

THE DIALECTIC *REDUCTIO AD*

ABSURDUM ARGUMENT:

A METHOD OF PHILOSOPHICAL

ARGUMENTATION OR ANALYSIS

DEMONSTRATING THE

MEANINGLESSNESS OF ALL VIEWS

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THUS BECAUSE THE WORD ARGUMENTS REDUCE TO MEANINGLESSNESS THEN YOU, ME, NIETZSCHE, CAMUS, SARTRE AND THE HOLE OF PHILOSOPHY ARE, IN THE WORDS OF A SONG BY NEIL YOUNG, "ALL JUST PISSING IN THE WIND"

"...THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN BE CALLED 'THE' PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD"¹

BY

COLIN LeSLIE DeAN

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¹ N. Swartz, 1991, pp.156-157.

PREFACE

To defeat the heirs of the enlightenment with their own weapon i.e. reason itself. To reduce all philosophy all science all views to irrational meaningless babble using their own epistemic conditions of truth. To confound the products of reason by reason itself. To show that the rational in fact collapses into the irrational. By reason itself all products of human reason reduce to intellectual chaos. To shatter the categories of thought, to rob all views and ideas of any epistemic worth by using reason to show that they end in stultification foolishness, or absurdity. Reason confounds reason and convicts reason by it's own standard to unintelligibility, babble, stultification, incoherence foolishness and absurdity, or meaninglessness. Reasons critique of reason shows that there is no consistency in any product of reason, no order , no coherence only chaos and absurdity, or meaninglessness. The life-jacket, or anchor reason gives in the void of meaninglessness is broken by reason itself. Into the void of nothing reason drops us. Cut adrift in meaninglessness we are free to acquire other insights other realizations by transcending reason. Meaning can be reduced to absurdity. Meaninglessness can be reduced to absurdity but for those who hold meaninglessness as a view, or meaning there is no hope.

The dialectic *reductio ad absurdum* argument reduces all our concepts, all our categories, all our ideas, all theses, all antitheses, all philosophies, all epistemologies, all ethics, all ontologies, and all metaphysics, in other words all our views to meaninglessness. They all collapse into absurdity, or meaninglessness via a dialectical *reductio ad absurdum* form of argumentation. This absurdity, or meaninglessness is epistemological not metaphysical i.e. all metaphysics is absurd, or meaningless epistemologically not necessarily metaphysically. Absurdities (i.e. self-contradiction, infinite regress, paradox, circularities and dilemmas) exist within a word, image, concept, or *anything* else as a yet to be discovered statue exists within the block of marble. It is argued that the dialectic *reductio ad absurdum* reduces all essentialist thinkings, or ontologies to absurdity or meaninglessness. Dean has shown, in *Case study in the Madhyamika : demonstrations of the meaninglessness of all views : contentless thought*, that the foundations of our logic and our words are built on the implicit assumption [which needs justification] of an essence - they cannot exist and function without this essence. This does not say that these essentialist thinkings or ontologies are wrong in that their essentialist claims do not exist. Only that epistemologically or logically these claims reduce to meaninglessness. . Dean has shown, in his *Essence the metaphysical ground of logic and language : a reason for the bankruptcy of logic, the stultification of reason and the meaninglessness of all views*, that essentialist thinking is at the heart of logic and language. Dean argues that logic and language contain

implicit ontologies in regard to an essence which rather than being taken for granted needs justification. Dean has shown that such essentialist thinking leads logic and language to reduce all views to absurdity.

METHOD

The method of argument against a thesis is to use your opponent's own epistemic criteria of truth, in this case the laws of Aristotelian logic, and a dialectical *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument. The schema of this argumentative pattern of refutation is "If P then Q; but not-Q; therefore not-P" Thus we see the method is comprised of two parts: dialectic and *reductio ad absurdum*. By dialectic I take its earlier Greek meaning namely arguing from a premise and drawing out the premises conclusions.² The premises you take for your dialectic are the conclusion arrived at by certain philosophers. The method of taking the conclusions of an argument rather than its premises is not new to philosophy. The dialectician Zeno used this method in his *reductio ad absurdums*. Socrates and the follower of Parmenides and Zeno Euclides of Megara, similarly adopted such an argument by refutation where they draw, like me, absurd consequences from their opponent's conclusions.³ Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* uses *reductio ad absurdum* forms of argumentation to point out the absurdity of Plato's notion that numbers are existent objects.⁴ Annas notes that Frege used similar

² W. Kneale, & M. Kneale, 1978., p.7.

³ *ibid.*, p.8.

⁴ J. Annas, 1976, p.28.

arguments in his *Foundations of Arithmetic* to attack current theories of number.⁵ This approach of Aristotle, Zeno and Pramenides, was continued up until the end of the seventeenth century in universities. From the Middle ages up until the end of the seventeenth century students of philosophy had to enter into disputations before they could graduate to demonstrate their skill⁶ –this still happens in Geluk-ba Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.⁷ In these university disputations of the Middle ages it was the ambition of each student to reduce to *implicat contradictionem* [meaning contradiction, or impossibility]-the others arguments-*implicat contradictionem* was reduced to ‘which is absurd’.⁸ In other words they attempted to reduce the others arguments to absurdity. In producing absurdities in an opponent’s conclusions by using their own epistemic conditions of truth we cut all ground from beneath their position. Murti notes “self-contradiction is the only weapon that can convince an opponent. If he does not desist from his position even after his assertion has been proven to be self-contradictory, we must give up arguing with him.”⁹

The only way to finally end the threat from conceptual arguments is to use the very tools these arguments accept in order to show that the arguments *a priori* end in *reductio ad absurdums* Where philosophers can just refuse to accept arguments which are outside their concept of philosophy they are bound to accept the very arguments they use themselves. Thus all avenues of escape from the arguments are cut off,

⁵ Ibid., p.28.

⁶ W. Kneale, & M. Kneale., op.cit , p.399.

⁷ D. Perdue, 1992, p.6.

⁸W. Kneale & M. Kneale, op. cit., p.300.

or severed, than would otherwise be made by offering *a posteriori* arguments, by *a priori* cutting the ground from beneath the *a priori* arguments. Consequently to refute a thesis is to offer *a priori* arguments demonstrating via *reductio ad absurdums* the absurdities stemming from your opponents arguments for the conceptual necessity of some thesis. It can be shown that dilemmas, circularities, infinite regresses, paradoxes and contradictions crop up as consequences of your opponents arguments.

In presenting a dialectical argument you need not be concerned with analysing the individual arguments put forward by your opponent. You need only be concerned with the conclusions arrived at from the arguments put forward. By focusing on these conclusions you avoid being entangled in complicated and convoluted debate. All that you do in attacking the individual arguments that lead to your opponents conclusions is end up in complicated and convoluted debates over terms, assumptions and metaphysical and epistemological points of view.. To my mind the only way to attack a position, and end the debate, is to reduce the arguments to absurdity via *reductio ad absurdums*' in terms of the position's own terms and criteria. If the conclusions lead to absurdity via a dialectical *reductio ad absurdum* form of argumentation there is no need to examine the arguments which generated them. Some philosophers may balk at the 'thought' of a novel methodology which does not engage with a philosophers arguments in a traditional manner. Nevertheless there are ample precedents in the history of philosophy for the use of novel

⁹ T.R.V. Murti, 1955, p.145.

methodologies. The method argument in a case study using the dialectic is to use your opponents own epistemic criteria of truth, in this case the laws of Aristotelian logic, and a dialectical *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument. The schema of this argumentative pattern of refutation is ‘If P then Q; but not-Q; therefore not-P’.

The method of the dialectic is not in any particular philosophic tradition. It may use the language of analytic philosophy, or phenomenology, or existentialism but the arguments are not inferences drawn from within these, or any other philosophic tradition. This avoids epistemological problems, in the case study, with quoting experts, or using arguments from a tradition. An expert is someone whose authority comes from the tradition in which they are an acolyte. The tradition becomes the epistemology for any texts produced within the tradition. The tradition is a continuity of practitioners with a disciplined methodology, a lineage of peers, a blood line based upon a common discourse, a praxis, a library, vocabulary and a set of received ideas; in other words a doxology which any one who wishes to enter the ranks of must agree to. In philosophy there are the traditions of analytical philosophy, Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology hermeneutics amongst others. Each with its own received ideas, texts, lineage and vocabulary (i.e. intensionality, commodity fetishism, bad faith, eidetic, and the hermeneutical circle for example). The philosophical traditions have no existence outside its discourse, the philosophy, texts, vocabulary by which it is continually produced. It is the tradition which gives credibility to the philosophy which is produced with in it rather than the originality of the philosopher. The

philosophy is created out of the pre-existing information and texts deposited in the tradition by its experts. Thus a tradition is a closed universe. The philosophy of a tradition is created within the tradition out of the tradition. A work within the tradition is made up of authoritative citations of antecedent authority. New ideas are judged in terms of the citations and the predecessors and their perspectives and ideologies become the guiding lines for new theses. The tradition is a research area of consensus and an interchange of ideas which set the problems and appropriate paradigms for its research and results. All these elements of a tradition highlight the fact that original creation is really the mythology of creation. The works of predecessors (texts) the institutional life of practitioners (universities) all go to diminish the original creation of an acolyte. The tradition is a consensus on what sorts of statements or texts are to be given credibility and who is allowed to be 'thought' of as a philosopher. A tradition or philosophy is thus a regulated area of ideas dominated by imperatives, perspectives, texts, methodologies and biases best suited to the tradition or philosophy. The tradition or philosophy is pronounced upon researched and administered in a particular manner.

Thus, in a dialectical case study, rather than using a tradition as an epistemological fount it uses instead the implicit tool these traditions use as the arbiter and method of the generation of their truths (i.e. Aristotelian logic). In other words a dialectical case study rather than being produced within a tradition steps outside of all traditions and uses what they all agree to be their tool for uncovering truth namely Aristotelian logic. Your method is to use dialectical and *reductio ad*

absurdum argument. by taking the conclusions of certain philosophers, in regard to your case study you reduce them to absurdity. Dean in his thesis, *Case study in the Madhyamika : demonstrations of the meaninglessness of all views : contentless thought*, by taking the conclusions of certain philosophers, in regard to thought having an essence, showed that thought cannot have any content, irreducible substrate, or essence, and thus gave evidence to substantiate the Madhyamika Buddhist demonstrations that all theses, all philosophy, all science, all views, reduce to foolishness, absurdity, or meaninglessness. The dialectic is used in Madhyamika Buddhism to demonstrate the meaninglessness of all essentialist or reified conceptuality or thinking.

PRASANGIKA MADHYAMIKA BUDDHISM

Nagarjuna the founder of Madhyamika examined the categories through which we understand the world via a *reductio ad absurdum* argumentation. His *reductios* showed that all beliefs, or views about essences, individual identities, or essential natures reduce to absurdity. These *reductios* were to point to the sunyata [emptiness] of both the world and the absolute. The rejection of all views by the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists includes both the thesis and its antithesis. In other words they would reject the view that 'thought' has no content (i.e. essence) as well as its antithesis namely that 'thought' has an essence. The crux of a Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhist analysis (prasanga)—a *reductio ad absurdum* argument—is that their demonstrations are non-affirming negations. They negate but don't put forward any conclusion to such negation. This is because their

negations are what they call non-affirming negations, they don't affirm anything. What this means is that they exhaust all possibilities of the tetralemma without any affirming conclusion. Now even though they don't put forward a counter position to their negations they do believe nevertheless that all views reduce to absurdity, or meaninglessness via a *reductio ad absurdum* argument [Murti, Fenner, Gangadean Bugault]. According to the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists there are four logical possibilities (the tetralemma) as to the nature of a subject. Namely something: 1) it is, 2) it is not, 3) it is and is not, 4) neither is nor is not. What this means in terms of my thesis is that there are four possibilities to the question has 'thought' an essence 1) 'thought' has an essence, 2) 'thought' has no essence, 3) 'thought' has an essence and has not an essence, 4) 'thought' neither has and essence nor has not an essence. The Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists would demonstrate that each of these alternatives is self-contradictory. In other words the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists would reject all these claims without making any affirming conclusion. The point of this negation, Dean argues¹⁰, is to send the meditator into a state of cognitive dissonance, a state of mental turmoil where the only way out of the mental angst generated by the mental effort to solve the conundrums is a yogic intuitive insight or vision.

The method which the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists use in these self-contradictory demonstrations is what they call the prasanga, or as some call it in the West, consequential analysis. The prasanga is no more than a *reductio ad absurdum*. Murti, Bugault, Gangadean and

¹⁰ C. Dean, 1993, p.58-85.

Fenner argue that, in consequential analysis (prasanga), the logical axioms of the laws of thought (i.e. the Aristotelian law of contradiction, excluded middle and the law of identity) are used to discover logical inconsistencies within all philosophical arguments. It should be pointed out that some Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhist scholars argue that the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists do not accept the law of the excluded middle, notably Bugault.¹¹ The self-contradictions in an argument arise according to the Prasangika Madhyamika Buddhists, because of reified thinking. That is thinking that assumes that ‘things’ exist intrinsically, or in other words have an essence.

The contradictions are generated in order to negate their adversaries' ontic, epistemological, or metaphysical claims, stemming from the belief in essentially existing ‘things’, by demonstrating the insubstantiality or emptiness (sunyata) of the reified entities making up the arguments.¹² This method of generating internal contradictions to a thesis is also called consequential (prasanga) analysis. Fenner argues that consequential analysis (prasanga) is meant not to perpetuate, or proliferate itself but rather to dissolve itself by reversing the conceptual process and thus bringing about the complete attrition of conceptuality itself.¹³

This attrition of conceptuality (sunya consciousness) is achieved by what Gangadean calls transformational dialectic (T D).¹⁴ Gangadean

¹¹ G. Bugault, 1983, pp. 26-38.

¹² P. Fenner, 1990, p. 103.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁴ A. K. Gangadean, 1979, pp.22-23.

maintains that T D "... can bring about the radical transformation to sunya consciousness only by seeing through the formal structures which condition any view of the world or experience."¹⁵ Gangadean says that the "... prerelational, prelinguistic, preontological consciousness which can never be objectified, never constituted in anyway, never referred to or described is called sunya."¹⁶ According to Gangadean, this "... radical transformation is affected through analytical meditation in which the formal conditions of all discourse or any possible world are themselves shown to be conditioned and not independent, absolute, or self existent."¹⁷ Under T D, Gangadean argues, "... the student's world begins to collapse and dissolve and static consciousness begins to be dislodged ... [With] the collapse of predictive structure, the world becomes an unintelligible flux: without categorical structure or form ... rationality and judgment becomes silenced and paralyzed. This is the level of unintelligibility and meaninglessness."¹⁸

My understanding of consequential analysis is that consequential analysis (prasanga) was meant to have a cathartic effect upon the mind. It was meant to purge the mind of conceptualisation and dissolve the process of reification by demonstrating the emptiness (sunyata) of the 'things' signified by the concepts. Through consequential analysis (prasanga), the practitioner stripped back the layers of the conceptualization process to lay the ground for the direct experience, or

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.24.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.39.

yogic vision, of the ultimate (paramartha). The soteriological function of consequential analysis (prasanga) is seen clearly in the words of Chandrakirti, from his *Supplement to the Middle Way (Madhyamakavatara)*:

“When things are [conceived to intrinsically] exist, then conceptuality (kalpana) is produced. But a thorough analysis shows how things are [in fact] not [intrinsically] existent. [When it is realized] there are no [intrinsically] existent things. The conceptualizations do not arise, just as for example, there is no fire without fuel.”¹⁹

ABSURDITY IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

The idea that all our views end in self-contradiction is not new to Western philosophy, Hume claimed that reason ends in its own self-destructiveness.²⁰ Similarly Kant believed that reason ends in its own self-destruction. O'Neill notes that "... Kant's initial diagnosis is that human reason leads to catastrophe [because it ends in darkness and contradiction]."²¹ O'Neill goes on to state "... Kant [might] just as well have conceded quite explicitly that he was undertaking neither critique nor vindication of reason and recognised that he is a skeptic."²² Hegel claimed that " all our concepts, and not just the generated infinities of the Antinomies, are embroiled in antinomic arguments."²³ With Kant's transcendental idealism, according to Hegel, we get the idea that the

¹⁹ P. Fenner op. cit., p. 266, verse 6.116.

²⁰ D. G. C. MacNabb, 1991, p.141.

²¹ O, O'Neill, 1994, p.188.

²² *ibid.*, p. 303.

contradictions in the world are put there by the categories of the 'Understanding'.²⁴ In other words it is thought or reason that create the contradiction in the world not the world itself. Hegel claimed instead that the contradictions had their seat in the very nature of the world.²⁵ In his book, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, G. Priest claims that the three aspects of thought conceptualisation (definition), cognition (relationships of knowledge, truth and rational belief), and expression (language characterising reality) all end in self-contradiction; because, following Hegel, "... contradiction is inherent in the nature of [these] subjects."²⁶ On these issues Hume believed that reasoning ends in its own destruction²⁷ with the result that all the products of reason and sense experience lead to the consequence that all is uncertain.²⁸ Whether they intended it or not Hegel, Priest, Hume and Kant show the complete bankruptcy of a philosophy which makes logic the locus of truth and an epistemic condition of truth—a bankruptcy Dean did intend to make in his book *The Nature of Philosophy*.²⁹

The notion that contradictions are inherent in 'thought' is also found in that paragon of logical thinking namely mathematics. In 1930 the mathematician Hilbert began a program to prove that mathematics was consistent. With the discovery of such mathematical paradoxes as the Burli-Forti paradox, Russell's paradox, Cantor's paradox and Skolem's paradox by early 1930's as Bunch notes, Hilbert's program did not

²³ G. Priest, 1995, p. 115.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.114.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.113-114.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

²⁷ E. Mosner, 1987, pp. 327-328.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 231-268.

²⁹ C. Dean, 1998.

succeed such that “disagreement about how to eliminate contradictions were replaced by discussions of how to live with contradictions in mathematics.”³⁰ Attempts to avoid the paradoxes led to other paradoxical notions but most mathematicians rejected these notions.³¹ Thus the present situation is that mathematics cannot be formulated, except in axiomatic theory, without contradictions without the loss of useful results. With regard to axiomatic theory, this cannot be proven to be consistent with the result that paradoxes can occur at any time. As Bunch states:

“None of them [paradoxes] has been resolved by thinking the way mathematicians thought until the end of the nineteenth century. To get around them requires some reformulation of mathematics. Most reformulations except for axiomatic set theory, results in the loss of mathematical ideas and results that have proven to be extremely useful. Axiomatic set theory explicitly eliminates the known paradoxes, but cannot be shown to be consistent. Therefore, other paradoxes can occur at any time.”³²

With all these paradoxes and inconsistencies Bunch notes that it is “... amazing that mathematics works so well.”³³ Since the mathematical way of looking at the world generates contradictory results from that of

³⁰ B. Bunch, 1982, p.140.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.136.

³² *ibid.*, p.139.

³³ *ibid.*, p.209.

science,³⁴ such as the mathematical notion of the continuum, and quantum mechanical concept of quanta. A mystery arises here, which I mention later in regard to instrumental results from logic and language, in that mathematics with a different ontology to science is used by science to generate ‘truths’ for that science. As Bunch notes “... the discoveries of quantum theory or the special theory of relativity were all made through extensive use of mathematics that was built on the concept of the continuum...[the mystery is] ... that mathematical way of looking at the world and the scientific way of looking at the world produced contradictory results.”³⁵ In this regard a measure of faith is required for us to accept the truths of mathematics and science; the same faith I argue later is the basis of our trust in logic and language. This can easily be seen in regard to the inventors of calculus namely Newton and Leibniz, who knew their methods gave results. But as Bunch notes the “mathematicians did not have a rigorous explanation of why their methods worked until the middle of the nineteenth century.”³⁶ Without an explanation of how their methods work the mathematical truths must as such be based upon faith rather than logic. Without a proof of the consistency of mathematics, the ‘truths’ and the logical, or rational basis of mathematics must be based upon a faith in the logical basis of mathematics (i.e. on irrationality rather than rationality). Thus what is held up to be the most rational of the sciences is itself in terms of its own logic inconsistent, paradoxical and irrational

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.210.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp.209-10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.110.

Adorno in his 'Negative Dialectic' arrives at the critique of the identity of the object similar to the Prasangika Madhyamika. Negative Dialectics seeks to undermine the ontology of the object by pointing out its lack of an identity. Habermas in his overview of Adorno writes "identify thinking turned against itself becomes pressed into continual self-denial and allows the wounds it inflicts on itself and its objects to be seen...Adorno practices determinate negation unremittingly in the categorical network of Hegelian logic - as a fetishism of demystification"³⁷ But Adorno is locked within the inevitable paradoxes generated by conceptual thinking and logic itself.. As Habermas points out "the totalising self-critique of reason gets caught within a performative contradiction..."³⁸ Adorno uses the metaphysics of presence [ontological identity] contained within language and the principle of logic to negate this metaphysical presence by demonstrating that its is a myth. Thus Adorno turns logic upon itself in demonstrating the myth of identity he demonstrates the myth of the very tools he uses to deconstruct the myth of identity - the self-reverential critique of logic leads to silence.

The method of the dialectic *reductio ad absurdum* yields minimal knowledge but affirms with certainty the ignorance of philosophers who put forward views. Thus it is similar to the Socratic dialectic where as Meyer notes, "dialectic, conceived as a questioning process yields but minimal knowledge, that which affirms with certainty the

³⁷ Habermas, 1995, p.186.

³⁸ibid, p.183

ignorance of the questioner.”³⁹ What the dialectic *reductio ad absurdum* does is show not that nothing can be known, or be true, but the inadequacy of logic in laying the foundation for the known, or truth. This is succinctly put forward by Hsueh-Li Cheng, referring to the Prasangika Madhyamika, when he notes:

“ Madhyamika (Prasangika) dialectic is not intended to establish a thesis but merely to expose the absurdity or contradiction implied in an opponent’s argument. It is purely analytic in nature there is no position to be proved. The Madhyamika [Prasangika] is said not to have his own logic. The contradictory or absurd consequences revealed by the dialectic are unintelligible in light of the opponent logic only.”⁴⁰

The dialectic cannot prove anything all that it does is reduce all views to absurdity. What this absurdity means is a question that is dependent upon other views i.e. logic being an epistemic condition of truth or it not being an epistemic condition of truth.. In other words to draw a conclusion from the reduction to absurdity of a view/views one must assume some other epistemological ontological or metaphysical position or assumption. Now the dialectic will also reduce these positions or assumptions to absurdity such that we in effect have nothing epistemologically to say at all in regard to what the reduction to meaninglessness of all views means ; since this meaning [stemming

³⁹ M. Meyer, 1986, p.104.

⁴⁰ Hsueh-Li. Cheng, 1991 , p.37.

from a position or view about logic] will reduce to meaninglessness. Thus all we have is silence no more squabbling.

Now an *a priori* deductive proof that the laws of logic reduce all views to absurdity would involve the proof in a paradox. Dean in his *Aristotelian logic as an epistemic condition of truth, the grand narrative of western philosophy : logic-centrism, the limitations of Aristotelian logic, the end of Aristotelian logic, logic/essence and language lead to the meaningless of all views* has shown that in the West the laws of logic are considered an epistemic condition of truth. If the laws of logic reduce all views to absurdity then they all so reduce to absurdity the view that the laws of logic are an epistemic condition of truth. So if logic proved that all views reduce to absurdity it also proves that by the laws of logic the laws of logic are not an epistemic condition of truth. – thus as Habermas noted “...the totalising self-critique of reason gets caught within a performative contradiction...”⁴¹. – this is what Dean argues is the case in his *The Nature of Philosophy*. If the laws of logic are not an epistemic condition of truth then the laws of logic cannot give any proof. “Consequently the only way to prove the view that ‘all views collapse into absurdity’ is inductively; case study by case study, if logic is an epistemic condition of truth.

The demonstration of the meaninglessness of all view via a dialectic is epistemological not ontological or metaphysical. In other words meaninglessness is epistemological not ontological or metaphysical. All that the dialectic does is show logically that an view reduces to

absurdity, not that what the view claims is wrong. – to say it is wrong one must assume some position or view in regard to what logic is and can do, i.e. it is an epistemic condition of truth but this being a view will it self be reduced to absurdity by the dialectic. The dialectic can not make any ontological, or metaphysical claims as it is only an epistemological method. The dialectic leaves the world ontology as it is - after a dialectical analysis the world has not changed. Before the dialectical analysis the world was the world, during the dialectical analysis the world is not the world, after a dialectical analysis the world is unchanged and still the same. Or in metaphor, before the dialectic argument a tree is a tree, during the dialectic argument a tree is not a tree, after the dialectic argument the tree is still a tree This is because 1) the dialectic adds no extra knowledge as it is purely negative it only affirms logically with nothing else to say because 2) it is only an epistemological method or tool and as such can say nothing ontologically or metaphysically- with out some other position or view to give meaning to the reductios. The dialectic only says that a view is epistemologically meaningless not that what the view puts forward as an existence cannot exist. Because the positions or views of philosophers or the products of “thinking” use words – which all reduce to meaninglessness - then epistemologically all they are doing is playing with words. Thus because word arguments or views reduce to meaninglessness then you, me, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre and the hole of philosophy are, in the words of a song by Neil Young, “all just pissing in the wind”

⁴I J. Habermas op.cit p.183

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Reductio ad absurdum, (Latin: "reduction to absurdity"), in logic, a form of refutation showing contradictory or absurd consequences following upon premises as a matter of logical necessity. A form of the reductio ad absurdum argument, known as indirect proof or reductio ad impossibile, is one that. Thank you for your feedback. Our editors will review what you've submitted and determine whether to revise the article. Join Britannica's Publishing Partner Program and our community of experts to gain a global audience for your work! Share.