

Pathways to Philosophy

PROGRAM A: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

The Possible World Machine: Unit Two

Introduction

WHY did you apply to do this course? That is a question which may have an immediate, clear answer, or it may be one which calls for some thought. Perhaps several considerations were brought to bear, and it may be difficult to say which of all the reasons was the deciding factor. It is just possible that the decision seemed a little reckless or even unwise at the time, given your other heavy commitments, but that you felt you just had to do it anyway for reasons that you could not clearly articulate, and still cannot explain even now. Or it may be the case, finally – though perhaps improbably – that sending in your enrolment form was a spur of the minute action that you cannot account for at all.

Whatever motivated you to apply, one would hope that you did so out of your own free will. That is not a foregone conclusion. You may have been coerced, or tricked, or even hypnotised into joining the course. Here, admittedly, one is relying on the everyday, non-philosophical understanding of what it is to do something out of ‘one’s own free will’. If you were threatened with the sack by a philosophy-mad employer or with divorce by a philosophy-mad spouse if you didn’t join, or coolly at gun point by an agent of the Pathways Association, then you still had the freedom to say no and face the consequences. Even if no such coercion was applied, no-one living in society, it might be argued, is totally free of constraints upon their freedom of action imposed, directly or indirectly by others. But there is a recognised difference between acting within ‘acceptable’ constraints – constraints which

respect an agent's right to make his or her own choices in matters that concern them – and those which cross the line (admittedly blurred at times) into unacceptability. (In human history, not all societies, perhaps not even the majority have respected 'freedom' or 'liberty' in this sense: it is the notion of liberty passionately argued for in John Stuart Mill's famous essay, *On Liberty*.)

Now if you were not coerced or tricked into enrolling, and if you were in full possession of your mental faculties at the time that you made the decision, then common sense would say that it was indeed your own free choice to join the course. If you should come to regret that decision at some time in the future (as we sincerely hope you do not!), then it seems you would only have yourself to blame. What you did, you did without being pushed, with your eyes open and knowing what you were doing. You could have chosen not to have done what you in fact decided to do. You were free to join the course or not to join. And you chose to join. What could be clearer than that?

Let us look a bit more closely what acting freely in this sense involves. If you did act on impulse, then the thought might have come into your head when you saw the advertisement, 'That looks interesting,' or, 'That would be fun.' Even if there was no time in the intervening period between first seeing the advert and signing the enrolment form when you mentally rehearsed to yourself the reasons why it would be interesting or fun, however, there must have been some background that made your impulsive act intelligible. At the very least you had to have some mental picture of what philosophy is about. You would not have acted thus if you hadn't felt the need for something new in your life, and so on. Someone else in your position but with different character and dispositions would not have made the decision that you did.

On the other hand, you may have gone through a process of deliberation that eventually led to a decision. You may have asked others what they thought of it, or borrowed a philosophy book from the library, and so on. You may indeed have made several decisions over a period of time, each one of which narrowed down options for consideration. (The first might have been simply, the decision to do something constructive with your free time, the second the decision to do a course, and so on.) At each stage, a range of choices appeared for consideration, and you had a clear reason for selecting one and rejecting

the rest. The final decision was in every sense yours, reflecting your beliefs and values. Someone with different beliefs or values would not have had the reason to do what you had reason to do, a reason which in the absence of countervailing reasons you chose to act upon.

But now suppose that someone were to make the following mischievous suggestion. Whether or not you deliberated before making your choice, you naturally assumed – as everyone does – that there were genuine alternative courses of action available to you. Prior to finally deciding, it seemed that you could have chosen to do one thing or another: all it took was your act of willing the action to make one of these possible outcomes actual. But what actually did happen? At the moment of putting your decision into effect, you were everything that your biological make-up and circumstances had made you, from your birth onwards. Given all that you were, all the decisions you had previously made in your life (accounted for, of course, in an exactly similar way), there was no possibility that you would hold back from the action you chose to do, or that you would choose to do something else instead. Even if you went through a careful process of deliberation, every thought that came into your head, every pro and con that you duly noted, arose in just the way it did because of what you were, because of what your circumstances or your previous choices had made you at just that moment in time. Taking all the circumstances into account – every aspect or nuance to your personality or your situation that was capable of having an effect on your decision – there was only one possible choice that you could have made, even though you were blissfully unaware of that fact.

In short, according to this suggestion, you had to enrol for this course. At the moment when you faced what seemed to be a choice, the outcome was already inevitable. It is only your ignorance of all the relevant circumstances – in the light of the human situation, a merciful ignorance indeed – that makes you think that some extra ingredient of ‘actually choosing’ or ‘freely willing’ had, at any stage of the process right up to the very end, anything to do with the final outcome. In other words, as we watch our lives unfold before us we are all slaves to a course of events over which we have no ultimate control, cogs in a machine, playthings of fate. What difference does it make whether or not you made your decision on impulse, whether your reasons for joining

the course were good or bad, or indeed whether you were dragged to the post-box kicking and screaming? The hope that you joined up out of 'your own free will' is but a sad delusion.

There must be something, we feel, that is wrong with the reasoning behind that suggestion. Whatever philosophy or logic may say to the contrary, we just know that we have free will. My sense that I do not have to be tapping these keys at this very moment is surely as vivid and as indubitable as my sense of my own existence. Yet at the same time, something has to give. Either the arguments are wrong or we are wrong. – That is the philosophical problem of freedom of the will.

The Black Box

The fighter's head spun. He never saw the swift upper-cut that sneaked under his guard catching him neatly on the left side of the jaw. He felt a vicious stab of pain at the back of his cranium, and a cold fog seemed to descend over the ring. For a few moments he gazed at the crowd, an expression of puzzlement in his eyes as if he were surprised to see anyone there, then at the bloodied face of his opponent. At last his head seemed to nod in recognition, his knees buckled and he sank gently to the canvas.

Later, in the bar, Danny was commiserating with his friend Joe.

'I just don't know how it could've happened,' Joe was wailing. 'A hundred quid it's cost me. My man was way ahead on points. He'd knocked that lump of lard down twice, no, three times. There was no way he could have lost.'

'Well, he did lose,' said Danny in a sombre tone that suggested a profound truth about the nature of human existence. The two men contemplated the truth in silence. Then Danny spoke again. 'He lost his concentration for a fraction of a second, that's all.'

Joe said nothing. That fraction of a second had swallowed up the week's housekeeping money.

That night, Joe had a dream. At first, he thought he'd woken. Next to him, his wife Betty looked serene. On her face there was no hint of the furious row they'd had that evening. Then his heart stopped as he became aware that someone else was in the room. From the shadows a tall figure in a shabby anorak approached, its face hidden by a voluminous hood.

'You don't know me, but I know you,' came a well-spoken man's voice, barely above the level of a whisper. Joe lunged at the figure, but his arms grasped at thin air. 'I'm sorry about your bet, but I knew you'd lose,' continued the voice unperturbed. 'You haven't been very lucky lately, have you?' Joe did not reply. It was a statement, not a question. 'That's why I've come to make you a proposal. I think you'll find it quite attractive.'

'Don't tell me, you want to buy my soul!' laughed Joe. 'Well you're in luck. It's going cheap.' He was no longer afraid, but settling down to enjoy his dream.

'No, not at all,' replied the voice. 'I have a gift for you. You can accept the gift or reject it, there's no catch. Then it's up to you how you use it.'

Joe noticed a small black box on the bedside table. He picked it up. The only features were a red button, and next to it in large white capitals the words, 'PRESS HERE'. For a few seconds Joe's finger hovered, then he carefully placed the box back on the table.

'Very wise,' said the hooded figure. 'You want to know what it does first. I'll tell you everything, we've got nothing to hide. In our organisation, we know the future like a book. On the basis of our exhaustive knowledge of the present state of the physical universe - I'll spare you the details! - we are able to predict every event that will ever happen, the birth of a solar system, the falling of a leaf, with perfect accuracy. Now, the answers to any questions that you will ever wish to ask about the future are stored in that box. Need I say more?'

'Yes you do!' said Joe defiantly. 'What you've just told me doesn't add up. It's one thing being able to predict the course of physical events, whether large or small. For the sake of argument, I'll grant you that, though the idea seems utterly far fetched. But if you then make your predictions available to human agents, you've introduced a new variable which wasn't part of the

prediction, and that is what a person such as myself chooses to do with that so-called knowledge. If you had told me that I was going to go to the boxing match yesterday, you would have given me a reason that I previously didn't have for not going, namely, to prove you wrong!

'How naive of you!', the hooded figure admonished Joe condescendingly. 'Do you suppose that we haven't already *included* what you're going to do with the information as part of the calculation? I assure you everything has been taken into account.'

'Then you already know whether I'm going to accept your gift or not?'

'Precisely. Now, will you take it?'

Joe's tongue moved to form the word 'No' but he found himself saying 'Yes.'

Joe awoke to find his wife already up and dressed. He was about to tell her of his strange dream when he noticed with a stab of fright the black box in her hands.

'I suppose this is what you spent the money on!' Betty looked at Joe accusingly.

'For God's sake, don't press that button,' cried Joe.

'Why not?' Seeing her husband panic, she tossed the box carelessly from one hand to the other. Then she pressed the button. From inside the box came a woman's voice. 'Thank you for calling. Please state your question after the tone...Beep.'

'Oh God, what am I going to do now?' blubbered Joe.

'You're going to take the box from your wife.'

Without thinking, Joe grabbed the box and put it on the bed. He waited to see what else it would do, but nothing happened. Keeping his eyes fixed on the mysterious device, Joe told Betty about the man in the anorak. Betty's mouth grew wider and wider.

'You expect me to believe that!'

'You heard what happened.'

For the first time, Betty's face showed signs of doubt. Joe saw his chance to take charge of the situation. Controlling his fear, he slowly reached forward and pressed the button. 'Go on, ask it something!'

'Thank you for calling. Please state your question after the tone...Beep.'

Betty hesitated. 'All right. What am I going to do now?'

'In fifteen seconds time you will make a phone call to your friend Judy.'

'Well I'm not, so there!' replied Betty, marching over to the dressing table. On the table she noticed a note that she'd scribbled two days before: 'Judy's birthday tomorrow.'

'Oh drat!' Without thinking, she marched over to the phone, picked it up and dialled. As her friend's voice came on she slammed the phone down. The penny had dropped.

Joe laughed with glee. 'My turn now!' He asked the box for the complete list of winners at Kempton Park horse races that afternoon. As the woman in the box recited the names, Joe's eyebrows rose several times. Then he phoned his bookmaker to place a £50 accumulator. 'We're going to be rich!'

Joe and Betty danced around the bedroom.

Betty sipped a Bacardi and Coke as the Caribbean sun beat down on pale yellow sands that stretched as far as the eye could see. The azure ocean merged at the horizon with a cloudless sky. 'Darling,' she said suddenly, 'it's been a wonderful holiday, but I'd really like to go home now. I miss my friends.'

Joe looked desperate. 'We can't.'

'Why ever not? Is there something you haven't told me?' As she stared into Joe's pleading eyes, Betty felt her insides turn to ice.

'I asked the box this morning how long the holiday was going to go on and it said another two months,' Joe said in a flat tone. 'There's no point in trying to leave, something's bound to stop us.'

Betty's eyes flashed with anger. 'The box!' You told me you'd left it behind!'

'I was going to,' said Joe breaking into sobs, 'then I asked it whether I would leave it behind and it said no.'

Betty gripped his shoulders. 'Listen to me. We've got to get rid of it!' But Joe avoided her eyes.

'There's nothing we can do.'

The kitchen table was strewn with empty beer cans. Joe was alone. In front of him the black box seemed to grow larger and larger until it filled his field of vision. Gripped by an irresistible desire and an equally strong aversion, Joe willed his hand not to move. But he had to know. He pressed the red button.

'Thank you for calling. Please state your question after the tone...Beep'.

'Whaddam I g'n do now?'

Joe's voice was barely comprehensible but the box replied immediately. 'In one minute's time you're going to drink another can of beer.'

Joe surveyed the table. All the cans were empty. He felt a surge of joy. He counted them to make sure. He'd bought twelve and drunk twelve. There was no more drink in the house. 'I'm free, free at last!'

At that moment, the door bell rang. It was his friend Danny. 'I heard things weren't going too well for you,' said Danny. 'I thought I'd drop by to watch the snooker.' In his arms were two six-packs of beer.

First Dialogue

'I think Joe is a very weak individual. I wouldn't have put up with any nonsense from that thingamajig, that's for sure! I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole!'

'Sorry, Gloria, but if the black box said you were going to press the button then you would press the button, and there's nothing you could do to stop yourself. As Dr Phillips said in the story, the black box is infallible, incapable of making a false prediction.'

'Nonsense! No machine is incapable of going wrong, least of all a machine for predicting the future, assuming there could ever be such a thing. Dr Phillips?'

'Patrick, I think you and Lucy each have a valid point. But neither of you have answered Gloria. First, let's assume that whenever the box does make a prediction it is infallible – never mind how. Then, as the hooded stranger says in the story, in making its prediction, the box has to take account of what effect this information will have on the person whose future it is predicting. There are some persons it can't give predictions to and others it can. Or

perhaps with a given individual there might be different occasions when it can or can't.'

'You mean it could know what the future held both for weak-willed Joe and strong-willed Betty, but it could only tell Joe but not Betty?'

'That's more or less right, Lucy. Once Joe is convinced that he cannot buck the prediction, then the job is easy. Betty is more sceptical and resistant, so if the box did make predictions for her, they would have to be disguised, or come out in unexpected ways. That's not a new idea: think of the Delphic Oracle!'

'What about what I said, that the black box cannot be infallible?'

'We've already seen that even if the box worked perfectly it could not always be relied on to give a person the prediction they'd asked for, at least not in plain terms. But of course it's true, Patrick, that every method of measurement that will ever be devised carries some margin of error. Now if you're in the business of predicting the future then whatever measurements the prediction is ultimately based on – say, motions of molecules or electrical impulses in a person's brain – each one will be at least slightly out. But there are millions of such measurements to be made, multiplying the potential error a billionfold.'

'You mean predicting someone's decision is like trying to say which way a rock perched on a ridge is going to fall. The tiniest movement of air can make the difference between the rock crashing down one side of the mountain rather than the other.'

'Exactly, Derek. There's even a branch of mathematics called chaos theory which deals with these kinds of problems. Predicting the weather is a familiar example. However close the computer models get, they will never succeed in mirroring exactly the weather patterns they are designed to simulate. A slight change in the direction of a breeze could conceivably make the difference between the occurrence or non-occurrence of a tornado hundreds of miles away.'

'Or the flap of a butterfly's wing?'

'So I've heard, Lucy, though I don't know how that could ever be proved!'

'I think you've all missed the point!'

'Go on, tell us Brenda!'

'Well, the idea of the black box is just a story, a vivid way of emphasising a point...'

'Which is?'

'Give me a chance, Derek! What I mean is, if I was Betty, I would be just as worried that the box had the information about everything I was going to do, even if it never told me. I would be just as unfree in my actions as sad old Joe, even if I was lucky enough to avoid having that fact rubbed in my face. Now maybe there could never be such a machine. The chemical or electrical processes going in my brain right now are what they are, even if they could never be measured exactly. They account for whatever I am going to do next, even if no-one, or at least no-one other than God, could ever be in a position to make the relevant measurements and calculations. And that's what the story really shows: none of us is free. Everything we have ever done or will ever do in our lives is a foregone conclusion, even though, due to our ignorance, it may seem to us otherwise!'

'That was really the point of my story, actually.'

'Oh, I see.'

'Well done, anyway! To put the point simply, science is based on the principle that the same cause will always produce the same effect. Suppose no-one could ever know the physico-chemical state of every neuron in your brain: still, given that state – whatever that state may be – a certain impulse has to be sent to a certain muscle. For example, you have to turn left rather than right. The fact that you don't know that makes no difference at all.'

'I don't accept that.'

'Why not, Patrick?'

'What you're saying amounts to the assumption of the truth of determinism, that given the total state of a system at any given time, every other state of that system, before and afterwards is determined by the laws of physics. But scientists now know that there are physical processes that give every indication of being indeterministic. Radioactive decay, for example. You can say how long it will take for half the atoms in a lump of plutonium to decay – I think the figure is something quite frightening, like two thousand years or so – but if you had your eyes trained on a single atom, there would be absolutely nothing about the state of that atom, even if you did know everything there was to know about it, that would tell you when it was going to decay. Now, if there are processes in the brain that are indeterministic in that sense...'

'That's a very big "if"!''

'Look, obviously I don't know whether there are such processes or not, and no-one else does either. The point I'm making, Dr Phillips is that if we insisted that we simply had to be free, that there had to be more than one possible answer in reality to the question what you or I were going to do next, then we would have to *assume* that there were indeterministic processes going on in our brains, even if those processes will never ever be identified.'

'Sorry, Patrick, Hume was there before you!'

'What do you mean, Derek?'

'I mean he considers just the point you are making, and dismisses it in a few lines.'

'I suppose you're going to give us another quotation from Hume's *Enquiry!*'

'If I can find it. Here's what I'm looking for: "Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil." That's from Section 8, Part 2.'

'What on earth does that mean?'

'What it means, Gloria, is that if your idea of free will is not being determined to do whatever it is that you're going to do next by your own unique character and innate dispositions, then you're no better, in effect, than a roulette wheel. The action you "freely" choose to do, according to this idea, is just the accidental result of whatever number in the roulette wheel in your head happens to come up. That's not anything anyone would recognise as freedom.'

'In fact the point you're making, if I may but-in Derek, is often made in discussions of the problem of free will. What we have is an argument in the form of a dilemma. Either determinism is universally true, or some processes, say, in the brain, can be indeterministic. An action resulting from a deterministic process cannot be free. But an action resulting from an indeterministic process cannot be what we understand as "freedom" either, at least according to Hume, that is to say, it's not an action which the agent would deserve either praise or blame. Therefore, either way, no human action can ever be free.'

'But is that what you think?'

'Not really, Patrick. It's not that I have any third alternative in mind that

Hume has somehow overlooked. And in fact he himself argues, as many philosophers have done since, that "free will" does not mean what we think it means. For him, freedom just means not being forced to do something by someone against one's will. And in that sense, we can be "free" even though all our actions may be determined. I find that very unsatisfactory. I feel it just misses the point. But then when I try to concentrate on just what the point is, it always seems to elude my grasp somehow. It's that sort of problem! How can philosophy make you feel the lack of something – say, free will in a "real" sense whatever that would mean – when the whole point of the argument is that you can't make any sense of what exactly it is that you think you lack? And yet that's just what we do feel. We feel that philosophy has denied us of something very precious, but get tongue tied as soon as we try to spell out what it is that we've lost!

'I suppose you'd say that's just what makes philosophy so fascinating.'
'You said it!'

Second Dialogue

'Hello, Sam, how's your evening class going?'

'Fine, thanks, Michael. We had our second meeting yesterday. By sheer coincidence, it was on the topic of today's paper: freedom of the will. Anyway, I managed to persuade three of my students to come along today to hear Dr Jordan's paper. I thought they might learn one or two tips! – This is Lucy, here's Gordon, who's thinking of joining us, and last but not least, our best read student, Derek. – Meet Professor Redbourne. He's the Head of the Philosophy Department here at Sellafield University.'

'I'm very pleased you could come today. Sam has kept me well informed about his brilliant evening class. By the sound of things, we could use you in the department. I'm afraid the undergraduates who come here straight from

school can be a rather predictable lot at times. What did you make of Dr Jordan's paper?'

'I think they need a little more time to digest the arguments...'

'I couldn't make heads or tails of it.'

'I thought it was brilliant.'

'I thought it was rubbish.'

'Ahem. We're in for an interesting time, then! I look forward to hearing your contributions to the discussion. Wait a minute, I think Bernie is about to start...'

'Could you take your seats, please! Keep the noise down! Dr Jordan is going to take questions now.'

'Thanks, Bernard. As I said at the beginning, the paper is only a first draft. So I'm relying on you to help me knock it into shape! And if there are any undergraduates here today, don't be afraid to speak up, especially the first years. I promise not to bite!'

'Okay. Hope we don't disappoint you, Margaret! Any questions? Yes Michael?'

'If you don't mind me getting my question in first...'

'You usually do!'

'I just want to get clear about the central argument, really. Maggie, you start off from the familiar Humean view according to which free will is *compatible* with determinism. Free actions are not those which are undetermined – whatever that might mean – but rather those which are caused to happen in the right sort of way, by an agent in full possession of his or her physical and mental faculties, not under any coercion or compulsion. On this view, when we express our disapproval at a person for doing something wrong, perhaps in very strong terms, we are merely seeking to bring it about that they – or others, by making that person an example – are more likely to avoid doing that wrong action in future. And basically, you want to defend that line, although your position is a bit more complicated. Is that right so far?'

'Yes, roughly speaking. Except that as I said in my paper, I think that the account you've just summarized of so-called "expressions of disapproval" is totally inadequate. It completely fails to explain why it is that we *feel* the way we do.'

'So basically you want to give indirect *support* to the compatibilist view by

defending the idea that free will is compatible with determinism *against* those who object to it on the grounds that it leads to an inadequate account of the nature of the attitudes of disapproval?’

‘That’s correct. You see, I can’t accept – and I think many people can’t accept – that all we are doing when we reprimand someone is altering the mental controls so that they act differently in future. We may have strong feelings about what they did. The particular action that occurred should not have taken place, we say, and would not have, had the agent thought their action through according to accepted norms of behaviour. And the difficulty for the compatibilist, of course, is that according to determinism, given the prior set of circumstances, the character of the agent and so on, that particular action had to take place, there was no real, objective possibility of the agent doing anything other than what they actually did!’

‘And your contribution to the debate, if I understand you rightly, is that in reprimanding someone or expressing disapproval of their action, we are *arguing against* what they did. Now one might ask why anyone should want to do that. You can try vigorously to persuade someone not to do an action when they still have the choice, but what’s the point of going through the same process when they’ve already done it? Of course, if the agent doesn’t think that the action was wrong, then they might well do it again. But according to you there is essentially more to it than that. That’s the part I’d like you to expand on.’

‘That’s right, Michael. What I was saying in my paper is that what we are doing when we reprimand someone is expressing the fact that we regard them as a person and not just an animal or machine to be ‘controlled’. The point obviously isn’t to change the past, although that’s what it *looks* as if we’re trying to do. What’s done is done. But, equally, it is necessary for us to feel the feelings that we do...’

‘That’s not the point at all!’

‘Could you please not interrupt...’

‘It’s all right, Bernard. I did encourage your students to speak up! Please go on.’

‘Actually, I’m one of Dr Phillips’ students from his WEA class. I just think Dr Jordan that you’re trying to defend attitudes which philosophical argument has shown to be completely irrational. We can’t change the past. Quite right. More than that, we can’t *pretend* that things could have gone any

differently, given the prior circumstances. As Hume said, the only “freedom” a person can have is to be determined to act by one’s own character and dispositions. You can’t blame a person for what they are. You can only try to change what they will be in the future. If that means radically altering our attitudes, then so be it!’

‘Do you really think it’s as easy as that?’

‘I didn’t say it was easy.’

‘Look, I think I understand your suspicions about what I’m trying to do, but all I’m really saying is that we have to be honest with ourselves. It’s all very well seeking to change the most basic ways in which we live and act as a consequence of a philosophical argument, and I’m not saying that should never be attempted, but first we have got to be very clear about what is involved. Imagine that you’re face to face with a serial killer who’s been captured at long last, and say to yourself that the only way that one is rationally justified in behaving towards this vile and despicable individual is to seek to change the way they behave in the future. Don’t they *deserve* the punishment that’s meted out to them for the terrible things that they have done?’

‘No. No-one “deserves” to be punished in your sense. That’s all based on an illusion which the argument against free will exposes. We have reason to get aggravated enough about the actual evil that people can do, and to desire that human beings should be better, without pretending to ourselves that the prior circumstances of an evil act being what they were, the act could still somehow, miraculously, have been avoided.’

‘You just don’t see the problem, Derek, do you?...’

‘Are you another of Sam’s students?’

‘I’m afraid so, Dr Jordan. My name’s Gordon. If you want...’

‘No, do go on. I’m enjoying this!’

‘Well I think you’re both wrong. If you Dr Jordan really accept the conclusion that the only free will we human beings have is to do what we are inevitably bound to do, given our character and dispositions – or the state of our brains – at the moment when we act, then any attempt, however subtle or clever, to explain how our attitudes to wrongdoers can be justified all the same is like trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat. At least, that’s the way it seems to me. There’s nothing there, unless you somehow manage to sneak it in somehow. Wanting to cause suffering to the criminal in the dock, or simply

to express your feelings of revulsion, is just like kicking your car when it breaks down, *if* that's all human freedom amounts to. That's why I for one would never accept the argument that led you into that position in the first place. I don't know where the argument goes wrong, I just know that it does, and that's all.'

'Margaret, do you have a reply to that?'

'No I don't, Bernard. I think that what we have come up against here is a fundamental difference in attitudes to philosophy. I just don't think that it's acceptable to say, "I know there must be a fallacy in the argument but I can't find it." To be in the game of philosophy is to be committed to reason, at least that's how I've always thought of it. If you're not prepared to make that commitment - to follow whatever arguments there may be wherever they may lead - then that seems to be very close to surrendering to irrationality and prejudice.'

'But philosophical arguments can go wrong sometimes, can't they?'

'Sure, Sam.'

'I mean, Margaret, you can be convinced for ages that the argument leads to X, and then discover one day that it doesn't lead to X but to Y. - To tell you the truth, it happens to me all the time! - Isn't it better to keep an open mind?'

'I take it that the question at issue isn't whether or not we should keep an open mind, which we all like to think we do, but exactly what that entails!'

'Margaret, Sam, I think I'll have to stop you at that point. We've run out of time. If anyone wants to join us, we'll be continuing the argument in the pub. See you there!'