

# **THE NAKED POLITICIAN: A Philosophical Post-Mortem**

**(Any resemblance to real politicians,  
living or dead,  
is entirely intentional.)**

**J. C. Lester**

**J. C. Lester is a Senior Fellow with the Libertarian Alliance. He is a libertarian philosopher and author of *Escape from Leviathan: Liberty, Welfare and Anarchy Reconciled* (Macmillan, 2000). His magnum opus is *A Dictionary of Anti-Politics: Liberty Expounded and Defended* (forthcoming).**

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**Suite 35  
2 Lansdowne Row  
Mayfair  
London  
W1J 6HL**

**Telephone: 0870 242 1712  
Email: [admin@libertarian.co.uk](mailto:admin@libertarian.co.uk)  
Website: [www.libertarian.co.uk](http://www.libertarian.co.uk)**

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**A PLAY IN ONE ACT AND SCENE.**

**CHARACTERS: TWO MEN IN SUITS: A DEFENCE LAWYER (D) AND A POLITICIAN (P).**

**SETTING: A LIGHT COMES ON. A MAN (D) IS SITTING ON ONE SIDE OF A TABLE, WITH NOTES AND A PEN. AN EMPTY CHAIR IS ON THE OTHER SIDE. A CLOSED DOOR IS VISIBLE.**

D: Next please!

**BEMUSED MAN (P) ENTERS THROUGH DOOR. DAZED. LOOKING AROUND.**

Welcome sir. Please take a seat.

**P SITS. STILL DAZED AND LOOKING AROUND.**

P: What is this place? It seems vaguely familiar.

D: A conference room.

P: (Reviving somewhat.) For conferring about what?

D: Your trial.

P: (Alarmed.) My trial?

D: Yes.

P: Trial for what?

D: For your life.

P: (More alarmed.) You mean I might die if convicted?

D: Ha ha! Hardly.

P: What do you mean, then?

D: Trial for the conduct of your life.

P: (Reviving.) What gives you the right to do that? Do you know who I am? Come to that, where am I exactly?

D: He gives us the right. I know exactly who you are. But you are nowhere exactly.

P: Who is 'he'? And where is 'nowhere exactly' exactly?

D: He is the one whom you have always claimed to believe in for electoral reasons. You are in a metaphysical space.

P: (Shocked.) Good God! Great heavens!

D: Right on both counts, more or less. But we do not name Him here and you are only in an antechamber of the heavens.

P: This is ridiculous! I've been kidnapped. Are you after a ransom?

D: Let me make this simple: what is the last thing you remember?

P: (Concentrates.) Someone shot me. Yes, that's it! In the chest. (Holds chest.) The bastard! (Looking down and feeling inside jacket.) But it all looks normal now. That's impossible.

D: And therefore?

P: And therefore ... I'm hallucinating; in a coma or something. (Looking all around. Double-taking the audience.) That's what this is.

D: You may find it more comfortable to think that.

P: I assure you that I don't find it comfortable in the slightest.

D: I assure you that it is more comfortable than the truth.

P: I refuse to take your implication seriously.

- D: That hardly matters.
- P: What does matter, then?
- D: That you discuss your life with me; or rather, some of its more dubious aspects.
- P: Why on Earth should I do that?
- D: No reason on Earth—but it might at least pass the time *here*.
- P: Can't you give me a better reason?
- D: We need to decide your defence or any mitigation.
- P: And who are you so kindly to help me with all this?
- D: I'm your defence lawyer.
- P: (Suspiciously.) Are you a real lawyer?
- D: No, I'm an ideal lawyer. And that is much better, you know.
- P: I don't know anything of the sort. And anyway, what law can there possibly be here? Assuming that 'here' is where you say it is—or should that be 'where you say it *isn't*'?
- D: I see that some intellectual argument will be necessary in your case. Good. I always enjoy that. Natural law is the law here, as it is the law everywhere else as well.
- P: Surely there can be no law without a law-giver. Law is designed and given by a state—or it is given by, er, (gesturing with his head and pointing up) Him perhaps.
- D: Wrong on both counts. Law is the system of enforceable rights and duties that evolve in any society to protect people and their property from aggressive invasions by others.
- P: Law evolves?
- D: Yes. And what evolves is not designed or given and so there can be no designer or giver. It is no more designed and given than is a natural language, or a free market in goods or in money.
- P: What is "a free market ... in money"?
- D: Money that people freely choose to use because it has a value in use and in exchange, such as gold, or is a token claim on such a thing.
- P: Very well, then, I shall play your little game for now as I seem to be stuck here until I wake up. What about state legislation? Come to that, what about the Ten Commandments?
- D: State legislation is an unlawful imposition. There are more than ten commandments in the bible, in fact. However, the valid ones merely report natural law.
- P: And the invalid ones?
- D: How they got in need not concern us here.
- P: Well, I am a lawyer by training and practice, as you may know. And I would say that a law is, roughly speaking, an invented rule backed by ultimate power.
- D: So any person or organisation with ultimate power can simply declare any rule to be a law? If I have the power to force you to obey any rule I wish, which I do incidentally, am I your law-giver?
- P: No, that is absurd.
- D: How so?
- P: Because you are not a duly appointed, law-making body; I should have added that. Also, laws cannot be arbitrary impositions: they are there for the good of the people.
- D: What makes a law-making body "duly appointed"?
- P: It is in accord with the rules of the state.
- D: What gives the state the right to make those rules?
- P: Because the state is needed to protect people. And the worst state is better than none at all.
- D: So if the best state were worse than none at all, then it would not be legitimate?

- P: No it wouldn't. But that is an idle supposition.
- D: And if the state were to impose any rules that did not protect people *in some way*, then those rules would be invalid laws *in some sense*.
- P: Yes, they would be erroneous, or possibly even felonious, rules posing as legitimate laws.
- D: Did you know that common law originally evolved without the intervention of the state? And that many legal disputes are still resolved without the state?
- P: Ah yes, but the state is needed as the *final* arbiter to decide disputes and enforce judgements.
- D: Private parties often choose independent and binding arbitrators that cannot be flouted with impunity.
- P: That might be so, but in any case the state is still needed to create and enforce all the legislation that pursues the public interest *beyond* mere common law.
- D: That is what politicians assert. But all the usual examples either can be provided by voluntary means, and the state has aggressively crowded them out, or they involve dubious activities in various ways.
- P: Nonsense. I completely reject that.
- D: Of course, and you would be completely honest—in part.
- P: Only the state can legislate to guarantee certain vital things to the population. What about education? And literacy in particular?
- D: Before the major state involvement in education in England and Wales in 1870, school attendance rates and literacy rates were both above 90 per cent.
- P: Then what about healthcare? People can't simply be left to suffer and die with their illnesses.
- D: People weren't left to suffer and die before the state dominance of healthcare. For instance, there were more hospital beds before the NHS was started than the NHS has today.
- And there weren't two bureaucratic administrators per bed.
- P: So what about welfare support? The national insurance scheme is a great boon to all.
- D: The so-called national insurance scheme is no kind of insurance at all. It's not merely a Ponzi scheme but a coercively imposed one. In the name of 'national insurance', you extort money from people today to spend on whatever you like, and then extort more money for whatever you have promised from completely unrelated people at a later date.
- P: But people do get vital welfare support as a result.
- D: People would have had a better outcome if that money had properly been invested, as with genuinely funded insurance schemes.
- P: Private schemes can go bust.
- D: Indeed, that is one of their merits. For that possibility rewards success and penalises failure. But going bust is far more likely when there is political expropriation of their funds and state-imposed inefficient regulations. And otherwise they can be very broadly insured to minimise that possibility.
- P: Only the state can offer cast-iron guarantees of these absolutely essential services.
- D: State schemes can go bust as well; and that is without the same economic merit. States can also renege on guarantees. In fact, they fail on a daily basis to deliver what they are supposed to. And people often even die as a result.
- P: The free market offers no guarantees and is only about making the biggest profit.
- D: Businesses in the free market often provide guarantees of one sort or another.
- P: That is only in order to attract more profit.
- D: More profit earned implies greater service provided. What use are state guarantees that produce worse results? Why is the profit motive a problem when it produces better results?
- P: The results won't always be better.

D: The state is a sort of anti-‘King Midas’: *everything* it touches turns to dross.

P: What do you mean?

D: When food is guaranteed expect only cabbage, and queues for that. When clothes are guaranteed expect only overalls, and queues for those. The market in itself may guarantee nothing and yet it provides a cornucopia of ever-improving choices wherever it is allowed.

P: Surely intentions matter.

D: Surely results matter more than intentions.

P: What about environmental problems, then?

D: What about them?

P: The free market is responsible for them and politics is needed to solve them. For instance, the rain forests are the lungs of the world and a great source of unique species and potential medicine. And they are being cut down by private companies and built on. But with the right political environmental policies we will be able to save vast areas of rain forest....

D: (Interrupting.) How much in terms of Wales?

P: Wales?

D: The country. A popular unit of geographical comparison. How many areas will be saved the size of Wales?

P: Oh, many Wales. And we will save many unique flora and fauna....

D: (Interrupting.) How much in terms of whales?

P: Wales?

D: The animal. The blue whale is a popular unit of biomass. How much unique flora and fauna will be saved weighed in whales?

P: Oh, many Whales. And with the new medicines we can develop we will prevent a great deal of unnecessary suffering....

D: (Interrupting.) How much in terms of wails?

P: Whales?

D: The cries of despair, sometimes accompanied by a gnashing of teeth, that are a popular unit of suffering. How much suffering will be saved counted in wails?

P: Oh, many wails....

D: (Interrupting.) I notice that these are things that politics will supposedly do rather than what politics has actually done.

P: What has politics actually done?

D: It has sold companies contracts to cut down the rain forests. But they are not the lungs of the Earth in any case. That honourable metaphor belongs to the plankton in the oceans and seas.

P: Even if that is so, the rain forests are biologically diverse and unique.

D: Yes they are. Though it is far from clear that all development of them is undesirable: wildernesses are not sacred places, after all. And the tribes who live in them are surely the rightful owners of the parts they are living in, at least.

P: Is that ownership a good thing, though?

D: Of course. All real environmental problems are caused by lack of private property-rights; with owners being able to husband their resources and to sue for any damage that others cause. Politics cannot help in that process.

P: Not even with global warming?

D: Especially not with global warming.

P: Oh dear! I sense that you are dying to divulge your perverse and polemical views on that subject as well.

D: Indeed, I do delight in my duty to correct your common sense ignorance—if that is what you mean. But I am not dying to do it, for I cannot die—as you have.

P: I am not dead! Anyway, please go ahead. For your views are at least somewhat entertaining, however mistaken they seem to me to be.

- D: Very well. Even if global warming were real and were manmade and were a bad thing, the political curbing of global economic growth to reduce carbon emissions would do vastly more damage than global warming itself while slowing global warming hardly at all. Geo-engineering would be better: technologies to reflect sunlight or increase carbon storage, and so forth. And there the specific owners who are adversely affected could sue to make those responsible pay for it. But even then you ought to be careful: you are in an interglacial period with the Earth's next ice age being statistically overdue. And an ice age would be far worse for your species than global warming, so you will need to stop it somehow. In that respect, some global warming looks more like a solution than a problem.
- P: Now I know that you are simply mad or mendacious. There is a scientific consensus that manmade global warming exists and is extremely harmful.
- D: There was once a scientific consensus that heavier-than-air machines could never fly. In any case, the proclaimed consensus is really a mere majority, and one that is maintained by propaganda and fear of dissent. Moreover, according to official records the last ten years have been cooling rather than warming.
- P: Well, if there has not been universal and continuous warming, then still there is definitely dangerous climate change. All agree on that.
- D: "Climate change"? What a convenient new slogan: universally uncontroversial and virtually unfalsifiable. Do people really fall for that?
- P: All informed and reasonable people know that climate change is real and that political action is absolutely urgent.
- D: Despite the view of most of your intellectuals, ignorance has never been your species' main problem. And nor has it even been knowing so much that ain't so.
- P: What is it, then?
- D: Your main problem has always been coercively imposing your ignorant certainties onto other people. And politics is the process by which that is done.
- P: So let me get this clear. You are saying that absolutely everything could become private property, and then the owners would look after what they own and sue anyone that imposes on them?
- D: Exactly.
- P: Including the whales in the oceans? And the very oceans themselves?
- D: Yes. Whether by GPS tagging, satellite demarcation, or whatever; property rights in these, as in all things, can be allocated in one way or another and the owners will then maintain their property.
- P: Even air, I suppose? Must those who can afford it buy air in canisters and walk around with their own supplies strapped to their backs in your insane property-rights Utopia?
- D: Everyone has a birthright to a supply of air of reasonable quality from the planetary system that produces it: for it was being used, and hence owned, for that purpose as the pre-existing *status quo*.
- P: That sounds like a strange kind of 'ownership' to me.
- D: Having an ownership right to good air is no stranger than having an ownership right to your own body. If someone damages the air supply of others then he can be sued, either individually or by a class action, by those whose air supplies are damaged.
- P: Aha! But that is not private ownership, at least. There is a common air system that no one owns.
- D: Wrong on both counts. The right to a supply of air is as privately owned as is one's right to one's money in the banking system. You cannot point in advance to particular air molecules and say that they are yours or point to particular notes or coins and say that they are yours. But you can privately own a share of both air and of money in the two systems that

you can draw on as required. And the overall air system itself is privately owned in common by humanity.

P: “Privately owned in common”? That doesn’t even make sense.

D: A commune can be privately owned in common by the inhabitants and not outsiders, can’t it?

P: I suppose so.

D: There, I have shown something you thought impossible in five seconds flat.

P: Is that supposed to impress me?

D: It ought to impress upon you the potential fragility of even those beliefs about which you are *a priori* certain.

P: I do grant that there is an impressive, if ghastly, consistency to your position. But even if such private-property fanaticism would work with environmentalism, which I very much doubt, you have to admit that the market alone cannot prevent inequality.

D: Why should it? There is nothing inherently wrong with inequality.

P: (Incredulous.) Nothing wrong with inequality? It is manifestly wrong.

D: I see no manifestation of its wrongness, and such manifestations are just the sort of thing I usually notice. What is wrong with it?

P: Why don’t you tell me what is right with it?

D: Very well: it is part of liberty and promotes human welfare.

P: I grant that tolerating some inequality, at least, is needed for an economy to work. Prices and incomes offer economic signals as to relative scarcity, show what is wanted, and provide incentives to produce those things.

D: Then when does inequality stop being needed?

P: When the inequalities are so great that state redistribution can improve human welfare.

D: That would appear to be an egalitarian delusion, especially once we look at the disastrous long-run effects of systematic egalitarian interferences by the state.

P: What of those people genuinely in dire need?

D: For the relatively tiny percentage of those people genuinely without the means to look after themselves there is always charity.

P: Charity? Charity is demeaning.

D: Charity means kindness, or even love. I don’t see how kindness is demeaning to either the giver or the receiver. But stealing the money and recklessly doling it out, as you prefer, is bad for both the victims and the recipients.

P: So you believe in kindness and I believe in theft? You have a way of twisting the truth.

D: I rather think I was untwisting your delusion to reveal the truth. You don’t seem to have an adequate rejoinder. However, it does count for something that to a great extent you show that you are genuinely deluded.

P: Counts for what?

D: Counts for mitigation. That is why we are having this conference, you will recall.

P: Well, it’s the oddest conference of its kind I’ve ever heard of.

D: That’s because it’s an ideal conference. We are not merely working out the most plausible story for you to tell in court. We have to confront your theories and your conscience with the facts and sometimes those facts require explanation.

P: And how are you able to be so omnisciently factual?

D: All I say is known on Earth by some people. No unearthly knowledge is allowed. And we can then contrast what you *do* think true and right with what you *reasonably ought* to think true and right. And here we see some mitigation in your genuine delusion.

- P: Well, I suppose that is something—if we are to play this absurd game of yours. Does my life-long fight against discrimination also count as mitigation?
- D: Only insofar as it involves more delusion.
- P: What delusion?
- D: The delusion that discrimination is immoral and damaging.
- P: How can discrimination possibly be defended?
- D: Discriminating in your use of what is yours is simply liberty. And liberty is good for all.
- P: So, for instance, not employing people because of their race, sex or sexual orientation is part of liberty?
- D: Of course, if the business is yours. Your body, your home, your land, your goods and your business are yours to do with as you wish—otherwise they are not fully yours.
- P: But other people can be harmed by such discrimination.
- D: No, there is no invasive harm to others in private choices that exclude them. There is merely the denial of a benefit to which other people have no right.
- P: Why not give those who are unfairly discriminated against that right?
- D: Because that would steal the benefit and thereby invasively harm the just owners. In any case, people can simply go elsewhere if they are not chosen.
- P: What if there is nowhere else to go?
- D: That is another fantasy. There is a cost in the market to discriminating against potential customers and workers, and therefore an incentive not to do so arbitrarily.
- P: What? So now you are saying that the market *does* have a tendency to stop discrimination. Which is it?
- D: The market tends to stop discrimination where it is inefficient, and tends to allow it where it is efficient.
- P: What is ‘efficiency’ in this context, then?
- D: People getting more of what they want. That is, human welfare as judged by the individual people themselves, rather than as judged by political rulers such as yourself.
- P: So there are ‘efficient’ levels of both equality and inequality in the market too, I suppose?
- D: Quite right. The market has a natural tendency to reward successful entrepreneurship and valuable skills with initially high returns. But it also then competes away inequality of profits and incomes as more people strive to copy that behaviour.
- P: I’m sorry, but I have to say that I find all your opinions frighteningly illiberal.
- D: They are quintessentially liberal. They are about respecting liberty as fully as possible.
- P: What about respecting rights as fully as possible?
- D: They do that too with natural rights. You want politically-correct ‘rights’, instead.
- P: What are ‘politically-correct rights’?
- D: State-imposed privileges. They have an egalitarian mask, which is ugly enough.
- P: And what is behind the mask?
- D: Bigotry against the traditional culture, which is even uglier.
- P: Aren’t some aspects of the traditional culture illiberal even by your standards?
- D: Yes, but what political correctness replaces them with is even more illiberal.
- P: You are simply distorting the liberal views of equality and fairness to make them sound sinister.

- D: Proactively imposed equality and fairness are not liberal in the slightest. And they are more than sinister; they are totalitarian.
- P: You may call it ‘totalitarian’ if you wish, but I would not want to live in the sort of ‘liberal’ world you envisage.
- D: There is little danger of that now.
- P: I am not dead! Anyway, you seem to me to have as rosy a view of the market as you think I do of politics.
- D: Indeed I do.
- P: I am honestly not convinced by you. I see great good in politics. And so that must count as some mitigation even if I am wrong. Yes?
- D: Indeed it does. But may I now attempt to cut through some of the infinite details of the arguments and evidence by asking you two fundamental theoretical questions?
- P: By all means. Please proceed.
- D: First, is ignorance of the law an excuse to break the law? And, second, are aggressive impositions on people and their property—whether coercive or covert—unlawful in principle?
- P: Ignorance of the law cannot be an excuse to break the law, of course. That would be too big an excuse for crime. And in any case, any reasonable person ought to realise that certain acts must be unlawful in principle; in fact, all aggressive impositions. So that answers your second question too.
- D: Excellent. So, for instance, theft and murder are objective crimes no matter who does them and what excuses they have?
- P: Yes, definitely. And thank goodness the state exists to ensure that they are treated as crimes. And thank goodness too, therefore, that there are public-spirited people like me who make great personal sacrifices to participate in the running of the state. (Sees D writing and leans forward.) That is more mitigation, then. If any is really needed, that is.
- D: (Looking up.) If you like, we can compare your ‘public-spirited’ salary—calculated on an hourly basis—with that of the average employee. Or we can discuss your ‘public spirited’ expense claims over several decades. They are impressively creative and occasionally hilarious.
- P: Ah! Er, I really think those things are relatively trivial.
- D: I completely agree. But you might be surprised to find that the public do not agree.
- P: I really think we should stick to the big issues.
- D: “The big issues.” Very well, what about taxation and war?
- P: What about them?
- D: Are they not extortion and murder?
- P: Of course not!
- D: Why not?
- P: I grant that some taxes can be excessive and that some wars can be aggressive. But necessary taxation and defensive wars cannot be crimes. I pay my taxes like everyone else, of course. And I am happy to pay my fair share, including for defensive wars.
- D: Let’s start with taxes, then. Surely you live off other people’s taxes?
- P: As a politician I am, like many people, paid out of taxation, if that is what you mean.
- D: Therefore, you can pay no net tax. You can make no genuine tax contribution to the state.
- P: Taxes are deducted from my salary. It’s on my pay slip.
- D: That is a mere book-keeping exercise that creates the illusion that everyone is really a taxpayer. It would be easier and cheaper to stop the pretence that you are a real tax contributor and simply pay you a lower amount of your tax-funded income in the first place.
- P: Perhaps. You couldn’t do that with everyone, though.

- D: No, of course not. For, unlike you, people working in the market sector really do contribute tax money to the state. If they stop working then the state has less money. But if you stop working then the state has more money.
- P: Oh, I see what you mean. Funny, I had never really thought of that; at least not in such a stark way. But paying tax-recipients less in order to simplify the system could create a lot of social unrest. It would make it seem as though there are two classes of people: those who pay taxes and those who live off those taxes.
- D: It would make the truth manifest, in other words. If that creates 'unrest' then that unrest would be due to people seeing things as they are.
- P: But even you have to admit that some of the people who live off taxation are doing useful jobs. Doctors and nurses, for instance.
- D: No, not at all. Work like their jobs needs to be done, of course. But it would be done far more efficiently if it were in the market sector. By being in the tax-consumption sector they are crowding out the market sector. It would be better if they stopped doing those jobs and let the market take over. The superior lost opportunity is what counts.
- P: Even if the market sector would be better, which I doubt, I don't understand that. They are doing useful work anyway.
- D: Consider. Suppose I steal your salary each month but pay half of it back to you. It would be odd to focus on only the half paid back and assert that I am providing you with a useful service. I would clearly be being destructive overall. Just like the doctors and nurses.
- P: "Destructive overall"?! Is it possible to find something both unintelligible and offensive? Of course public sector doctors and nurses are doing an invaluable job. Anyway, taxes are necessary for all sorts of reasons, and so it is better that people believe that everyone pays them. It is a good and useful trick. It even fooled me!
- D: Aren't taxes a form of aggressive coercion?
- P: I admit they are coercive, of course. Force or the threat of force is used to extract them. But I deny that they are aggressive. For only the state can decide who owns what.
- D: Is there no ownership without the state?
- P: There is risky ownership without the state.
- D: Ownership where the state decides what is owned and takes a huge slice in taxes sounds pretty risky to me. Do people own their own bodies?
- P: Of course.
- D: But only because the state says they do?
- P: No, it would clearly be an aggressive act for the state to take ownership of someone's actual body.
- D: But you say it isn't an aggressive act for the state to take ownership of any money and external property?
- P: No, because the state both determines and defends what is money and external property.
- D: And so it has the right to make the rules?
- P: Yes, though only in the public interest.
- D: But the state uses aggressive coercion to maintain its control of money and external property. Money and property existed and were defended without the state.
- P: As I said, it only took over these things in order to offer better protection. It was defensive by intention.
- D: The modern state often takes something approaching half of national income. That doesn't look much like protection. That looks more like a massive 'protection racket'.
- P: Taxation is needed to protect people in various ways, especially those who are least able to protect themselves.
- D: But there are homeless people in your society. There are people waiting, to the point of death, for vital operations. There is increasing illiteracy and innumeracy after many years of state schooling despite official figures claiming

ever-improving examination results.

P: The system is not perfect.

D: Not perfect? You extort all that wealth and you can't even help those in most need. In fact you make things worse than before you interfered.

P: Our intentions are good and so things can only get better.

D: That does not seem much of a defence for the system in which you were a key player for so many years. But, I am interested, why do you explicitly exclude self-ownership from state interference?

P: People have a right to own their own bodies. I accept that self-ownership is natural and moral. The alternative is some form of slavery, which is indefensible.

D: So you do not outlaw, for instance, any recreational drug-taking?

P: We do. People still own themselves, but they need to be protected from themselves.

D: As people were protected from themselves by alcohol prohibition in America?

P: Clearly that was a big mistake.

D: Why?

P: Alcohol prohibition caused gangsterism to meet the market demand. And that was often with poor quality, even dangerous, alcohol.

D: Just as drug prohibition causes gangsterism to meet the market demand. And that is often with poor quality, even dangerous, drugs.

P: But those drugs are exceedingly dangerous in themselves already.

D: People take the allegedly worst ones, often for decades, with consequences that are statistically no worse, indeed often less dangerous, than that of people taking alcohol or engaging in other risky activities such as some popular sports.

P: Society deems drugs to be too dangerous having seen the terrible consequences.

D: No, you politicians deem non-traditional drugs to be too dangerous out of ignorant prejudice and the effects of prohibition. But even if they were as dangerous as you assert, it is not your decision to take. And neither is it your decision to ban a free market in kidneys or any body-parts.

P: Of course that should not be allowed. That would be disgusting.

D: It would save many lives of those in need of organ transplants, for instance.

P: Some things should simply never be bought and sold as mere commodities. It is wrong to buy and sell human organs.

D: So you steal them instead?

P: What? We don't steal people's organs.

D: You steal the right to sell them and thus far you steal an ownership right in people's organs. The state has become a partial owner of people, just as it has with the right to use certain drugs. So selling is wrong but stealing by the state is acceptable.

P: That is ludicrous. People still own their organs and their bodies.

D: Not entirely. Consider: one owns something to the extent that one has the right to do what one likes with it. You have taken some of those bodily rights of use away. Those bodily property rights are now in the possession of the state. And they were taken by aggressive coercion.

P: Hmm. I can't say exactly what's wrong with that argument off hand, but I strongly suspect casuistry.

D: That is not allowed here, I assure you.

P: Anyway, you're a clever devil.

D: Right on both counts.

P: What?! Couldn't I have had one of the other lot to defend me?

D: It is generally thought that we understand politicians better.

- P: But you argue as though you are on the side of doing the right thing—at least in principle, for I have to say that I find all of your arguments very odd indeed.
- D: I am merely playing angel's advocate. We need to see how you respond to what they might say in there. (Nods off stage.)
- P: Anyway, even if we have taken away some bodily ownership rights, it is only in order to protect people.
- D: In the case of human organs, you are 'protecting' some people from selling something they would rather sell and other people from buying something that would save their lives. That is another odd kind of 'protection'.
- P: There are grave dangers without state regulation.
- D: But what you do necessitates even more graves as well as being an act of theft.
- P: (Irritated.) I must say that this all seems an oddly specific issue for you to be bringing up and going on about so much.
- D: Not at all. It relates to your death.
- P: I am not dead!
- D: Very well, then, let us say to the attack on you.
- P: Attempted murder!
- D: Wrong on both counts. It was successful and it wasn't murder.
- P: Putting the 'attempted' issue aside for now, *please*, how could it not be about murder?
- D: The man who attacked you is low on the list of organ recipients. He is too poor to go abroad for an operation or to pay for an expensive clandestine one at home, and so he is going to die soon. You had in effect voted to kill him by voting to prevent organ sales, and you even voted to prevent the mere paying of people to carry donor cards—which would have been enough to save many lives. You had also been prominent in persuading other politicians to vote the same way. He knew this and that is why he shot you. So it looks more like a just retaliation.
- P: He was breaking the law.
- D: Breaking the alleged laws that your state aggressively imposes.
- P: At best, he was taking the law into his own hands.
- D: Now that is an ironic position for you to take. He was observing the natural law of retaliation, or *lex talionis*. You were the one that had taken the law into your own hands, and were killing people as a result. That is what states do. States by their very nature are guilty of aggressive coercion.
- P: What do you mean, "states by their very nature are guilty of aggressive coercion"?
- D: The four horsemen of the political apocalypse are parasitism, persecution, privilege and Procrusteanism. In practice, a state cannot be found that does not have all four to some degree. And, analytically, at least one must exist for a state to be a state at all.
- P: "Parasitism, persecution, privilege and Procrusteanism"?
- D: Living off others by aggressive coercion; deliberately damaging others by aggressive coercion; maintaining claims denied to others by aggressive coercion; making people fit arbitrary state standards...
- P: (Interrupting.) ...by aggressive coercion. I see. I've never heard such a completely perverted view of politics. What about when states really do no more than protect people in the way that even you think they should be protected?
- D: Thus far they are not states at all but mere protection agencies.
- P: But taxes are needed for that, at least.
- D: We see from all the private security services and arbitration agencies that they are not.
- P: You appear to have a view of the state as almost a criminal organisation.

- D: Oh no! That is most unfair. I would never use the word 'almost'.
- P: Then what does that make me?
- D: A criminal.
- P: A common criminal?
- D: Oh no! That is most unfair. I would never use the word 'common'.
- P: What then?
- D: You were a political criminal. A public enemy. A menace to every state subject in the country while you remained at large.
- P: What about protecting the country as a whole in a defensive war? Surely the state and taxes are needed for that.
- D: Ah yes, we should discuss war. So-called national defence is not really about defending the nation, that is the people of a country. It is, at best, about defending the existing state from a competitor state. But so-called national defence is often an excuse for war as an end in itself; for the glory of beating a competitor state.
- P: In the past that might sometimes have been true. But today we are much more civilised, I assure you.
- D: No, states strive for power as surely as businesses strive for profit. And all states throw their weight around to the extent that they can do so. The populace often enjoy it on a more tribalistic basis: it's a bit like supporting football teams but much more exciting. Yet even where a competitor state is the aggressor and is worse, it would usually be better for the people to avoid war and accept invasion.
- P: Sorry, in what way would it "usually be better for the people to avoid war and accept invasion"?
- D: In terms of preserved lives and wealth. In any case, it is much harder to conquer and to rule a society that has popular polycentric defence, such as in Vietnam during USA occupation, in Afghanistan under several occupations, and as stateless societies would typically have.
- P: And the two world wars?
- D: It merely increased the death and destruction for every additional state that joined in with both of those wars.
- P: I have never heard anything so irresponsible; so evil, in fact.
- D: Is it irresponsible and evil to put people before politics?
- P: There were principles at stake.
- D: Principles of higher value than human life and welfare?
- P: Sacrifices sometimes have to be made.
- D: But not by the politicians that send the young men to war. You are fond of war, are you not?
- P: Of course not. What an abominable suggestion.
- D: What about your 'defensive' armed interventions in recent years? All of those resulted in tens of thousands more people dying as a consequence.
- P: It was a question of upholding national sovereignty.
- D: You mean the protection of one criminal state rather than its replacement by another criminal state that is not obviously any worse, despite your government's dishonest propaganda, and possibly rather less bad. Does that matter more than human lives and suffering?
- P: Hard decisions are sometimes necessary in politics.
- D: You were not at any risk of dying. It was not so hard for you.
- P: I have to live with my conscience.
- D: Not any more.
- P: I am not dead!
- D: And what of the invasion to overthrow the leader in another country that resulted in more

than one million premature deaths that there is no reason to suppose would otherwise have occurred? Not to mention the terrorist backlash that this provoked at home and which you all claimed to be unrelated to your invasion, and used as an excuse to increase state powers. All more of your wonderful 'protection', I suppose.

P: Tyrants should not be allowed to prosper.

D: I wonder whether your killer thought the same thing.

P: I am not dead! And I am not a tyrant! I was democratically elected.

D: You don't have a democracy, though.

P: Of course we do.

D: Do the people rule? Do they vote to decide the laws?

P: No, it's a representative democracy. The people democratically vote for representatives who make the laws.

D: There is a popular vote, but it can't be 'democratic' as such because it is not in itself the people ruling. That is what the word 'democracy' means: the people rule. There could easily be binding democratic referenda, even though some kind of oligarchy would inevitably dominate the state. You just don't want democracy.

P: What is it that we have, then?

D: Popularly elected oligarchy: mass voting for the few who rule.

P: But the people can vote us out if they don't like the way we run things.

D: And that is certainly a safety valve. But that does not give the people the power of ruling, and hence it is simply not democracy. You rule and you give the people the so-called laws that you think are good for them, even when you know that they are not what the people would have voted for if there were a real democracy. You merely call it a 'democracy' as a way of legitimising your own oligarchic rule. You pretend that the people are somehow

ruling themselves so that you can rule them as you think best. There is nothing democratic about it.

P: But that is how the term 'democracy' is used today.

D: That is how the term 'democracy' is abused today. You may as well say that slavery is 'representative self-ownership' as long as slaves can vote on who owns them—though that would be a safety valve too.

P: (Pause.) Between you and me, there is something in what you say. But calling elected oligarchy 'democracy' is a good and useful trick. It even fooled me! For real democracy would be a disaster. The public are too fickle and ignorant to rule themselves collectively.

D: I completely agree; even if some form of oligarchy could be avoided.

P: Then why are you complaining that we don't have a democracy?

D: Not because democratic tyranny would be better...

P: (Interrupting.) "Democratic tyranny"? What's that supposed to mean, in Heaven's name?

D: The tyranny of the majority, and it's more in Hell's name.

P: How could it be tyranny if the people were ruling themselves?

D: Because there is no moral agent that is "the people". There is only the winning majority of people in any vote. And the losing minority are ruled by them.

P: But the winners and losers will vary.

D: That merely means the tyrants and victims will vary.

P: That hardly makes it much better, I suppose.

D: Precisely. That is why I said, not because democratic tyranny would be better. I merely point out your pretence to be a democracy. Because the admitted popularity of that men-

dacious propaganda does in fact help to legitimise your rule. And all government is in practice government of the state, by the state, for the state.

- P: But elected oligarchy, as you prefer to call it, is better than democracy would be. And especially if democracy is merely tyranny of a varying majority.
- D: I completely agree. But you oligarchs are not much better because you are also “too fickle and ignorant to rule ... collectively”. And especially if elected oligarchy is merely tyranny of a varying minority. However, both systems would be impractical and immoral even if the rulers were not fickle and ignorant.
- P: (Exasperated.) Someone has to be in charge of everything. What about (Nods and points upwards.) —Him? Isn't He in charge?
- D: Of course not. He would hardly have let you do what you have done if he were. But you would not have done it anyway had you believed in Him.
- P: At the beginning of our little chat you were also rude enough to imply that I only affected to believe. But I assure you that I have always been a believer.
- D: You are confused, at best.
- P: I should know what I believe.
- D: You should, but evidently you don't.
- P: How can it possibly be evident?
- D: Because if you really believed then you could not have behaved as you have. The fear and awe plus knowledge that your actions were being observed, and the long-term consequences for you, would have made it psychologically impossible. It would have been like a burglar breaking into a house while knowing that a vanful of policemen were watching him—except far less likely.
- P: I might sometimes have had doubts. But I'm honest in saying that, overall, I believe.
- D: Yes, I know you are.
- P: What? So now you agree that I do believe.
- D: No, that does not follow at all. I know that you honestly believe that you believe. But you do not in fact believe, as your behaviour shows. You are confused about your beliefs.
- P: This is certainly becoming confusing for me now. Anyway, whether I really believe or not, on Earth we are *de facto* in charge and law-making.
- D: And anything you do that is in accord with your own laws is therefore lawful?
- P: Yes.
- D: But you more or less make up the laws as you go along.
- P: No! Well, yes in a way. But we don't just make up laws on the hoof.
- D: No, you make them up on the cloven hoof.
- P: But someone has to be in charge.
- D: People cannot be in charge of their own lives?
- P: They would make too many mistakes.
- D: Like the mistake of saving for their pensions, perhaps.
- P: How is that a mistake?
- D: Because your government stole hundreds of billions from their pension funds, which resulted in penury for many thousands of pensioners.
- P: That wasn't stealing. It was necessary taxation.
- D: Necessary for protection?
- P: Yes.
- D: What were people being protected from that was worse than what you did?
- P: Mistakes were made. All politicians make them.
- D: Yes, they make them on other people's be-

halves and then eventually retire on very comfortable, fat pensions themselves—paid out of taxation. They also often have additional lucrative sinecures in industries that are suspiciously related to their previous political positions.

P: Admittedly, the system can be improved. Is there an alternative to politics?

D: Is there an alternative to disease?

P: What do you mean?

D: Neither seems to do any good. The alternative is to not have them at all.

P: But that would be anarchy.

D: Yes, and good health.

P: There has never been an advanced society without politics.

D: There has never been an advanced society without disease either. But both can at least be combated and cut back.

P: Anarchy is a war of all against all. It is lawless.

D: No, anarchy is merely no rule, no politics, no state. Politics is a war of all against all. One man's gain in politics is another man's loss; unlike the market where both sides gain in a trade. Anarchic law, such as common law, merely exists to protect people and their property from aggression.

P: So you are not referring to socialist anarchy, at least.

D: No. I refer to *private-property* anarchy, of course. Socialist anarchy is merely confused and foolish. Money and capital accumulation occur anarchically and are amazingly useful. Only a state can systematically disrupt them. And to the extent that they are disrupted human liberty and welfare will decline.

P: What about all the economic slumps and crises caused by greedy bankers and city traders?

D: Under which rules do they operate? State rules.

P: Well, they need better rules.

D: Yes, natural laws that determine property rights would provide the better rules. Your government regulations have failed time and time again. They have usurped market competition in the supply of money and in loans. Along with the vast extortion you call 'taxation' and your other financial interventions, politics is the major cause of the worst economic problems.

P: That is not the way it appears to most politicians.

D: Yes, because most politicians don't even pretend to have any advanced knowledge of economics. You usually pretend to be trained in the law. But you would all have a better insight into the economy and society generally with a better knowledge of economics. That would save you from some of your worst errors.

P: That may be so, but if some of your more-extreme assertions about politics and economics are true, then why isn't anyone who espouses those views quickly taken up by the majority of the relevant academics?

D: Why should he be?

P: Because in the world of the blind the one-eyed man is king.

D: On the contrary, in the world of the blind the one-eyed man is a dangerous lunatic: he embarrasses others with his heterodox assertions and threatens their status and livelihood.

P: In that case, you can hardly blame me for not seeing what most clever people have failed to see for whatever reason. Even if all you have said is true, I don't know these things.

D: But as you have said yourself, ignorance of the law is no excuse and anyone ought to realise that aggressive coercion cannot be lawful.

P: What about *mens rea*? A guilty mind. I was never intending to do wrong.

D: Direct intention of the bad consequences of your actions is not necessary for a guilty mind. It's enough that a reasonable person in your

position should have foreseen these things.

P: I don't think that a reasonable person should have foreseen them.

D: Then how is it that you were told by many people in advance what would result in many of the cases we have discussed?

P: Perhaps those people were much cleverer than I was, rather than merely reasonable, or maybe just somewhat lucky in their predictions.

D: No, it was your flawed moral character.

P: What evidence can you possibly offer for that?

D: Consider just one example. You were a student doing a higher degree. So quite old enough to show your adult character. You were staying at the flat of friends and sharing the bills. When you all moved out there was one final bill. Your share was not large. At first you agreed to pay it. "You'll get your money," you said—and kept on saying. Eventually, you told people that it was a lie that you owed it. In short, for a paltry sum you cheated and slandered a friend.

P: That never happened. Not at all. It's a complete and utter fabrication.

D: It's pointless lying to me. We can see the truth here as plainly as we can see you.

P: Can you see *all* the truth?

D: Yes.

P: Oh dear!

D: Not all at once. For true propositions are infinite—though not as infinite as false propositions, of course.

P: (Uncertainly.) Er, of course.

D: But we see the truth value as we focus on relevant propositions....

P: (Interrupting.) Anyway, it was indeed a 'paltry sum' of money. He should have let it go.

D: Why should he? You owed it.

P: I had paid enough money already for living in that cold, damp flat.

D: But you had agreed to pay your share and you owed it. Also, you had secretly put an electric heater in your room that the others were in effect subsidising when all of you were on low incomes. So, rightfully, you owed even more of the bill than you were being asked to pay. I could go on.

P: All right, all right! But that's all so trivial. How can it really matter?

D: In itself, it doesn't matter much. The problem with politicians is not the relatively small personal fiddles that they try to hide, even though these fiddles sometimes exceed the salaries of most of their subjects, but the big things they do in public and boast about. However, the point here is that if someone can treat his supposed friends like that then how much worse would he treat strangers in pursuit of his self-interest? It belies your famous claim to be a straightforward sort of a guy.

P: One has to be tough in politics. One sometimes has to cut corners. The greater good is what matters.

D: Climbing the slippery pole became an end in itself for you, as it does for almost everyone in politics who gets to the top of it. At the beginning you did have some moral aims, I admit, however mistaken you were about them or about the best means to achieve them. But eventually you lost sight even of them.

P: So that is my defence or mitigation, then: moral aims lost in the confusion of practical politics.

D: It's not much of a defence. Consider only the one war to supposedly 'liberate' a country from an unelected tyrant, whom you also dishonestly claimed to be a threat to the rest of the world. Your administration lied about the evidence and the reasons for going to war. You ignored any version of just war theory throughout the whole of the invasion and occupation. More than one million people died as a result. More than one million souls taken before their natural time.

P: I stand by my decisions. I did my best in the circumstances as they appeared to me.

**D STANDS UP SUDDENLY AND SLAPS P HARD ACROSS THE FACE.**

P: (Stunned.) You slapped me. That is outrageous treatment. Why did you do that?

D: If I were to slap you one million times across the face it would hardly be outrageous treatment under the circumstances as they appear to me. I need to make you see; to make you begin to appreciate the enormities for which you bear a considerable share of responsibility—and what might now be done to you as a consequence.

P: But the facts have to be proven in court before I could be justly punished.

D: You still don't understand. We know the facts. The purpose of the trial is only to see whether there can be any excuse, any mitigation.

P: I refuse to participate in this farce any further.

**P STANDS. D CLAPS HIS HANDS ONCE LOUDLY. P LOOKS DOWN ALARMED AND BEGINS TO APPEAR UNSTEADY AND TERRIFIED.**

P: Aaaaaaargh! I'm on a cliff edge. I can see them far below me. I can feel the great heat! They're burning! Screaming! Burning!

**D CLAPS HIS HANDS AGAIN. P SITS DOWN, SHOCKED.**

P: What was that?

D: It was a quasi-metaphor to help you understand.

P: Understand what?

D: Your position is precipitous, do nothing precipitant lest you precipitate.

P: What do you mean by "quasi-metaphor"?

D: It actually showed you where you will be going.

P: Is there no hope, then?

D: (Pause.) Let's review in summary, shall we. (Looking at notes.) Extortion, on a vast scale. Authoritarian rule, on a vast scale. War crimes, on a vast scale. No mere gangster or serial killer begins to be in your league. When it comes to evil, you are top of the first division. What do *you* think?

P: But I never intended to do wrong.

D: Nobody ever does.

P: What?

D: Nobody perceives what they do as unambiguously wrong at the time that they do it. In fact it seems the right thing to do at the time.

P: Mass murderers must know that what they do is wrong.

D: You didn't, did you? Individuals and states have killed prostitutes, homosexuals, Jews, Christians, Muslims ... name your group. They all regarded themselves as making the world a better place. That is no excuse at all for the deaths they caused; nor for all the deaths you caused.

P: But those deaths were not intended, they were collat...

D: (Interrupts.) Please don't even mention the words "collateral damage" or I will give you a much warmer close-up of what you have just seen. Foreseeability, not intentionality, is the criterion of guilt.

P: But if I hadn't done what I did, then others would have done the same.

D: And then they would have been as guilty as you. But is that really true? There were others that were against many of the things you did.

P: Is there no hope at all?

D: (Long pause. Speaks slowly.) There is a potentiality of a possibility of a prospect of a hope.

P: What is it?

- D: We send you back to life.
- P: What? But I'm dead!
- D: Make up your mind.
- P: I mean, you keep saying I'm dead.
- D: That would seem to be a prerequisite of resurrection.
- P: But the dead cannot come back.
- D: You mean they cannot go back.
- P: Can they?
- D: Under certain circumstances.
- P: What circumstances?
- D: If He decides that they should be given a chance to try to atone for some of the wrongs they have done.
- P: I do want to try.
- D: You have a lot for which to atone. One might even say, a Hell of a lot. (Chuckles.)
- P: Can I do it?
- D: Not *completely*. Not anywhere near *completely*. In fact, not anywhere within sight of *completely* with a very powerful telescope.
- P: So I am doomed.
- D: Oh yes. I thought that was understood. Doomed. Utterly, utterly doomed. Doomed to be damned. For a very, very long time, indeed.
- P: But not forever?
- D: Of course not.
- P: Why not?
- D: Because you are not infinitely evil, unlike Him.
- P: (Confused.) Unlike Him? (Nods and points upwards.)
- D: The other Him. (Nods and points downwards.)
- P: Oh, of course.
- D: We are never unnecessarily cruel.
- P: Only necessarily cruel?
- D: Precisely! And precisely cruel too. Therefore the punishment is proportional.
- P: Proportional to what?
- D: To the number of years of life taken, money extorted, the amount of suffering inflicted, and so forth, multiplied by your share of the culpability. It's all strictly mathematical.
- P: So if I were to save a lot of lives, lower a lot of taxes and prevent a lot of suffering, by effectively combating their political causes, then that would go towards offsetting what I had previously been responsible for?
- D: More or less, yes.
- P: "More or less"? I thought you said it was "strictly mathematical"?
- D: And so it is. And so there is also the contrition coefficient to be considered.
- P: "The contrition coefficient"?
- D: For instance, if you were to do it merely in order to lessen your sentence or for some other non-moral reason, then it would not be so effective. Your degree of contrition affects the outcome.
- P: (Hopefully.) Can really sincere contrition be enough on its own?
- D: (Sternly.) No! It can only decrease the severity or length of the punishment for your damnable actions. In any case, a truly contrite person would want to do his best to make amends as far as possible. And he would also wish to be punished at least insofar as he could not make amends.
- P: I see. Of course. But how will my motives be clear? Is it possible to look into a man's soul?

D: Well yes, frankly. And the view from here is far from salubrious.

P: Why should I be granted this possibility; this second chance?

D: Because, as we have seen, a lot of your behaviour was based on false empirical and false moral beliefs. You are not an out-and-out selfish misanthrope or psychopath, unlike many Earthly presidents I could mention.

P: How can I act for the right motive when I now have a self-interested motive to do the very same thing? That will add confusion, at least.

D: Oh, you wouldn't remember any of this. You would be granted the usual epiphany about the behaviour concerning which the consequences should have been foreseeable. And the rest would then be up to you.

P: "The *usual* epiphany"?

D: You don't suppose that you are the first person this sort of thing has happened to, do you?

P: I suppose not. Though I can't recall many politicians, in particular, radically changing their ways.

D: Once succumbing to temptation becomes habitual, it's not easy to change.

P: Well, I hope to do better. So how does this work?

D: (Looks at door.) You see that door over there where you came in?

P: (Looks.) Yes.

D: Try to open it. If you can, then your second chance might have been granted. You just have to walk through it.

P: "*Might* have been granted"?

D: If your contrition coefficient is high enough.

P: How high is that?

D: Higher than point five, of course.

P: (Unconvinced.) Oh, of course! And if it isn't high enough?

D: Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

P: What does that mean?

D: It's nothing that need concern us just now.

P: (Gets up and walks over to door. Tries it. It opens slightly.) It's open.

D: Then you are free to leave.

P: What about the time that has passed?

D: We are outside that physical time here. You will simply gasp for breath as the defibrillator shocks you for the fourth time, and there you are.

P: Goodbye then. (Hesitantly.) And thank you.

D: Goodbye for now. And good luck.

#### **P WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR.**

You are going to need it.

#### **PAUSE. LOOKS DOWN AT PAPERS.**

Next please!

#### **LONG PAUSE. THE SAME MAN RE-ENTERS. BEMUSED.**

Welcome sir. Please take a seat.

P: (Sits. Dazed. Looking around.) Where am I? I seem to recognise this place.

D: In a conference room.

P: (Reviving somewhat.) For what kind of conference?

D: For a legal conference.

#### **THE LIGHT GOES OUT.**

**END.**