could she?

C. No, but that's not what I mean—you're using a false analogy. It is ridiculous to suggest that your mother is everyone's.

L. But true.

C. Does everyone include animals?

L. Everyone and everything.

d C. And your father is everything's father?

L. Yes.

C. Then some of your father's children are fish?

L. And your father's.

C. And you have calves and piglets and puppies for your brothers and sisters?

L. So do you.

C. Perhaps your father is a dog?

L. Yes. So is yours.

SYKES You will soon see the truth of this, if you will answer a few questions. Have you a dog?

C. Yes, we have an old collie.

e S. Has he any puppies?

C. Yes, there's a litter down the street just like him.

S. Are you sure he is their father?

C. Yes, we had him mated with the mother.

S. You say he is your dog?

C. He is.

S. He is a father and he is yours: therefore he is your father, and the puppies are your brothers. (before Clemons can object) Let me ask you one more question: do you beat this dog'?

C. I certainly do. (laughing) He is not so big as you.

299a S. Then you beat your father.

C. I should far rather beat yours, for producing such 'intelligent' offspring. I imagine he got about as much benefit from this intelligence of yours as the father of your puppies did.

- 299a S. He hadn't need of *much* benefit, and nor have you.  
 C. Nor you yourself, perhaps.
- b S. No, nor anyone. Tell me, Don, do you or do you not think that a sick man will benefit from taking medicine when he wants it? or a soldier from carrying arms when he goes to the front?  
 C. I do. Is this another of your conjuring tricks?  
 S. Answer my questions and you will soon see. You admit that medicine benefits the sick. If a sick man needed as *much* benefit as possible it would be best when the doctor prescribes castor oil to ship him a whole truckload.
- c C. Very sensible, if he has a thirst like most graduate students in philosophy.  
 S. And if weapons are of benefit in war, soldiers should carry as many rifles as they can hold.  
 C. Excellent. An intelligent observer of world affairs like you, John, wouldn't dream of dissenting from such a sound proposal, would you?  
 LUCAS I have my doubts.  
 C. What, are you going to strip NATO bare?
- d SYKES Do you think, Don, that the possession of wealth is a good thing?  
 C. I do, and plenty of it.  
 S. Large bank accounts all over the place?  
 C. Yes sir.  
 S. Do you think people benefit from money?  
 C. I most certainly do.  
 S. Then ought one not to have money all over the place? Wouldn't a really happy man
- e make his meals of bank notes, and have his fingernails and toenails plated with gold?  
 C. Yes. In California they make bathing suits out of dollar bills. They say a wealthy suitor will never make advances unless he can see the credentials.
- 300a LUCAS When you see a credential, do you get sight of it?  
 C. Certainly.  
 L. So credentials have sight?  
 C. Oh yes, they can see a long way.

- 300a L. What sorts of thing can they see?
- C. No *things*, they do not see *things*. But are you so naive as to imagine that they cannot therefore see? Ha, I think I have caught you napping this time. If it were not an impossibility, I should say you had spoken without saying anything.
- SYKES. Is it impossible to speak without saying anything?
- C. Unfortunately yes.
- S. When you say nothing, is anything said?
- b C. No, nothing.
- S. And when nothing is said, everything is silent?
- C. Yes.
- S. And when everything is silent, nothing speaks?
- c C. You're right. (taking the initiative) But surely, Dick, everything is silent all the time.
- LUCAS Oh no.
- C. Then can everything talk?
- L. Some things do.
- C. I did not ask you that. I asked: can everything talk or is it silent?
- d SYKES Neither and both. Ha, that will stump you.
- C. (roars with laughter) He's neithered, bothered and bewildered. (more laughter)
- VALERIE (joins in the laughing)
- C. (redoubled guffaws)
- e HEMPEL Why are you laughing at such a mighty serious matter, Valerie?
- S. Have you ever seen a mighty matter, Mr Hempel?
- H Yes, many.
- S. Were they the same as the mighty, or not?
- H. Were they the same as the mighty? I find this question most difficult to answer. I
- 301a think that they are different from the mighty itself, but that they enjoy the presence of might.
- S. If you were in the presence of a cow, would you be a cow? Or does being in my presence make you me?
- H. God forbid.
- S. Then how can one thing be another by being in the presence

- 301a            of that other?
- b H. (imitating their manner) Why, is that what you cannot understand?  
 S. It is indeed. Not even I can understand what is not there to be understood.  
 H. What do you mean? Isn't the beautiful beautiful and the ugly ugly?  
 S. If I think so.  
 H. But do you?  
 S. By all means.  
 H. And isn't the identical identical and the different different? We can hardly suppose
- c            that the different is identical: even a child could see that it is different. This  
 makes me suppose that your mistake was intentional, since you are obviously  
 experts in this question and answer technique, and you seem to me to do your  
 job in a workmanlike manner.  
 S. On the subject of jobs, can you tell me whose job is driving?  
 H. The chauffeur's, I suppose.  
 S. And typing?  
 H. The stenographer's.  
 S. And slaughtering, skinning and chopping meat?  
 H. The butcher's.
- d S. You would agree that people ought to stick to the jobs for them?  
 H. Certainly.  
 S. And the butcher's job, you said, is skinning and chopping?  
 H. I did say that, but please don't be too severe on me.  
 S. Then if one were to kill a butcher and chop him up, that would be doing his job for  
 him, and if one took a ride on the chauffeur or typed the stenographer, one  
 would be doing their jobs for them.
- e H. Here we have the last word in higher education. How can I hope to make such  
 intelligence my own?  
 S. If it did become your own, would you ever recognise it?  
 H. With your leave.

- 301e S. You think you can recognise what is yours?  
 H. That is my opinion, hereby submitted in three copies for your authorisation.  
 S. Well, what do you say to this: a thing is your own only if you are free to use it as you like. Take household pets, for example: you will call a dog your own if, and only if, you are free to sell it, give it away, or kill it.
- 302a H. Yes. These are the only conditions under which I would call a thing mine.  
 S. And would you say that these live creatures are animals?  
 H. Yes.
- b S. So you would agree to call no animal your own unless you had over it the rights we have specified.  
 H. I would.  
 S. (thinks) Mr Hempel I take it you are a supporter of parliamentary democracy.  
 H. (with desperate ingenuity) No, not exactly.
- c S. I sympathise. Doubtless you count yourself above the current unthinking devotion to representative government and the other paraphernalia of the American way of life.  
 H. Excuse me, Mr Sykes, like other Americans I have the highest regard for representative government.  
 S. Don't Americans approve of parliamentary democracy?
- d H. No. You see, in this country we do not have a parliament. Our Congress corresponds to the British Parliament.  
 S. No matter, you have a Congress?  
 H. That is correct.  
 S. And is it yours?  
 H. Yes, the government belongs to the people.  
 S. And therefore to you?  
 H. Yes. But I do not see where your argument is leading.  
 S. Are the members of your Congress alive?  
 H. They are.  
 S. You remember that you agreed that all live creatures are animals. It follows, does it not, that the members of your Congress are animals?
- e H. It must.

302e S. You further agreed that an animal is yours if, and only if, you are free to give it away, sell it or kill it, when and as you wish.

H. I did. I have to admit it.

303a S. Right. If you admit that this Congress is yours, you must have the right to give away, sell or slaughter its members, just as you would other animals.

H. (nonplussed)

CLEMONS Good for you, professor.

S. But is it good for me or good for you?

C. Oh, I give up. You can't win against these two.

b ALL Well done, Sykes. Three cheers for Oxford philosophy, etc. (derisive laughter and applause)

c HEMPEL Gentlemen, I have to confess that rarely before have I had the privilege of talking with men of your intelligence. I am greatly in your debt. Many of your talents deserve my admiration, but none more than your magnificent contempt

d for all opinions, no matter how general or authoritative, which conflict with your own. Your methods, of course, can never have a wide appeal, since our narrow-minded public would be more ashamed to win an argument your way than to lose it. I approve also of the convenient and democratic manner in which you dispose of all distinctions, between good and bad for instance, or

e great and small or black and white. This, as you say, has the admirable effect of preventing anyone from opening his mouth; and, since you allow the interdiction to apply to yourselves, must result in the removal of every source of verbal contention. But the most attractive feature of your method is that anyone

304a can learn it in a few minutes; and I noticed how quickly Mr Clemons, with a little effort, was able to give a fair imitation. Now all this simplicity is an excellent thing; but I must advise you not to publicise your course since there is a danger, if you attract too many students, that they may not appreciate the importance of what they are able to learn so effortlessly. Perhaps the best thing would be for you to lecture to one

304a another. But if there is to be an audience, I urge on you two precautions: charge  
b an entrance fee—this is important—and instruct your students not to talk too  
much outside the lectures, except to you or among themselves. The best things  
in life may be free, but it is the expensive ones that people find attractive. And  
now it only remains to ask you to enrol myself and Valerie in your course.

c That was the end of our discussion, Mr Pratt, and after a few more words we  
dispersed. I hope you will join me in their course, since they say that for  
teaching a man their brand of intelligence their only requirement is his money.

PRATT It sounds interesting, Mr Hempel, and I should like to go, were it not that I  
feel frankly out of sympathy with Lucas's approach. I am one of those you  
d mentioned who would prefer to lose an argument his way, rather than win it . It  
may seem absurd for me to give you advice here, but I think you had better hear  
what *I* heard yesterday from a legal friend of mine—a man of considerable  
intellect—who left your discussion in the middle and met me walking on  
Nassau Street. He asked why I was not attending the meeting. I inquired what  
meeting, and he told me there was a long discussion in progress in the Student  
Center. 'Tell me what I am missing,' I asked. 'You are missing a chance,' he  
e said, 'to hear the top philosophers of our generation showing their paces.' I  
asked him what he thought of them. 'I thought the whole performance was  
utter nonsense,' he said, 'they were making a lot of fuss about nothing.' Those  
were his very words. 'But surely,' I said, 'philosophy is a very agreeable  
305a study.' 'Agreeable? It is worthless. It surprised me very much,' he went on,  
'to see Mr Hempel there; he should know better than to expose himself to such  
pointless wrangling. And yet these men,' he repeated, 'are reckoned among the  
most promising philosophers of their generation. The fact is,

305a Pratt, that the subject itself is trivial and those who engage in it grotesque.’ My  
b own view was that his disparagement of philosophy, or any disparagement for  
that matter, was unjust; but when he expressed disapproval of your engaging in  
public argument with such people, then I had to agree.

H. They are remarkable men, Mr Pratt. But what was I going to say? Oh yes, tell me  
about this man who disapproves of philosophy—is he a practising lawyer or a  
professor?

c P. Oh, a professor! I doubt whether he has ever been inside a law-court. But they say  
he knows his subject and writes well.

H. As I thought, he is one of the very class I was about to mention. You remember  
that William James said of Law Professors that they sit on the knife edge  
between scholarship and politics. The trouble is that they take pride in this;  
they think they are the salt of the earth intellectually, and many people seem to  
agree with them. But on the whole philosophers have an even higher  
d reputation; so the law professor reasons that if only he can prove philosophy  
worthless no one will be left to dispute his title to intellectual supremacy; which  
he considers his by rights anyway and in spite of a tendency to be worsted in  
most verbal encounters with philosophers of Lucas's calibre. This self-esteem  
is natural, since lawyers have a certain amount of philosophical skill and a  
e certain familiarity with practical politics: and they argue, reasonably enough,  
that their acquaintance with each subject is just sufficient to keep them out of  
the pitfalls of sophistry and the dangers of political feud, while allowing them  
the free use of their intellectual powers.

P. And do you think there is anything in this?

H. Nothing.

P. Yet their argument has a certain plausibility.

H. ‘Plausible’ is the word. But the fact is that they do not appreciate the danger of  
306a falling between two stools. If you combine two activities of which one is  
worth



306a while and the other not, then your resultant activity is better than the second but worse than the first. If the two activities are both worth while, but not complementary, then the combination is less effective than either in achieving the ends at which they severally aim. Only in the case of two worthless  
b activities is their combination less worthless. So if philosophy and politics are both worth while activities, but not complementary, it is nonsense to say their  
c combination is more worth while: it is less.....There could only be truth in what these lawyers claim if both the combined subjects were valueless, which I do not imagine they would want to admit. The truth is that lawyers who combine the practice of philosophy and politics are generally, and contrary to their own opinion, lesser men than both the philosophers and the politicians they emulate. However, I do not wish to stir up animosity. We may forgive them their aspiration, provided that we have no illusions about their achievement. After  
d all, any man who professes an intellectual occupation and engages resolutely in it deserves our greatest respect.

P. I think I have mentioned to you before how worried I am about future plans for my daughters. The younger one is still small, but Jane will soon be ready for College. I often think, when I hear you talking, that the sort of anxieties we have over our children verge on the lunatic. We make colossal efforts to  
e choose a well-educated girl for their mother, and to insure their future against bad times and accidents to ourselves, but when it comes to education we take no trouble at all. But then when I look at the people who set themselves up as educators, I am horrified what a queer lot they seem to be. You know, I am not sure I can advise the girl to go to College at all.

H. But my dear Pratt, it's true of every profession that the great majority of its adherents are unsatisfactory in some way, or even worthless. Surely you appreciate

307a           that a good man is always a precious rarity. Look at business or the law or the foreign service or sport: these are all perfectly respectable professions, aren't they?

P, Surely.

b   H, And they all contain a large proportion of bunglers.

P. That is perfectly true.

H. But you are not going to forbid your daughter to have anything to do with them?

P. I couldn't sensibly.

H. No, but what you can do is this: simply ignore the *professors* of philosophy, good and bad; examine instead the *profession*. If you conclude that it is all a waste of time, do not recommend it, certainly not to your children. But if you find it as I do, then I hope that you and your whole family will become zealous and conscientious students.

FINIS