

The Court Sketch

(or “It’s not what you know, it’s the way that you know it”)

Scene: A courtroom

Characters: Judge
Prosecuting counsel
Defence counsel
Constable
Mr Allsop

Prosecution Now then, Constable, could you tell us what happened on the day in question?

Constable As I was proceeding in a westerly direction in the Holloway Road, I observed the accused causing a brick to be propelled in the direction of a passing bicyclist who was displaced from his vehicle by the aforesaid projectile. I gave chase and apprehended the accused by an adroit application of my boot.

Prosecution No further questions. Your witness.

Defence You say that you were proceeding in a westerly direction in the Holloway Road?

Constable Yes, sir.

Defence With the permission of the court, I’d like to present exhibit A, a London street map, on page 46 of which the court will be able to observe that the Holloway Road runs from north to south. Westerly, Constable?!

Constable I was crossing the road, sir.

Defence (crushed) Quite. Er . . . accepting that the Earth is spherical, Constable, then had you continued in a westerly direction, you would eventually have arrived in the east.

Constable Yes, sir.

Defence In other words, Constable, you were walking eastwards in a westerly direction.

Constable Yes, sir.

Defence If you saw the incident on your right while walking in a westerly direction, then it occurred to the north of you, and if on your left then to the south. But as you were walking eastwards, you were either looking left instead of right, or right instead of left.

Constable But it happened in front of me, sir.

- Defence** (triumphant) In that case, you were walking away from it, Constable, and could not have seen it.
- Constable** Er, possibly, sir.
- Prosecution** Objection, m'lud, the defence counsel is confusing my witness.
- Judge** Er . . .
- Defence** You claim that the accused threw a brick at the cyclist.
- Constable Yes, sir.
- Defence** How did you know it was a brick?
- Constable** It looked like a brick, sir.
- Defence** (produces imitation fried egg on plate) What's this, Constable?
- Constable** It's a fried egg, sir.
- Defence** Look again, Constable?
- Constable** It's a piece of rubber, sir.
- Defence** Well, Constable, I put it to you that if there is a difference between the class of fried egg-like objects and the class of fried eggs, it is equally plausible that there is a difference between the class of brick-like objects and the class of bricks, and therefore, it is possible that some fried egg-like objects are in fact bricks, and, *more to the point, Constable*, some brick-like objects are in fact fried eggs. I put it to you, Constable, that the brick-like object that you saw was in fact this fried egg.
- Prosecution** Objection, m'lud. That's not a fried egg – it's a piece of rubber.
- Judge** I thought it was a brick. Objection overruled.
- Defence** Now, Constable, you say that this fried egg-like object actually hit the cyclist?
- Constable Yes, sir
- Defence** Was the bicycle moving?
- Constable Yes, sir.
- Defence** In that case, when the object reached the position in which the bicycle had been when the object was thrown, was the bicycle still there?
- Constable** No, sir, it had moved on.
- Defence** And when the object had reached the position to which the bicycle had moved when the object had reached the position in which the bicycle had been when the object was thrown, was the bike still there?
- Constable** Had it moved, again sir?

- Defence** Clearly, Constable! And when the object had reached the position to which the bicycle had moved when the object had reached the position to which the bicycle had moved when the object reached the position in which the bike had been when the object was thrown? . . . M'lud, need I continue?
- Judge** How much longer?
- Defence** Infinitely, m'lud.
- Judge** All right, then, but keep it brief.
- Defence** I think it is clear that the object could never have reached a position in which the bicycle was. But, I must now ask you, did the object move at all?
- Constable** Of course, it did, sir.
- Defence** Then it must have moved from where it was.
- Constable** Yes, sir.
- Defence** But if it was where it was it never moved.
- Constable** No, sir, it moved to the bicycle.
- Defence** In that case it moved to a position where it was not – where it did not exist! I put it to you, Constable, that the brick you saw never existed.
- Prosecution** Objection, m'lud, we've established it was a fried egg.
- Defence** No, we've established it was a piece of rubber.
- Constable** I thought you said it never existed.
- Judge** Whatever it is, it's immaterial. Proceed.
- Defence** As for the Constable's fatuous claim that he actually caught up with the accused . . . I think I need say no more! Finally and most importantly, Constable, can you be sure that Mr Allsop here was the man that you did not see not throwing the non-existent fried egg-like object?
- Constable** It looks like him!
- Defence** (with infinite patience) Really, Constable, we've gone over all this before! The class of Mr Allsop's is not co-extensive with the class of Mr Allsop-like objects; and the same applies to yourself, to . . . Queen Victoria, to . . . Julius Caesar. What does that mean, Constable?
- Constable** It means . . . that I'm Queen Victoria?

Defence (pointing at Allsop) *It means that this man is Julius Caesar!* And why should we believe his (points at Allsop) delusion that he is Mr Allsop, any more than your (points at Constable) delusion that you are Queen Victoria, or this man's (points at judge) delusion that he is a judge.

Prosecution Objection, m'lud. If we follow the direction of the defence counsel's argument, we will discover that we are all Julius Caesar, or for that matter, not Julius Caesar, as the case may be, and that the entire universe is, or is not, a non-existent fried egg-like object.

Defence Precisely.

Judge I've had enough of this! (very fast – almost unintelligible.) I shall and shan't now proceed to the summing up and taking away. Members and non-members of the jury, you have all heard and not heard how the Mr Allsop-like object who is and is not Julius Caesar moved and did not move a non-existent brick-like fried egg-like universe in an eastward direction westerly. I sentence the whole of humanity to be hung and not hung by the neck until they are dead and alive. Next case! Previous case!

END