

FEELING BETTER EVERYDAY

By G. Bratford

The following excerpts are from the satirical novel Feeling Better Everyday written by UVic student G. Bratford. In this scene, one of the story's main characters, a reporter by the name of Johnson, is having a conversation with his roommate, Brent, who is a philosophy student.

A day and a half later, Brent entered Johnson's room.

"What are you doing?" he asked, casually enough.

"Nothing much," Johnson responded.

"Ahh!" said Brent with a finger held high like philosophers do when they think of something extraordinarily deep. "But you are not doing nothing, are you? You must be doing something!"

"Nope," replied Johnson. "I'm not doing anything. How about you?"

"No, no, no," urged Brent, ignoring Johnson's questions in a hurried rush to confuse him. "Allow me to show you the error of your ways." He began to roll up his sleeves, and he launched into a spiel with much gusto. "Now, it is elementary knowledge garnered from any theoretical logic textbook that if you have a conclusion from which a logical sentence and the negation of that same logical sentence can be derived, it is the negation of the conclusion that can be claimed, and not the conclusion itself. For instance, if you conclude sentence, say, p , and from p you can derive, say, q and not q , then you must conclude not p ."

Johnson did not care about p 's or q 's and told Brent to mind his own and get out of his room.

"No!" said Brent resolutely, and proceeded to continue. "Listen very carefully. This is a matter that concerns us all. When you claim your conclusion, p , that you are doing nothing, it means that you are doing something, correct?" He did not await a response. "Of course it does, it means that you are doing nothing, which is something. Therefore, from your conclusion, p , that you are doing nothing, it can be concluded that you are both doing something, q , and not doing something, not q . Thus, your

conclusion p has led to a contradiction and it must therefore be refuted.” Brent had let out a long breath with this and smiled serenely. “You are not doing nothing,” he said deeply, “you are doing something.”

“What? Nothing?”

“Precisely.”

In this scene Johnson, on his first day at work for the newspaper, meets with Bill, a “philosophical field reporter.”

Johnson followed Frederick quickly down the hallway wondering what on earth a philosophical field reporter could possibly do with his time. When Frederick had disposed of him into Bill’s hands, his curiosity was satisfied.

“I follow riveting philosophical issues which the public finds both interesting and stimulating,” Bill had told him matter-of-factly from behind his round glasses and completely messy desk. “When a breakthrough in an are of philosophical concern is mad, I got o cover it in the field.”

“What field?” Johnson asked.

“Well, usually it’s a philosopher’s office.”

“Oh.”

“It’s terribly exciting,” said Bill intellectually.

“I see,” Johnson said, humouring him. “So, what sort of assignments do you cover?” he asked.

Bill looked up from his desk and swaggered in his chair. “Well, for instance,” he began rather egotistically, “last week I covered a philosopher who proved the existence of God.”

“He proved it?” Johnson asked, taken aback, for he considered proof to contain certain hard and fast facts.

“Yep,” said Bill happily, pleased with Johnson’s reaction to the news.

“Why hadn’t I heard anything about it?”

“Perhaps you simply haven’t been keeping up with the relevant material,” Bill said perfunctorily.

It seemed clear to Johnson that he obviously hadn’t been. Here was proof that God existed right under his nose, and he hadn’t heard anything

about it! He wondered why the world hadn't been turned upside down by this remarkable finding.

"Well, what was the proof?" Johnson asked incredulously. Here he expected to hear news of some mind-blowing archaeological find, or some absolutely brilliant scientific theory that proved once and for all the complete order of the universe.

Bill simply scoffed. "Oh, it's much too complicated to get into," he said very highly.

"Too complicated?" Johnson repeated quizzically.

"My dear boy, Bill said rising from his chair. "Do you know the least bit about epistemology or metaphysics?" Johnson shook his head. "Logic?" Johnson shrugged his shoulders. Bill continued, "The proof for the existence of God is tremendously long and complex proof combining all of these areas, and until you are quite thoroughly versed in them you will be unable to understand either the steps in the argument or the conclusion garnered from them."

"It's a logical proof?"

Bill scoffed again. "Very much so, very much so."

Johnson's eyes were open very wide. The idea that God existed and that this knowledge was open to everybody enthralled him. If this was the sort information that philosophy dealt with he wanted in—he would study all day and all night to unlock this amazing puzzle. However, he was left at a loss at how to deal with life until he fully understood the complexities of this proof. He wondered how it affected Bill, someone who fully understood both the fact that God existed and the reasons why.

"How did the proof change your life?" Johnson asked, regarding him with deep interest.

Bill looked at him as though he had lost his mind. "What are you—some kind of religious fundamentalist?" he asked in indignation.

"I'm sorry?"

"The proof didn't change my life at all," Bill said harshly. "Granted it's fascinating, but there are many points I object to, as will be outlined in my upcoming article."

Johnson rubbed his eyelids hard. "Wait a minute, you're objecting to a proof?" Johnson asked in a tone of amazement.

"Well of course! It's not like I'm the first! It was also disproved by R.R. Butler two days ago!"

Johnson shook his head. "Who's R.R. Butler?"

"A philosopher held in great esteem by a small, elite intellectual circle of other intellectuals who are also held in great esteem," said Bill in textbook fashion.

"What's his first name?" Johnson asked puzzled.

"R."

"Oh." Johnson contorted his lips in a puzzled fashion. "And he disproved a proof?"

"Exactly!" said Bill cynically, "The proof got disproven!"

"But I thought it was a proof!"

"It was! But that doesn't mean it actually proved anything."

"So ... what did it prove?"

"Nothing."

"So, something is nothing?"

"Precisely."

Johnson took a deep breath to steady himself. He was getting bad flashbacks of college. All he wanted was some concrete information.

"So, does God exist?" he asked tiredly, trying to find out if he had to remain a good person or not.

Bill looked at him and took off his glasses. "That debate hinges on whether God exists or not."