

# Philosophy on Trial

*by*  
Jeff Fraser

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## Characters

Lady Philosophy  
Justice Sage  
Bailiff

### Counselors for the Prosecution:

Mr. Carp  
Mr. Bass  
Ms. Pike

### Counselors for the Defense:

Ms. Hawke  
Mr. Eagles  
Ms. Falcone

Rene Descartes  
William Shakespeare  
Friedrich Nietzsche  
Thomas Jefferson  
Albert Einstein  
Socrates

Television reporter  
Assistant to the reporter  
Cameraman  
Mrs. Wordsmith  
Nietzsche's dog  
The Human Applause-o-meter  
Cheerleader

Ideas on costumes:

Judge: traditional black judicial gown

Witnesses: Academic regalia (except for Socrates--see below). Nietzsche has somewhat disheveled hair and a very large bushy mustache as he appears in many actual photographs.

Attorneys: professional attire, but perhaps with some whimsical accessories that indicate bird or fish

Bailiff: London bobby or British army officer uniform

## Scene 1 (courtroom)

Bailiff: ALL RISE ! (looks out to audience and sees that not everyone has arisen. Steps forward, and gestures for all to stand up) ALL RISE! The court of public opinion is now in session, the Honorable Justice Sage presiding.

[Justice Sage enters]

Justice Sage: Bailiff, call the first case.

Bailiff: (with gravity and a touch of pompousness) If it please your honor, the court will hear the case of The People vs. Philosophy

Judge: Bring in the defendant.

[The bailiff escorts Philosophy to her seat. Philosophy is dressed in a long, loose robe with a large hood (hiding her face), with a rope belt, resembling a monk's robe.]

Judge: Bailiff, read the charges.

Bailiff: The defendant is charged with the following misdemeanors: loitering, vagrancy, and disturbing the peace. The defendant is also charged with the following capital offense: corrupting the minds of our young people.

Judge: Defendant, do you understand these charges against you?

[Philosophy only bows her head]

Judge: Chief Counselor for the Prosecution: Mr. Carp, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr. Carp: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the prosecution proposes to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that Philosophy is an idle chatterer of no particular use to anyone. She constantly distracts our students from more valuable studies, and, worst of all, she pollutes their minds with delusional and dangerous ideas. With all the advances in scientific knowledge, from quarks and bosons to the Big Bang, what need have we for idle speculation on the why there is something rather than nothing? With all the information available via the internet with the click of a button, why would someone want to look *inside themselves* for answers? Why slow our civilization's inevitable progress with spurious protests regarding the ethics of animal experimentation or genetic engineering? Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, on behalf of my associates, Mr. Bass and Ms. Pike, I implore you to consider very real and very serious threat that Philosophy poses to our society and its future.

Judge: Chief Counselor for the Defense: Ms. Falcone, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms. Falcone: I have no need for long speeches your honor. (addressing the audience) Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we the counselors for the defense, Mr. Eagles, Ms. Hawke, and myself, propose only to let the facts, and the witnesses, speak for themselves. We are confident that the jury will then see that Philosophy has been most wrongly accused, and that the only danger to our society is to reject the counsel of Lady Philosophy, for who else will guide the application of sound reason and careful judgment to the challenges facing our world today?

Judge: Mr. Carp, the prosecution may call the first witness.

Mr. Carp: Your honor, the prosecution would like to call Rene Descartes

Judge: Bailiff, call Rene Descartes

Bailiff: Rene Descartes, born 1596!

[Descartes enters with a sweeping bow.]

Descartes: Please, call me Rrrrrrene (with a long French "r")

Bailiff: Right, then! Rrrrrrrrene, please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Descartes: But, of course. I always do.

[Descartes takes his seat on the witness stand.]

Judge: Mr. Carp, your witness

Mr. Carp: Rrrr, Rrrrr, cough, cough, cough. Uh, Mr. Descartes. Would you please state your occupation?

Descartes: Mathematician . . . , and philosopher.

Mr. Carp: Yes, yes, of course. Now, is it true that you once said “I think, therefore I am”<sup>1</sup>?

Descartes: Yes, I did say that . . . More than once I believe.

Mr. Carp: In fact, would it be fair to say that this brief sentence is the most famous statement you ever made? Perhaps one of the most famous statements in all of Western Philosophy?

Descartes: (smiling smugly and brushing lint off his shoulder) Yes, I believe that would be most fair.

Mr. Carp: Ah Ha!! You admit it, then?

Descartes: Well, certainly (now looking a bit puzzled and concerned)

Mr. Carp: Mr. Descartes, I mean, really??? “I think, therefore I am”??? After all, what’s the big deal, anyway? Is this really such a earth-shattering insight? Is it not self-evident that if thinking is occurring, then there must be a thinker? This statement is not even one of those fancy-shmancy syllogisms that you philosophers are so fond of. The existence of the “I” is explicit in “I think”; the remainder, the “therefore I am”, is redundant and utterly superfluous. For how could it be that “I am not, and yet I think”?

Descartes: Sir, I fear you miss my point.

Mr. Carp: Ooooooh, noooo, I don’t think so. Indeed, I fear there is no point at all. It is all quite dull and trivial. You have demonstrated all too clearly to the members of the jury that philosophy is all about making mountains out of molehills. You philosophers are oh so clever at making simple things sound complicated.

No more questions, your honor.

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<sup>1</sup>Descartes, Rene; *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*; Part IV

Judge: Ms. Falcone, do you wish to cross-examine the witness?

Ms. Falcone: Yes, your honor. It would be my great privilege to do so.

Mr. Descartes, I believe you implied a moment ago that your famous statement “I think, therefore I am” might be misunderstood out of context. Would you care to elaborate?

Descartes: Why yes, I would. You see, I began my inquiries into human understanding with some very simple questions: What do I know to be true? What is real? And it occurred to me that our senses are constantly prone to error. We see what is not there, and we don't see what is there. Moreover, when we dream, we have no doubt that what we are experiencing is real . . . Until we wake up!! So how do I know that I am not dreaming right now? Or, perhaps it is the good people there (gesturing toward the counselors for the prosecution) who are lost in dreamland. In any case, I began my search for truth by doubting everything. And I asked myself, what is the one thing that I absolutely, positively cannot doubt? And I responded, my own existence, of course!

Ms. Falcone: Mr. Descartes, you sound a bit like a skeptic.

Descartes: Exactly!! I believe that one must start from a position of questioning all of the so-called truths that have been passed down to us. Otherwise, we are doomed to perpetuate the mistakes of the past.

Ms. Falcone: Yes, and I suppose some members of the jury might be wondering whether they are dreaming right now.

Descartes: I would certainly encourage them to give due consideration to that very possibility.

Bailiff: (aside) this is getting weird already.

Ms. Falcone: Indeed. Now, Mr. Descartes, you have been called not only “the father of modern philosophy”, but also “the father of analytic geometry” for your development of the Cartesian coordinate system. Not only did your system permit the translation of equations into lines and curves, and vice-versa, but without it, some have argued that Newton could not have invented the calculus. Is this not true?

Descartes: yes, all true, although I suppose some high school students wish I hadn't invented analytic geometry.

Ms. Falcone: In fact, you, sir, are a genius. Not even you could doubt that.

Descartes: No, I suppose not.

Ms. Falcone: But, I am curious about one thing. I understand that while studying at the University, you prepared yourself to be a lawyer. What happened? Why are you not with us here today as a fellow attorney, instead of as a witness?

Descartes: Well, as I explained in my *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, I entirely abandoned the study of the law. (Pulls a book out, ie *Discourse on Method* and begins to read aloud) "Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that of which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it."<sup>2</sup> (puts book down) . . . However, if I were still a lawyer, I would count it an honor to stand with you, sir, in defense of Philosophy. I wish you success, for I believe future generations still need her wisdom and guidance.

Ms. Falcone: No more questions, your honor.

Judge: thank you, Mr. Descartes. You may step down.

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Judge: Does the prosecution wish to call another witness?

Mr. Bass: Yes, your honor.

Judge: Very well, Mr. Bass. Whom does the prosecution wish to call next?

Mr. Bass: The prosecution calls William Shakespeare.

Judge: Call William Shakespeare.

Bailiff: William Shakespeare, born 1564!

[Shakespeare enters with a bow.]

Bailiff: Mr. Shakespeare, please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Shakespeare: Of course, (with flair) for at the length truth will out.

Mr. Bass: Mr. Shakespeare, could you please state your occupation?

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid; Part I

Shakespeare: Poet and playwright--you know, your basic bard.

Mr. Bass: Uh-huh, and you have written quite a number of plays, have you?

Shakespeare: yes, 45, if you include those that have been lost. Mostly comedies.

Mr. Bass: Yes, well, it is the tragedies that I am most interested in. Some of them have been quite well received over the years, despite the fact that they all seem to end rather badly for the main characters. Odd isn't it?

Shakespeare: People love a good cry-fest.

Mr. Bass: Mr. Shakespeare, we are speaking of some of the darkest, most anguishing moments in English Literature. There's (looking at his notes) Macbeth for example. Do you recall what happens in Act V, scene v?

Shakespeare: Of course, Macbeth has murdered King Duncan in order to seize his throne, but he has just learned that his wife has killed herself, and that his castle will soon be laid siege to.

Mr. Bass: do you recall his soliloquy? Could you recount it for us?

Shakespeare: Of course.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Bass: Mr. Shakespeare, with all due respect, Macbeth seems to be saying that life is meaningless, and that the past has taught us nothing. It's all rather bleak. I mean, where is Philosophy's bright beacon leading us to greater wisdom and a better way of life? Instead, it appears that we are all fools being led to dusty death.

Shakespeare: Well, Macbeth was having a pretty rough day.

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<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, William; *Macbeth*; Act V, scene v

Mr. Carp: Nevertheless, it sounds as if his world view has been reduced to nihilism.

Ms. Falcone: Objection! Your honor, this is a play (gesturing to Shakespeare). I don't see what it has to do with philosophy.

Mr. Carp: (patiently) If you will allow me to continue this line of questioning, I believe the relevance will become clear soon enough.

Judge: Overruled. Continue Mr. Carp.

Mr. Bass: As I say, it sounds as if Macbeth's world view has been reduced to nihilism. Which is exactly where philosophy too often leads--nihilism! I don't think there is a more eloquent, a more poignant, or a more agonizing expression of it in all of Western literature than right here in these lines . . . (pauses and paces in front of the witness while the courtroom is silent).

Mr. Shakespeare, I'm sure you recall another play you wrote (pauses to look at his notes) "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark"?

Shakespeare: Yes, we just put on a production the other day at the new Globe.

Mr. Bass: And can you tell the jury what transpired in Act I, Scene V?

Shakespeare: Of course. Hamlet speaks with the ghost of his recently deceased father, and learns that his father was murdered by his uncle, who has married Hamlet's mother and is now the new king. Hamlet demands that his friends swear that they not reveal what they have seen that night.

Mr. Bass: And when Horatio expresses his amazement, how does Hamlet reply?

Shakespeare: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Bass: He is speaking perhaps of the philosophy that they studied together when they were both students at the University of Wittenberg?

Shakespeare: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Bass: It is not a very stirring endorsement of philosophy, is it? What value is philosophy when you have learned that your own father has been murdered, and that your mother now sleeps with the murderer? Does not philosophy inevitably fail us when we need it most? When our world crumbles before our eyes due to events too terrible to imagine?

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<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, William; *Hamlet*; Act I, scene v

Shakespeare: I believe you have made an accurate assessment of Hamlet's emotions at that moment.

Mr. Bass: Thank you, Mr. Shakespeare. No more questions your honor.

[Mr. Eagles steps forward]

Judge: Your witness, Mr. Eagles

Mr. Eagles: Mr. Shakespeare, do you believe in ghosts?

Shakespeare: Me? No.

Mr. Eagles: (chuckles) I didn't think so. Tell me, are you familiar with a man named Boethius?

Shakespeare: Of course, he was a Roman senator who was sentenced to be executed by Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, after the fall of the Roman Empire. He was perhaps the last of the great philosophers of the ancient world and the first great philosopher of the middle ages.

Mr. Eagles: And do you know what Boethius wrote while imprisoned, awaiting death?

Shakespeare: He wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It was a very influential work in my day. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth herself, my most gracious sovereign and benefactor, translated it into modern English.

Mr. Eagles: *The Consolation of Philosophy*?

Shakespeare: Yes, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It was written as a conversation between Boethius and Lady Philosophy, who tries to comfort him in his time of despair.

[The prisoner slumps forward, sobbing. The Bailiff hurries to support and comfort her. He offers her a handkerchief and she blows her nose loudly into it. She offers it back to him, and he emphatically declines.]

Judge: Does the defendant wish a recess?

[Lady philosophy shakes her head and holds her hand up to indicate she is alright]

Judge: Continue Mr. Eagles.

Mr. Eagles: Mr. Shakespeare, you were explaining that in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy tries to comfort Boethius in his time of despair.

Shakespeare: Yes.

Mr. Eagles: Right. Now, as it happens I have a passage here . . . Yes, here it is . . . A passage from his conversation with Lady Philosophy. Could you read it for the benefit of the members of the jury, please?

Shakespeare: (reads) "It's my belief that history is a wheel. 'Inconstancy is my very essence,' says the wheel. Rise up on my spokes if you like but don't complain when you're cast back down into the depths. Good times pass away, but then so do the bad. The constant change of fortune is our tragedy, but it's also our hope. The worst of times, like the best, are always passing away."<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Eagles: It sounds like Philosophy was quite helpful to Boethius as he pondered the cruelty of his fate.

Shakespeare: Yes, well the good senator was perhaps a bit older and wiser than Prince Hamlet. (pondering) Perhaps I should write a play about old Boethius.

Mr. Eagles: No more questions, your honor.

Judge: Thank you, Mr. Shakespeare. You may step down.

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Judge: Does the prosecution have another witness?

[Ms. Pike steps forward]

Ms. Pike: Yes, your honor.

Judge: Very well, Ms. Pike. Call your next witness.

Ms. Pike: As our final witness, the prosecution would like to call Friedrich Nietzsche to the stand.

Judge: Call Friedrich Nietzsche.

Bailiff: Friedrich Nietzsche, born 1844!

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<sup>5</sup> Boethius; *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book II, section ii

[Nietzsche enters with a bit of a swagger and a curt tip of the cap to the judge.]

Bailiff: Mr. Nietzsche, please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Nietzsche: (with great, almost maniacal, enthusiasm) yes, YES, YES !!

Ms. Pike: Mr. Nietzsche, you have written many books, have you not?

Nietzsche: Yes. Yes, many excellent books. Let's see, there was Beyond Good and Evil; Human, All Too Human; and, oh yes, one of my favorites: Twilight of the Idols, or (he grabs judge's gavel, and loudly continues) How to Philosophize with a Hammer (bangs gavel on judge's desk as if smashing imaginary little "idols"—bailiff restrains him, wrestles gavel away). (Nietzsche continues, calm again ) Those are just a few of my books, of course.

Ms. Pike: Of course. Now Mr. Nietzsche, did you ever write the words, "God is dead"?

Nietzsche: Yes, and you have no doubt heard that God later responded by claiming "Nietzsche is dead". But, as you can see, (gleefully) here I am!

Ms. Pike: Mr. Nietzsche, I am appalled by your cavalier attitude! This is a serious matter! How could you deny the existence of God, without any proof whatsoever? . . . without considering the effects of those words on impressionable young minds? . . . without concern that you might be harming millions of human beings who look to their god for hope, for guidance, for meaning (slowly, emphasizing each of the three: hope, guidance, and meaning)?

Nietzsche: Hope? Meaning? Hope and meaning were exactly the things I was trying to salvage! When I wrote "God is dead" I wasn't arguing against the existence of God. I was lamenting the loss of god, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the Darwinian revolution. I was merely observing what many of my contemporaries, especially in the academic world, assumed to be true. Europe was declining intellectually into a moral vacuum, empty of all values. My entire life's work has been an effort to restore values and to challenge humans to raise themselves back up, to embrace their destiny with dignity and courage, and to overcome themselves.

Ms. Pike: To overcome themselves? You are referring I believe to your concept of the Overman? (With disapproval) What proud and arrogant man would have the audacity to conceive of an Overman—some superhuman being, above the laws and customs of civilized society?

Nietzsche: A society in decline, I would remind you. I have wanted nothing so much as to provide an antidote to nihilism--an antidote to Macbeth if you will.

Ms. Pike: (with disgust) No more questions, your honor.

Judge: Does the defense wish to cross-examine?

Ms. Hawke: We do your honor.

Judge: Then please proceed Ms. Hawke.

Ms. Hawke: Mr. Nietzsche, I have here a passage from one of your works, *The Joyful Wisdom*. Would you please look it over and confirm that you have written it?

[Nietzsche looks it over.]

Nietzsche: Yes, this is my work.

Ms. Hawke: Would you please read it for the jury?

Nietzsche: (reads) Have you ever heard of the madman who ran to the market-place calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. "Why? is he lost?" said one. "Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage?", the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub.

The insane man jumped into their midst. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him, you and I! We are all his murderers! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife - who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves?"<sup>6</sup>

Ms. Hawke: Thank you. Mr. Nietzsche, are you that madman in the story?

Nietzsche: (pretending to be shocked) Madame, I am often mad, but I have never been insane.

Ms. Hawke: Tell me this: is belief in god a matter of faith or a matter of philosophy?

Nietzsche: It is a matter of faith. And for those who have retained a faith in their god, I have no quarrel. But for those who are less fortunate, and feel themselves without hope or purpose, I offer them my challenge. Live your life with a creative passion, and embrace your destiny.

Ms. Hawke: Thank you. No more questions, your honor.

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<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich; *The Joyful Wisdom*; Book III, section 125

Judge: Thank you, Mr. Nietzsche. You may step down. The court will take a short recess and reconvene in one hour. [slams gavel down]

## Scene 2 (outside the courthouse)

[An on-location television reporter walks on stage with his cameraman, and goes through a sound/video check. Assistant brings on a middle aged woman in a frumpy dress.]

Reporter: Good afternoon. This is Morton Salt, and I am coming to you live outside the courthouse, where Philosophy is standing trial. This morning the jury heard testimony from the prosecution's witnesses, including William Shakespeare. We are fortunate to have Shakespeare's grammar school teacher, Mrs. Wordsmith, with us today. Mrs. Wordsmith, how well prepared do you think Mr. Shakespeare was for today's questioning?

Wordsmith: Well, I was surprised that he remembered the writings of Boethius from our studies. You know, young Will was a middling student and not very focused--always daydreaming in class or jotting something down in his little notebook.

Reporter: Did he ever get himself in trouble?

Wordsmith: No, not really, except that I would often catch him passing notes to the girls in class. Little love poems mostly. Made the girls swoon right in the middle of lessons. Not the kind of disturbance little boys usually cause, but quite disruptive nonetheless.

Reporter: Love poems? Interesting. Were they any good?

Wordsmith: Well, I intercepted a few of them, and I can tell you this--they certainly made me blush. He most definitely had a way with words, but his style was a little too saucy for my taste.

Reporter: Sounds like a real charmer, alright. Not your rough-and-tumble type of boy, then?

Wordsmith: Well, of course, he loved to play at swordfighting too. He and the other boys used to really get after it during recess.

Reporter: Fascinating. Any other thoughts before we let you go?

Wordsmith: No, but I would like to give a big shout-out to my homeys--all the schoolmarms back in Stratford-on-Avon.

Reporter: Thank you for joining us.

Wordsmith: My pleasure (waves good-bye to the camera)

[Assistant brings on the Bailiff.]

Reporter: We are joined now by a veteran witness of these affairs, the Bailiff, George McCracken. Mr. McCracken, what have you found most striking about the trial so far?

Bailiff: (In a gruff but affable, official-sounding, deadpan voice) Well, we have seen some beautiful gowns tonight. I thought Mr. Descartes wore his ensemble particularly well. Very elegant lines. Right stately, I should say. He does have a sense of style for a Frenchie, eh?

Reporter: Did you feel that the prosecution scored some points when they had Mr. Nietzsche on the stand?

Bailiff: Well, I wouldn't know about that sir, but I do think Mr. Nietzsche was having a very bad hair day today. Very bad indeed. Oh, my land! Inexcusably unkempt if you ask me. If his hair is any indication of what's going on inside his head, I would say he must be quite mad! Quite mad indeed! And what about that disaster on his lip? Goodness gracious sakes alive! Was that a moustache or did a sheep dog get stuck crawling up his nose? (guffaws, quite pleased with his joke)

Reporter: (somewhat annoyed) Now, you've served on many cases with Justice Sage. Has he shown you any indication today as to what his take on the whole trial might be?

Bailiff: (with a wink and a grin): Well, I wouldn't say sir even if I could, now would I? Get my bailiff's license revoked! Oh no, sir, mum's the word! But Justice Sage, now he's an old hand at this, don't you know, and he's got his poker face on today. No, he wouldn't tip his hand. He'll let the jury decide on this one. He's a fair man—very fair. And he's not bad a bad tennis player, either.

Reporter: Tennis?

Bailiff: Oh, yes sir. He's got a wicked serve, he has. We were playing a match just last Sunday—he won it in straight sets, yes sir.

Reporter: You play tennis with Justice Sage?

Bailiff: Why, yes, every weekend. We belong to the same club. I guess we just can't get enough of the courts, as he always likes to say! (chuckles) But then he has his humorous side! (serious again) You wouldn't know it today. Very serious business, this is. Very serious, indeed.

Reporter: Well, thank you, Mr. McCracken, and good luck in the second half.

Bailiff: thank you.

[assistant escorts a dog onto stage]

Reporter: We are especially fortunate now to be joined by one of Nietzsche's closest companions—his dog, Ego. Tell us, Ego, how long have you known Mr. Nietzsche?

Dog: (New Jersey accent) We've been together since the early days-- you know, just a couple of young hoodlums sneaking around town painting inflammatory slogans on the sides of buildings.

Reporter: And how did you get your curious name?

Dog: You know, Freddie--I call him Freddie-- once wrote: "Whenever I climb I am followed by a dog called 'Ego' ". So I guess that's me—I don't know, whatever-- I've been called worse. It's like I say, you can call me anything you want--just don't call me late for dinner.

Reporter: Now, some have said that you have actually had a significant influence on his philosophy. Is there any truth to that?

Dog: Yeah, that's true. We used to talk philosophy quite a bit on our long walks, you know, just to kill time. He loves his walks. He used to say, "All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking". Anyway, we used to bounce ideas off each other. That's how I turned him on to the idea of "the eternal recurrence".

Reporter: The eternal what?

Dog: The eternal recurrence. You know, the concept that if we assume that time is infinite and the universe is finite, then it follows logically that the history of the universe will repeat itself over and over again.

Reporter: I'm not sure I follow.

Dog: Well, the universe is constantly changing right?—meaning matter is constantly rearranging itself—and the chance that it will sometime in the future rearrange itself so that everything is exactly the same as it is right now—you and me standing here talking about the eternal recurrence—has to be more than zero, right? I mean, it might be very close to zero, but it can't be exactly zero, because it is not impossible for matter to rearrange itself sometime in the future so that everything is exactly the same as it is right now, right?

Reporter: Yeeeahhh (slowly and a bit uncertain)

Dog: Well, if time is infinite, then it is necessarily true that sooner or later, every moment in history will be repeated, not just once, but an infinite number of times. That's your eternal recurrence, right there.

Reporter: I see. And you told him about this, this idea of the eternal recurrence?

Dog: Yeah, I mean, I'd wake up and he would give me the same old dry dog kibbles, day after day. And then we'd go on our walk, but I mean, every time we'd take the same path up that valley in the Swiss Alps there, where he liked to hang out. Now, ya gotta understand, I'm a dog—I like a little variety in my walks--you know. So, I'm trying to pull him off onto a new path, and he keeps yanking my chain pulling me back. So, I say, "what!? Can't we try a different path today? It's like the eternal recurrence here!" Well, he stops dead in his tracks and he says, "what did you say?" So, I explain about the eternal recurrence thing.

Reporter: You explained it to him?

Dog: Yeah, turns out I had just come across it while I'm reading "The Brothers Karamazov" by, uh, that Dostoevsky guy. You know, the part where Ivan is going nuts, and he's got a fever and he's hallucinat' and everything, and he thinks he's talking with the devil. And the devil is trying to explain it all, but Ivan doesn't get it. Ivan doesn't see the big picture. So the devil says—wait, I've got it right here (pulls out a copy of the book)--

"Why, you keep thinking of our present earth! But our present earth may have been repeated a billion times. Why, it's become extinct, been frozen; cracked, broken to bits, disintegrated into its elements, again 'the water above the firmament,' then again a comet, again a sun, again from the

sun it becomes earth -- and the same sequence may have been repeated endlessly and exactly the same to every detail, most unseemly and insufferably tedious . . ."<sup>7</sup>

So, Nietzsche drops my leash and runs straight home. And I'm thinkin', oh, brother, here we go again. So I get home, and he's buried himself now in the *Brothers Karamazov*, and he don't care about nothin' else. Spends the whole day and night just readin' and readin'—never says a word. Finally, I says, "hey, little help here—I'm gettin' hungry". But it's no use, see. So I have to get my own kibbles.

Reporter: That must have been very hard for you.

Dog: Yeah! Same old stinkin' kibbles, and I have to get 'em myself. I mean, fuhgeddaboutit! Anyway, you know the rest. At first, this idea of the eternal recurrence kind of gives him the heebie-jeebies, you know what I mean? He called it "horrifying and paralyzing". It was like this heavy weight on his mind. But then all of sudden one day, he decides that this idea is like a key that opens up a door—I mean, it opens up a door to his decision to affirm life, to embrace his destiny, to love his fate. *Amor fati*. He says to me, "My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary, still less to conceal it . . . but to love it."<sup>8</sup>

Reporter: Amazing! You know, you're really quite well-read and articulate for a dog.

Dog: Tell me about it! Still can't get a decent meal! Stinkin' kibbles . . . Hey, wanna play fetch?

Reporter: No, I'm afraid I need to finish up this segment.

Dog: (grumbling) Fine, whatever . (trudges offstage)

Reporter: (pushing earphone into his ear) I'm getting word that the trial is about to re-commence, so we are going to send you back into the courtroom. This is Morton Salt reporting.

### Scene 3 (the Courtroom)

Bailiff: All Rise!

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<sup>7</sup> Dostoyevsky, Fyodor; *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 11, Chapter 9

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich; *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever", section 10

[Justice Sage enters]

Bailiff: The court of public opinion is back in session. The honorable Justice Sage is still presiding!

Judge: Is the defense prepared to call its witnesses?

Ms. Hawke steps forward

Ms. Hawke: Yes, your honor.

Judge: Very well. Please proceed Ms. Hawke.

Ms. Hawke: Your honor, the defense wishes to call Thomas Jefferson.

Judge: Call Thomas Jefferson.

Bailiff: Thomas Jefferson! Born, 1743!

[Thomas Jefferson enters]

Bailiff: Mr. Jefferson, please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Jefferson: I do. For, “truth is great, and will prevail if left to herself, and is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and can have nothing to fear from the conflict, unless (by human interposition) disarmed of her natural weapons – free argument and debate: errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.”<sup>9</sup>

Bailiff: A simple “I do” will suffice, sir.

Jefferson: I know, but I wrote that, and I’m quite proud of it. You can find it in *An Act for the Establishment of Religious Freedom*, which passed into Virginia State law in 1786 and is now available on amazon.com

[Bailiff shrugs and shakes his head, as Jefferson takes his seat]

Ms. Hawke: Mr. Jefferson, could you please state your occupation?

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<sup>9</sup> Jefferson, Thomas; *An Act for the Establishment of Religious Freedom*; passed by the Virginia Assembly, 1786

Jefferson: (pausing after every one or two occupations in the list as if finished, then continuing) Architect . . . inventor . . . author . . . patriot . . . botanist . . . lawyer . . . farmer . . . educator . . . founding father.

Ms. Hawke: You were also President of the United States at one point, were you not?

Jefferson: Oh yes, there was that.

Ms. Hawke: You mentioned you are an author. In fact, I wonder if you would be so good as to read to the court something you wrote. I have it right here.

Jefferson: (reading, with emotion and somewhat wistful) “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>10</sup>

Ms. Hawke: I would venture to say that most of us are well familiar with these famous words of yours, but nevertheless they still stir our souls every time we hear them. Where did you find the inspiration to write something so profound and so moving that it could energize an entire nation towards revolution, and towards a revolutionary experiment in government?

Jefferson: To be completely honest, I borrowed heavily from some great thinkers who came before me, from the Greek philosopher Epicurus to the British philosopher John Locke. It just seems that I have a knack for getting the wording right—at least that’s what Ben Franklin tells me.

Ms. Hawke: Alright, then tell us, how did you become acquainted with these philosophers that you find so worthy of emulation?

Mr. Jefferson: Well, at the College of William and Mary I studied quite a bit of Greek, Metaphysics, and Philosophy.

Ms. Hawke: Ah, philosophy!

Mr. Jefferson: Yes, philosophy. From the Greek roots, meaning “love of wisdom”.

Ms. Hawke: Very good—“love of wisdom”—I like that. Do you love wisdom, Mr. Jefferson?

Mr. Jefferson: Oh yes, in all fields of intellectual pursuit. That is why I joined the American Philosophical Society, which, as it happens, was founded by my old friend Ben Franklin to promote, as he put it, “useful knowledge in the sciences and humanities through excellence in scholarly research”.

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<sup>10</sup> Jefferson, Thomas; *Declaration of Independence*

Ms. Hawke: Excuse me, did you say “useful knowledge”? Are you suggesting that philosophy promotes “useful knowledge” (with exaggerated astonishment, and looking at the prosecution attorneys)?

Mr. Jefferson: Of course, in those times we viewed philosophy as having many branches, including natural philosophy, which formed the the foundation of science and technology.

Ms. Hawke: So you would consider Philosophy (gesturing to the prisoner) to be the mother of the humanities and the sciences.

Mr. Jefferson: Well said, my good man.

Ms. Hawke: No more questions, your honor.

[Ms. Pike steps forward.]

Judge: Your witness, Ms. Pike

Ms. Pike: Mr Jefferson, you were in fact the president of the American Philosphical Society from 1797 to 1815, were you not?

Mr. Jefferson: That’s correct.

Ms. Pike: And yet, there is no record of you attending a single meeting after 1800. It seems that you didn’t take the Society’s activities very seriously.

Mr. Jefferson: Well, I became rather occupied with the business of running a new nation, you see.

Ms. Pike: No more questions, your honor.

Judge: Thank you, Mr. Jefferson. You may step down.

Mr. Jefferson: (as he is walking offstage) I tried to resign three different times--they wouldn’t let me . . .

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Mr. Eagles steps forward.

Judge: Mr. Eagles, does the defense wish to call another witness?

Mr. Eagles: If it please the court your honor, the defense calls Albert Einstein.

Judge: Bailiff, call Albert Einstein

Bailliff: Albert Einstein, born 1879!

Albert Einstein strolls in with a walking stick

Bailiff: Albert Einstein, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Einstein: "Truth is what stands the test of experience".

Bailiff: (impatient) Yes or no?

Einstein: Yes

Mr. Eagles: Mr. Einstein, could you please state your occupation?

Einstein: I am a physicist.

Mr. Eagles: You are also a bit of a philosopher, are you not?

Einstein: You could say that I am an amateur philosopher, I suppose, but very much an amateur. I claim no expertise in the field.

Mr. Eagles: So you do have an interest in some philosophical ideas.

Einstein: To paraphrase something I once said: physics without metaphysics is lame; metaphysics without physics is blind.

Mr. Eagles: Could you please elaborate, Mr. Einstein. I'm not sure we catch your meaning.

Einstein: Certainly. Take time.

Mr. Eagles: Take time . . . to do what?

Einstein: No, I mean, take "time" for example. I can explain if you have a moment.

Mr. Eagles: Take your time.

Einstein: A physicist will tell you that, with respect to time, the distinction between past, present, and future is merely an illusion, albeit a stubborn and persistent one. I can show you mathematically—

Mr. Eagles: --You may need to teach me some math.

Einstein: (patiently) I could do that, and then I could show you mathematically that there is no difference between the past, the future, and this moment right now. But that would miss the mystery of it all. And “the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead”. And what is metaphysics but our poor attempt to use our imagination to peer behind the veil of the mysterious? And so, physics without metaphysics--without our native curiosity and the struggle to imagine what’s really out there--is lame.

Mr. Eagles: And metaphysics without physics . . . ?

Einstein: . . . is blind. Mere groping in the dark. The truths we discover in physics—

Mr. Carp: Objection! Truth in this context has not been defined.

Justice Sage: Sustained.

Mr. Eagles: Your honor, perhaps if we let Mr. Einstein define “truth”, the court will allow him to answer the question.

Justice Sage: (pausing to reflect) I will allow it.

Mr. Eagles: Mr Einstein, would you care to define truth for us?

Einstein: Well, as I told the Bailiff there, truth is what stands the test of experience. In science, the truth of a statement, or of a theory, rests solely on its ability to make accurate predictions about future events. Scientific truths are always tentative, because we never know if the results of some future experiment will conflict with what the theory predicts.

Mr. Eagles: Wasn’t David Hume, the famous Scottish philosopher and proponent of empiricism, among the first to say essentially the same thing?

Einstein: Indeed he did. And I believe “Hume has permanently influenced the development of the best philosophers who came after him.”<sup>11</sup> His message was that whatever in knowledge is of empirical origin is never certain. Nevertheless, when a theory does make accurate predictions time after time, we may consider it true until proven otherwise. Scientific truths can also be relative. Newton’s theory of gravity is incredibly accurate. Nevertheless, my theory of gravity is

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<sup>11</sup> Einstein, Albert; The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell, “Remarks on Bertrand Russell’s Theory of Knowledge”

even more so! I'll never forget the moment when I learned that Sir Arthur Eddington had made the first key observation showing my theory to be more accurate than Newton's. He had to go to a remote island off the coast of West Africa to observe the stars during a solar eclipse—and he showed what I predicted—the light rays from the stars were bending (with awe and amazement) as they passed by the sun—just as my equations predicted they would as a result of the sun's gravity. Space is curved!

Mr. Eagles: Thank you, Mr. Einstein. Now that you have defined truth for us, please finish explaining how metaphysics without physics is blind.

Mr Einstein: Of course. I was explaining that only scientific truths can guide our imagination toward comprehending the incomprehensible. Otherwise we are lost. I like to say, “the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible”—at least somewhat.

Mr. Eagles: Would you care to sum up your thoughts on philosophy and science?

Mr. Einstein: Science is knowledge. Philosophy is imagination. And “imagination is more important than knowledge”

Mr. Eagles: No more questions, your honor.

Mr. Bass arises and steps forward.

Judge: Mr. Bass, your witness.

Mr. Bass: Mr. Einstein, I believe you are familiar with the work of Bertrand Russell, the (sarcastically) renowned and brilliant British philosopher.

Einstein: yes, of course.

Mr. Bass: And I understand that you have read his book, “Theory of Knowledge”.

Einstein: Actually, I have. As a matter of fact, I wrote some remarks on that work.

Mr. Bass: Ah ha. Whatever led you to do that?

Einstein: I was invited by the editor to provide some commentary. I was intrigued because, at the time, the difficulties posed by quantum mechanics were forcing physicists to come to grips with some very deep philosophical problems.

Mr. Bass: Yes, well, I have read your comments myself, and I noticed that you seem to equate metaphysics, in your own words, with “empty talk” and “philosophizing in the clouds”.

Einstein: Only when metaphysics is not grounded in our sensory experience and in experimental fact. Indeed, if you had done your homework more diligently, you would have read my assessment that in the last chapter of “Theory of Knowledge”, Russell was able to show that after all, “one cannot get along without metaphysics.”<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Bass: (somewhat glumly) no more questions.

Judge: Thank you, Mr. Einstein. You may step down.

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Ms. Falcone steps forward.

Judge: Ms Falcone, does the defense have another witness?

Ms. Falcone: The defense would like to call Socrates as our final witness.

Judge: Bailiff, call Socrates.

Bailiff: Socrates, born circa 469 BC!

Socrates walks in, wearing a Hawaiian shirt with a lei, and straw sunhat, shorts and flipflops, holding a marguerita in one hand.

Socrates: ‘sup judge?

Bailiff: Socrates, please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Socrates: Right on!

Ms. Falcone: Mr. Socrates--

Socrates: Please, call me Socrates.

Ms. Falcone: Socrates, do you understand the gravity of this case? Philosophy, here, having been charged with the capital offense of corrupting the minds of the young, is facing capital punishment.

Socrates: Huh! Yeah--been there!

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Ms. Falcone: Socrates--by the way, is that a Marguerita you're drinking?

Socrates: Well, it ain't hemlock, I'll tell you that.

Ms. Falcone: We have heard from a number of venerable witnesses today, witnesses who have provided a variety of perspectives on the history of Philosophy--a history filled with contentious debate, even slander; a history filled with controversy; a history marked at various times by despair, hope, terrible grief, and tremendous joy.

Socrates: Yeah, I guess me and Plato really started something.

Ms. Falcone: I would say you did. And I want to ask you if you would like to share your opinion on the matter before the court today.

Socrates: Certainly. But first, tell me, how do *you* think the case is going for you and your team so far today?

Ms. Falcone: Well, pretty good, I think.

Socrates: Splendid! Did you clarify Descartes' position on the importance of taking nothing for granted.

Ms. Falcone: Yes

Socrates: Good man. And Neitzsche, he tends to go off sometimes--bit of a loose cannon. Did you keep him on point?

Ms. Falcone: We did the best we could, sir, and I think we managed to do alright.

Socrates: Excellent! Well, I don't think you have anything to worry about, because deep down, everyone knows--you can't get by without philosophy. I mean, who are you going to turn to when you get that sinking feeling that the only thing you know for sure is that you don't know anything. Am I right?

Mr. Eagles: Absolutely right, sir.

Socrates: Good. Is there anything else?

Mr. Eagles: No, uh, I mean, no more questions your honor.

Mr. Carp steps forward.

Judge: Your witness, Mr. Carp.

Mr. Carp: Well, Socrates, you old geezer. Looks like you've put on a few pounds since your fightin' days.

Socrates: Well, too many cheeseburgers in paradise, I guess.

Mr. Carp: Socrates, can you honestly say that philosophy has made any real progress in the last 2000 years?

Socrates: How do you measure progress?

Mr. Carp: I'll ask the questions here.

Socrates: Let's both ask questions. It's more fun that way.

Mr. Carp: OK—how do *you* measure progress?

Socrates: Well, ask yourself this: are you better off than you were 2000 years ago?

Mr. Carp: I wasn't around 2000 years ago.

Socrates: Well, I was. And believe me, it was no picnic.

Mr. Carp: Look, no one is claiming that society has not made any progress in the last 2000 years. There can be no doubt that the contributions of science have been immense. The question is: what contribution has philosophy made?

Socrates: There you go again—trying to make a distinction between science and philosophy. Tell me, have you ever wondered why?

Mr. Carp: what?

Socrates: Not what, why.

Mr. Carp: why what?

Socrates: Why anything.

Mr. Carp: Huh?

Socrates: Have you ever wondered why anything is the way it is and not otherwise.

Mr. Carp: Why, of course!

Socrates: Exactly. Man is the only animal to ask why things are the way they are. Other animals may be concerned about the where and the what and the who, but they are not concerned with the why.

Mr. Carp: So?

Socrates: Without human beings asking why questions, there can be no science. But once an animal starts asking why, you're going to have philosophy, as well. You can't have science without philosophy. You just can't. So get over it. It is the human capacity to ask "why" that stimulates and nurtures the imagination. Now, sometimes you have to rein the imagination in, but sometimes you have to let it roam wild. You have to let it explore all the possibilities, or else you might not find what you are looking for. Because sometimes the answer appears in the most unexpected place. Do you profess to have all the answers, my good man?

Mr. Carp: Of course not.

Socrates: So what's wrong with letting some people follow lady philosophy wherever she might lead? The revelations she provides may yet surprise even you!

Mr. Carp: Sir! You have failed to provide a proper answer to any of my questions.

Socrates: Yes, but I have provided many excellent *questions* in response to your questions, and that is far more valuable a thing.

Mr. Carp: (exasperated) No more questions, your honor.

Socrates: Now, *that's* a pity.

Judge: you may step down, Socrates.

Socrates: (raising his glass) cheers. (Socrates steps down and ambles off)

Judge: Ms. Falcone, does the defense wish to produce any additional witnesses?

Ms. Falcone: No, your honor. The defense rests.

Judge: Mr. Carp, are you prepared to make your closing argument?

Mr. Carp: Yes, your honor. (turning to the audience) Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, what you have seen here today clearly establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that Philosophy cannot be trusted with the minds of our youth. As portrayed in the words of our witnesses, she is a promoter of obfuscation and muddled thinking, of platitudes and pipedreams. There is no place

for her in our schools, which must be kept free of her corrupting influence. Surely you can see that a guilty verdict is more than justified, and is necessary to ensure the continued progress of our society.

Judge: Ms. Falcone, does the defense wish to present a closing argument?

Ms. Falcone: Indeed, your honor. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the testimony of these six great thinkers. They have explained the value of philosophy, despite my worthy opponents' attempt to discredit them or distort their own words. They understand humanity's insatiable thirst for knowledge and for wisdom. And no one understands the needs and desires of human beings more than Mr. Shakespeare. As Hamlet, the philosopher-prince, said, speaking of the capacity of the human mind,

What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.  
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To fust in us unused.<sup>13</sup>

We were not blessed with understanding and reason only to let them wither and rot away. We are obliged to employ them in all pursuits, wherever they might lead. Let us therefore not be afraid to think, to imagine, and to speak freely. And so, I ask you to find Lady Philosophy innocent of these charges, for to do otherwise would be a corruption of justice.

Judge: Very well. Now, members of the jury, your time has come to consider the testimony you have heard today and render a verdict. You must decide whether the prosecution has established beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty of the charges brought against her. The defendant will approach the bench.

[defendant slowly rises and walks to a spot just in front of the judge, facing the judge]

Judge: OK, Bailiff, bring on the Human Applause-o-meter!

[Human Applause-o-meter is escorted onstage and stands at attention faces the audience]

Judge: Alright, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, who thinks that Lady Philosophy is guilty of loitering, vagrancy, and disturbing the peace?

[silence, presumably]

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<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare, William; *Hamlet*; Act IV, scene iv

Judge: And who feels that Lady Philosophy is innocent of loitering, vagrancy, and disturbing the peace?

[loud clapping and cheering, presumably. Human Applause-o-meter raises right arm through an arc, indicating loudness]

Judge: The jury finds the defendant innocent of these charges!

Now, who thinks the defendant is guilty of corrupting the minds of our youth?

[mostly silence, presumably]

Judge: And who thinks the defendant is innocent of corrupting the minds of our youth?

[loud clapping and cheering, I hope. Human Applause-o-meter responds as appropriate]

Judge: The jury finds the defendant innocent of all charges! Case closed!

[slams gavel down]

[Lady philosophy abruptly sheds her robe to reveal herself clothed in a wrestling uniform as she turns to face the audience, and makes gestures of victory, holding her arms above her head, as a victory song begins to play. The attorneys for the defense begin to celebrate, while the attorneys for the prosecution stand dumbfounded. Lady philosophy looks at them and goes into a crouch, as if ready to wrestle. She gestures to the prosecution attorneys to “bring it on”. They cower in fear, and she moves toward them. They scramble, bumping into each other. She chases them briefly around their work table, then jumps on the table, again taking on a crouching position, ready to pounce. The attorneys scramble across stage, but she catches one and they engage in some wrestling. Meanwhile a cheerleader comes on stage with a megaphone, and calls to the audience]

Cheerleader: Give me a Q!

Audience: Q!

Cheerleader: Give me an E!

Audience: E!

Cheerleader: Give me a D!

Audience: D!

Cheerleader: What's that spell?

Audience: Q-E-D {perhaps}

Lady Philosophy chases remaining attorney off stage as curtain falls.

