

Letter from Mary to Arthur Prior, undated¹

Monday night

Dearest,

I've been thinking about your necessary existence² thing and drawing morals from it. It seems to me to be a paradigm of philosophical argument. I mean the argument against has a philosophical rigour which objections like "what Q. could that answer?" just haven't. It would be rash to claim that to any philosopher it is clear that the argument is no good because there are people who'll object to logic itself! But its clear that to most philosophers of whatever school and it good to see a philosopher dealing w. an argument as an argument, and not simply brushing {2} it up in order to secure his own particular "school" against another. To be interested in "what is" instead of "what ism," wh. is the curse. And that is what logical formulation can do so well – get philosophy into a common language and clear from the language of the cliques. The best philosophy has always had that rigour e.g. Moore[']s Nat. Fall.³ Stuff and the ontological argument itself. It was to the strength of Berkeley – or so it appears to me to be, a rigour which gave no quarter.⁴ So much "philosophical" argument consists of changing the subject instead of arguing it out and I think Berkeley and Hume did try to argue out specific problems.

Tuesday – Lunch Time: Because I'm on the library today I can skip out of {3}lunch early. But as Gilly has dishes to do we can't make an early start, so here I am already to go, the shacks around me empty and unnaturally silent. I can hear the kids at Beckenham school out playing. It carries me back to the Balfour St house when you were away when that same noise assailed me. The very same noise as the blue of 2 chairs can be the same.

I'm glad you find Mrs Kirk⁵ so good and sensible, and glad she finds M.⁶ "good". Here the quotes mean she said it, not me. Don't let M. miss next hour for the sake of school. Here nothing is allowed to interfere w. ours.

After all the cold today is a pleasure. It[']s so warm here. I'm sitting in the sun, just loving it.

That book of Snow[']s is good. He gets so well the excitement of science – even the physical appearance typical of scientists too – not white coated figures, but dressed w. an {4}air of "mucking about" about them. So many scientists seem to do half their work in the clothes they go tramping in when they can get away w. it.

There[']s pictures tonight, and I'm expecting to go. Think it[']s a reasonable thing but a DRRRRRAMA wh. is a bit tiresome. Why is tragedy usually corny or gruesome and quite uncathartic on the films?

How started sewing up my new pink frock.

¹ Editors' note: This letter has been edited by Martin Prior, Peter Øhrstrøm and David Jakobsen. It is part of the Martin Prior Collection, presently kept at Aalborg University folder C, item 11. The letter is written on standard unheaded writing paper. It was kept in an envelope stamped Tuesday 17. August 1954. It was partly written Monday night. The other part on Tuesday 17. August.

² Editors' note: During 1954 Arthur worked with the ontological argument, and at several occasions discussed it with Mary.

³ Editors' note: This is a reference to G.E. Moore's Natural Fallacy. A.N. Prior addressed problems regarding this idea in *Logic and the basis of Ethics* (1949).

⁴ Editors' note: A military term which means to give no clemency.

⁵ Editors' note: According to Martin Prior, Mrs Kirk gave him lessons in the latter part of his year with tuberculosis.

⁶ Editors' note: 'M'. is for 'Martin'.

Now I'll stop and get ready to meet Gilly. She can[']t be long.

All kisses

Polly.