

A Damned Politician

A Dialogue Introduction to
Libertarianism

Any resemblance to any real politician, living or dead, is entirely
intentional.

Preface

This is a short dialogue introduction to libertarianism. It was written around the time of its complementary partner *The Philosophical Genie: a Dialogue Introduction to Philosophy*, in the late noughties, and was also presented at one of Christian Michel's intellectual soirées. Partly by reason of its brevity and form, it does not attempt to cover the gamut of approaches to the libertarian ideology. Rather, it mainly focuses on my own critically-preferred conjectures. In particular, these include anarchy rather than minarchy (and more than minarchy might be classical liberalism, but it is not libertarianism). I also ought to point out that the setting was chosen purely for dramatic purposes and is not an endorsement of any kind of theological approach. As with its partner dialogue, I have avoided adding references to books and articles relating to the sundry controversial assertions that are made. This is for several reasons, which bear repetition especially in case this is the first or only dialogue read. 1) It would distract significantly from the main text and turn it into something other than the dialogue it is intended to be. 2) Such references would not, in any case, support those assertions: for we can never escape the realm of conjecture. 3) It is a small matter these days to do an internet search for relevant material (pro and con) concerning any assertions. And 4) my more-scholarly books and articles already contain many of the relevant references and in a more-detailed argumentative context.

Characters: A defence lawyer (D) and a politician (P).

Scene: A man (D) is sitting on one side of a table, with a huge ledger and a quill pen. An empty chair is on the other side. A closed door is visible.

[A light comes on.]

D: Next please!

[A bemused and dazed man (P) enters through the door. He looks around.]

D: Welcome sir. Please take a seat. [Writes.] 15,172.

[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: 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. We 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: 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 still 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 lawgiver. 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 initiated 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 law-expressing ones only describe natural laws.

P: And the others?

D: What they are, or 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 a dominant power.

D: So if I invent any rule I wish and have the power to force you to obey it—which I do, incidentally—am I then your lawgiver?

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, *just* laws cannot be arbitrary: they are necessary 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 the 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: Perhaps not. But that is an idle supposition.

D: And if the state were to impose any laws that did not protect people *in some needed way*, then those would be unjust laws.

P: Yes, they would be erroneous—possibly even felonious—laws posing as legitimate laws.

D: Your use of “felonious” rightly suggests a higher law than state law. And common law, for instance, originally evolved without the intervention of the state. Moreover, many legal disputes are still resolved without the state.

P: Ah yes, but the state is 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: The state remains as the final arbiter when *needed*, and in any case it is still needed to create and enforce all the legislation that protects the public interest *beyond* mere common law, etc.

D: That is what politicians assert. But all the usual examples either can be provided by voluntary means—and the state has used proactive coercion to crowd 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—but also completely confused and mistaken.

P: Only the state can legislate to guarantee certain vital things to the population. What about education? And literacy in particular?

D: Before *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—with a smaller population, of course—about two and a half times as many hospital beds before the NHS was started than the NHS has today. And now there are also about one and a half times more administrators than there are beds.

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’, the state extorts money from people today to spend on whatever it likes, and then extorts more money for whatever it has promised from completely unrelated people at a later date.

P: But people do receive 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 inefficient state-imposed 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 usually 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 state-guaranteed expect only cabbage, and queues for that. When clothes are state-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 Earth 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 Gaiaesque metaphor belongs more 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. Although 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.

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 commonsense 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 is real and is manmade and is 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 might be better: technologies to reflect sunlight or increase carbon storage, and so forth. And the specific owners who are adversely affected could take a class action lawsuit 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 alleged consensus is really a mere majority, and one that is maintained partly by dubious propaganda and fear of the consequences of dissent. Moreover, according to some official records, there has been no global warming since at least January 1997—and possibly much longer.

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: far less controversial *and* almost unfalsifiable. Do people really fall for that?

P: All informed and reasonable people know that significant 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 isn’t so.

P: What is it, then?

D: Your main problem has always been aggressively 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 electronic 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 private-property 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 for that purpose as the pre-existing *status quo*, and so the property claim already exists.

P: That sounds like a strange kind of ‘ownership’ to me.

D: Having an ownership right to good air is no stranger, and no less essential, than having an ownership right to your own body. If someone damages the air supply of others then he can be sued by, or on behalf of, those whose air supplies are damaged.

P: Aha! But that is not private ownership, at least. That 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, which 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. It’s inherently inconsistent.

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 conceptually impossible in five seconds flat.

P: Is that supposed to impress me?

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

P: I do grant that there is an impressive, if ghastly, consistency to your ideology. 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 admit that tolerating some inequality is needed for an economy to work. Differing 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 or love is demeaning to either the giver or the receiver. But extorting 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 extortion? You have a way of twisting the truth.

D: I rather think I was untwisting your confusion in order 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 that I've ever heard of.

D: That's because we are not working out the most plausible excuses for you to repeat 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 here is known on Earth by some people. No unearthly knowledge is allowed. 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: Then I suppose that is useful—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 in practice. And liberty is good for one and 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 in question 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 positively harmed by such discrimination.

D: No, there is no invasive harm to—or proactive imposition on—other people in private choices that exclude them. There is merely the denial of a benefit to which other people have no right.

P: Then why not give that right to those people who are unfairly discriminated against?

D: Because it is not unfair to allow people to discriminate with what is theirs, and your suggested “right” would extort a benefit and thereby invasively impose on 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: Economic efficiency. 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 an inherent tendency to reward successful entrepreneurship and valuable skills with initially high returns. But it also then competes away excess inequality of profits and incomes as more people are encouraged 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 (that is, spontaneously evolved) rights, which all respect liberty. 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: Sometimes, 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: Aggressively-imposed equality and so-called 'fairness' are not liberal in the slightest. And they are worse than sinister; they are at least authoritarian and even, at the extreme, 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 likelihood of your doing 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 invasive impositions on people and their property—whether coercive, crafty, covert, or however—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 real “invasive impositions”—as you call them. 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 matters are relatively trivial in the broader scheme of things.

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 millions of other 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 quite clear how much on my pay slip.

D: That is a mere book-keeping exercise to create 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 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 that way 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 in the NHS, for instance.

D: No, not at all. Work very 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 that is so, which I doubt, 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 invasive imposition: specifically, an 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: At best, 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 invasive imposition for the state to take ownership of someone's actual body.

D: But you say it isn't an invasive imposition 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, although only in the public interest.

D: But the state uses aggressive coercion to maintain its control of money and external property. Money and property can, and sometimes still do, exist and be defended without the state.

P: As I said, it only takes over these things in order to offer better protection. It is defensive by intention.

D: The modern state often has total taxes 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 many ways, especially those who are least able to protect themselves.

D: But there are many homeless people in your society. There are people waiting, to the point of death, for vital operations. There is increasing illiteracy and innumeracy among the poorest people 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. And the opportunity cost loss rapidly compounds over time. Domain-wide dire disadvantages only continue to exist because of the state.

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

D: That doesn't 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: Of course we do. People still own themselves, but sometimes 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 often take the allegedly worst ones, even 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 those drugs to be too dangerous, having seen the terrible consequences.

D: No, you politicians deem non-traditional drugs to be too dangerous out of your ignorant prejudices and the effects of your prohibitions. 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 any body-parts.

P: Of course that should not be allowed. That would be exploitative and very dangerous

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 completely immoral to buy and sell human organs.

D: So you extort them instead?

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

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

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

D: Not entirely. 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 your "state regulation" results in more actual graves as well as being an act of extortion.

P: 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, *if you please*, how could it not be about murder?

D: The man who shot 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—really arbitrary commands—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 genuine 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 would you call me? ‘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 it 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 you aren’t. 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 somewhat like supporting a football team, but even more exciting. Yet even where a competitor state is the aggressor and is worse, it would often be better for the people to avoid war and accept invasion.

P: Sorry, in what way would it “often 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 many 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 wicked, in fact.

D: Is it irresponsible and wicked 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 people to war. You are fond of war, are you not?

P: Of course not. What an abominable suggestion.

D: What about your allegedly ‘defensive’ armed interventions in recent years? All of those resulted in tens, or even hundreds, of thousands more people dying as a consequence.

P: It was often an issue 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 much or any worse—despite your government’s dishonest propaganda. 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 responsibility and my conscience, at least.

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 hundreds of thousands of 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 supposed ‘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. 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.

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—although that would be a safety valve too.

P: [Pause.] Between you and me, there is something in what you say. But calling popularly 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 really 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 specious propaganda does in fact help to legitimise your rule. And all political 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 real democracy would be. 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”. 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. You would have been too much in awe of Him.

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, more or less.

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: Can't people 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 extorted more than a hundred billion pounds from their pension funds, which eventually resulted in hardship for many thousands of pensioners.

P: That wasn't extortion. 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 behalves and then eventually retire on very comfortable pensions themselves—paid out of taxation. They also often have additional lucrative sinecures in industries 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 a state.

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 libertarian property from invasive impositions.

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

D: No. I refer to *private-property* anarchy, where that property is derivable from interpersonal liberty. Socialist anarchy is merely confused and foolish. Money, capital accumulation, and big business 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, spontaneous libertarian laws that determine property rights and rectifications of their infringements. Your government regulations have failed time and time again. Along with the vast extortion you call 'taxation' and your other financial interventions, politics is the major cause and continuance of the worst economic problems.

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

D: No, but you would all have a better insight into the economy and society generally with a better knowledge of basic 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 held to be a dangerous lunatic: his heterodox assertions threaten the status and livelihood of the orthodox ‘experts’.

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 invasive impositions, especially 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 or known these things.

P: I don’t think that a reasonable person should have done so.

D: No, it was your flawed moral character.

P: What evidence can you possibly offer of that?

D: Consider just one example. You were a student doing a higher degree, 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 former 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—although 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: Anyway, it was a paltry sum of money. He should have let it go.

D: Why should he? You owed it. Then there was the matter of the heater secreted in your room.

P: 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 yearly 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?

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, 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. 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. Why did you do that?

D: If I were to slap you a thousand times across the face it would hardly be outrageous treatment in 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 his 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 near the 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 collateral damage.

D: Reasonable 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.

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? [Points upwards.]

D: The other Him. [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 lives taken, money extorted, the amount of suffering inflicted, and so forth, multiplied by your share of the culpability in each case. 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.] Could really sincere contrition be enough on its own?

D: 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, actually. And the view from here is far from lovely.

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 some Earthly politicians 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. Although 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 the 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 conference is the evil thereof.

P: What does that mean?

D: 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 walk through.

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 out of the door.]

You are going to need it.

[Pauses. Looks down at the ledger.]

Next please!

[Long pause. The same man re-enters. Bemused. He looks around.]

Welcome sir. Please take a seat. [Writes] 15,173.

[P sits. Dazed. Looking around.]

P: 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 conference about your trial.

[The light goes out.]