

From Metaphysics to Mysticism

Exploring the Case for a Neutral Metaphysical Position

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Summary

When Leibnitz expressed his wish for a Euclidean universal language which would allow the truth-value of all philosophical propositions to be determined from the axioms without controversy he probably spoke for all metaphysicians. Mysticism claims of its logical scheme that it is Euclidean, that from its axiom the rest of its doctrine follows, but it makes this claim in so many languages and in such a variety of self-contradictory ways that it is hard to discern how this could be possible, and it is rarely considered a plausible claim in metaphysics. I believe it is possible, and here I try to explain why. My proposal is that in traditional metaphysics, where we must start with an unambiguous metaphysical proposition, this axiom would state that the universe is metaphysically neutral.

Part I

1. Introduction

Reason in metaphysics, even if it tries, as it professes, only to gain *a priori* insight into those laws which are confirmed by our most common experience, is constantly being brought to a standstill, and we are obliged again and again to retrace our steps, as they do not lead us where we want to go. As to unanimity among its participants, there is so little of it in metaphysics that it has rather become an arena that would become especially suited for those who wish to exercise themselves in mock fights, and where no combatant has as yet succeeded in gaining even an inch of ground that he could call his permanent possession.

Immanuel Kant
Critique of Pure Reason

One of the stranger properties of our universe is that it does not seem to conform to an identifiable metaphysical position. In what we call the 'western', 'rational' or 'analytic' tradition of philosophical investigation, solidly grounded in the system of philosophy, theology and teachings which was eventually to dominate medieval western Europe, we have searched for a metaphysical position that would be consistent with reason and account for the facts for more than two millenia and have not found one. Yet if the universe is 'reasonable,' in the sense that we ourselves would judge its explanation reasonable if only we knew what it was, as we must assume it is for philosophy, then there must be at least one metaphysical position that would meet this specification. But where is it? Why is it so difficult to find?

In the physical sciences we can turn a blind eye to this problem for most practical purposes. We can say that metaphysics has nothing to do with us. Yet by ignoring it we do not make it go away. Metaphysics is not optional for fundamental theories, and when we bury our head in the sand in this way we can build only sandcastles. In the physical

sciences we have no plausible fundamental theory for anything at all, and will not have one until we have solved all, or at least most, of the mysterious paradoxes and riddles that arise for any investigation of first principles. Nor do we find a solution in any popular kind of monotheism. Whitehead characterised the dogmatic Christianity he knew as ‘a religion in search of a metaphysic’ but this is clearly what it is not. It is simply without one. On this basis we may be tempted to dismiss some or all of the Church’s teachings as false. We cannot dismiss a religious doctrine on the grounds that it is philosophically flawed, however, until we can show that there is even such a thing as a logically defensible metaphysical position.

The difficulty of showing that there is such a thing has led the majority of metaphysicians past and present to conclude that the task is hopeless. Their conclusion is that metaphysics is incapable of producing a positive result. From the study of it we learn only that all questions about the nature and properties of the universe as a whole are formally undecidable. Every one of our ‘problems of philosophy’ is an attempt to decide one or more of these questions and every attempt fails. Nor is the problem any easier to crack in physics, for empiricism merely confirms this result of logic.

Faced with the intransigence of this problem we might conclude that metaphysics is doomed to remain forever what it was for Whitehead, a series of footnotes to Plato. In scientific consciousness studies, which becomes metaphysics at the limit, David Chalmers has proposed that we have no choice but to settle for a nonreductive Mind-Matter theory, since the more deeply we explore the question, ‘Is Mind or Matter fundamental?’ the more clear it becomes that both answers are absurd.¹ In contemporary physics there is even talk of *ex nihilo* creation, so impotent can rationalism seem in the face of the riddles of existence. This gloomy view is not forced on us, however, for a different approach is possible. We can, if we wish, take the result of two and a half thousand years of intense philosophical analysis at face value and assume that it tells us something important about the universe. For this approach, instead of interpreting the ongoing failure of metaphysics as we habitually do in physics and philosophy, as evidence for a barrier to knowledge or for the inadequacy of human reasoning, we would interpret it as a vital clue for our investigation into the origin and nature of the universe, an empirical fact from which it might be possible to extrapolate to a fundamental theory.

This might seem a straightforward approach to metaphysics, almost a naïve one, so why do we not usually take it? After all, it is implausible that almost all philosophers reach exactly the same wrong conclusion. One reason would be that it is not as straightforward an approach as it might seem. When we take this approach we are forced to adopt a neutral metaphysical position, having just eliminated all others from our investigation. This is the only position for which it would be inevitable that metaphysics is incapable of producing a positive result. Yet this is not obviously a viable position to take up. At first glance it appears to be paradoxical, absurd, irrational, not so much a metaphysical position as the absence of one. How could the answer to the question ‘Is Mind or Matter fundamental?’ be no? How could Solipsism be neither exactly true nor false? How could we exist and not-exist? To take this seemingly naïve approach, therefore, is not to make the issues any less sophisticated. Another reason may be that the cosmological scheme endorsed by the world’s principal wisdom traditions is metaphysically neutral. It may appear, therefore, that to take this approach we would have to abandon metaphysics almost before it has begun. Despite this, a significant minority of respectable philosophers have made arguments for this ambiguous position. Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plotinus, Spinoza, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Bradley, Jung, Erwin Schrödinger and George Spencer Brown would be some prominent examples, given a sympathetic interpretation, and Kant only narrowly avoids endorsing it in the *Critique*.

¹ Chalmers, David. J., *The Conscious Mind*, (OUP 1996), and ‘Facing up to the problem of consciousness,’ *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2: 200-219, (1995).

2. An Argument from Metaphysics

While metaphysics is a frustrating business for those who believe that metaphysical questions ought to be decidable, it is by the same token a source of reassurance for those who believe otherwise. Into this latter category would fall the mystics of all ages and cultures. It is because the mystics believe otherwise that a formal argument can be made for mysticism from metaphysics. It is old argument, one with which Buddhist philosophers will be most familiar. It can be stated as a syllogism, or something very like one.

- a) All positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible.
- b) A neutral metaphysical position is not logically indefensible.
- c) The universe is metaphysically neutral.

As it stands this is not a rigorous argument but it is at least strictly metaphysical. Yet, at the same time, if these three propositions are not all true then the doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism is not all true. This argument therefore allows us to explore the plausibility of the metaphysical scheme of the mystics from within metaphysics, as just another putative theory.

a) All positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible.

We know from the failure of metaphysics to endorse a positive position that in respect of logic nothing prevents us from supposing that Proposition *a*) is true. Unless we conjecture that most philosophers are untrustworthy thinkers then their ubiquitous conclusion is the proof of it. As an axiom it is surely safer and more philosophically useful than *cogito*. If it is false then the doctrine of Buddhism is false, so clearly it is not easy to falsify it, and its truth is already taken for granted in most of philosophy. Oddly, however, it is not the logical indefensibility of positive metaphysical positions that is controversial in philosophy, but the idea that they are indefensible because they are false, because they do not correctly describe the universe. This is an obvious inference to make, one it is difficult not to make, we might even consider it perverse not to make it, and in this sense when we do make it we are taking a naïve approach to metaphysics. There is, however, a problem with this innocent following of our reason. A neutral metaphysical position is now our only hope, so that when we extrapolate from the indefensibility of positive metaphysical positions to their falsity our view immediately becomes consistent with that of Lao-tsu and the Buddha. Not everyone is tempted to set out on such an adventure, and yet we have no choice if we conjecture that positive metaphysical positions are not only absurd but false as well. The only alternative would be to say that according to reason the universe does not conform to a reasonable metaphysical position, a conclusion which renders philosophy largely a waste of time. Russell opts for this pessimistic view, writing forthrightly in his *Problems of Philosophy*, 'Knowledge concerning the world as a whole is not to be obtained in metaphysics.' But Russell's pessimism may have been self-inflicted. A different view of metaphysics is possible, one by which his view is temperamental. For many philosophers, among them his colleague G. S. Brown, for whose book on mathematics, metaphysics and mysticism Russell wrote a glowing endorsement but otherwise seems to have ignored, the indefensibility of positive metaphysical positions would be a vital piece of knowledge concerning the world as a whole, the most important that can be obtained in a strictly scholastic metaphysics.

Let us be clear as to what a positive metaphysical position is here. Reduced to its essentials a metaphysical question presents us with a choice between two positive metaphysical positions. 'Is Mind or Matter fundamental?' and 'Did the universe begin with Something or Nothing?' would be typical. Such questions ask us to decide whether the universe as a whole is *this* as opposed to *that*, has *this* property as opposed to *that* property. Is Scepticism true or false? Is Internalism or Externalism true? Is the universe One or Many? Is space-time fundamental? Does freewill exist? Do I exist? Does anything

exist? Built into each of these questions is the questioner's expectation of an unambiguous answer, an expectation which arises from the prior assumption that the universe conforms to a positive metaphysical position.

Many questions are metaphysical in character yet do not ask us to adopt a positive metaphysical position. These might be: Why are there laws of nature? Why does anything exist? If God is Good why is there suffering? For the definition of a metaphysical question here, however, these would not be exceptions to the rule but second-order questions. They are predicated, respectively, on the assumption that there are laws of nature, that anything exists and that suffering is real, and do not directly address first principles. First-order questions would be: Are there laws of nature? Does anything exist? Is suffering real? Each of these questions asks us to adopt a positive metaphysical position.

In the language of Kant a positive metaphysical position would be a selective conclusion about the world as a whole. For Kant we can never reach such a conclusion in a rational philosophy because it will be logically indefensible. This would be the reason why all questions about the universe as a whole which demand a selective answer are undecidable. For a positive metaphysical position, then, we would have to ignore Kant's analysis and assume that *not* all such questions are undecidable. If he is right then our position is not just absurd but demonstrably so. In the more mystical philosophical schemes of Hegel and Bradley, for whom logic is also ontology, where the psychophysical universe would reduce to a symmetry beyond the contradictions of partial metaphysical views, a positive metaphysical position would be any one for which plurality is more than mere appearance. The universe would be a unity, and this would be the reason why any other view is logically indefensible.

Examples of positive metaphysical positions would be the common forms of materialism, idealism, theism, dualism, monism, nihilism, realism, solipsism, scepticism and epiphenomenalism. All of these 'isms' make an explicit or implicit selective claim about the universe as a whole. In physics and philosophy any theory for which the universe is assigned fundamental or absolute positive (or negative) properties will embody a positive metaphysical position. In consciousness studies only *relative phenomenalism* or its equivalents would not embody a positive metaphysical position.² In religion, a cosmological doctrine will embody a positive metaphysical position if it is not rigorously apophatic.

To say that a metaphysical position is 'logically indefensible' is to say that it gives rise to contradictions, that it is logically absurd, that it can be refuted by the use of Aristotle's three laws of logic and dialectic method. Thus Proposition *a*) states that wherever a fundamental theory implies a positive metaphysical position it can be refuted in the dialectic. (Or, in other words, that a consistent theory implying a positive metaphysical position cannot be completed). We would not need to examine the theory closely, the details will make no difference. The theory will rest on the assumption that metaphysics can produce a positive result, that not all selective conclusions about the world are undecidable, while if we learn anything for certain from the study of metaphysics it is that once we have ruled out a neutral metaphysical position it becomes a zero-sum game, a game of chess with the Devil which, while it may be eternally absorbing, can at best only end in a stalemate.

Even if we are still sceptical, the proposition that all positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible does at least appear to be unfalsifiable in philosophy. At the same time, its truth would be plausible, for this would be the simplest explanation for why metaphysics cannot produce a positive result. If it is true, then it would be unnecessary to interpret a metaphysical question as a disguised form of the liar paradox or dismiss it as meaningless, two common but difficult to defend strategies for explaining away its

² Cf. Barkin, Edward, 'Relative Phenomenalism,' *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol 10, No. 8 (2003)

undecidability. The issue would be simpler. Metaphysical questions would be meaningful, and they would be undecidable for the same reason that the question, 'Does two plus two equal three or five?' is undecidable. Carnap rejected metaphysical statements as meaningless on the grounds that they cannot be empirically confirmed or refuted, contrary to the claims of the mystics throughout the ages, but once the claims of the mystics are ignored we must reject his proposal on the same grounds. In logic the situation is more clear, since the entire problem with metaphysical statements is that in logic we can usually refute such statements quite easily, and to refute one thing is to confirm another.

There are few formal proofs of Proposition *a*) but two are widely known. Bradley's metaphysical essay *Appearance and Reality* is one. Bradley systematically refutes all positive metaphysical positions to show that the universe must be a unity. His argument is a prose form of the proof presented in verse form by the second-century Buddhist philosopher-saint Nagarjuna. What Zeno of Elea does for certain positive metaphysical positions Bradley and Nagarjuna do for them all, and by the same method. In his *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* Nagarjuna demonstrates, by way a series of terse and exhaustive *reductio* arguments, that all positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible.³ This proof sets the scene for his *theory of emptiness*. This theory, as it is usually denoted, is the philosophical expression of Mahayana Buddhism, the famous 'Middle Way' doctrine, so named partly because it does not embody a positive metaphysical position. For Nagarjuna's theory we would have to approach metaphysical dilemmas as would the professors of the Colleges of Unreason encountered by the hero of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, who take the view, 'Extremes are alone logical, but they are always absurd; the mean is illogical, but an illogical mean is better than the sheer absurdity of an extreme.'

The proofs of Bradley and Nagarjuna are made by abduction, the method recommended by Sherlock Holmes for solving cases involving multiple suspects and only circumstantial evidence. One by one the suspects are eliminated from the enquiry and when there is only one left, as there eventually is for Bradley and Nagarjuna's investigation, then the case is solved. If all positive metaphysical positions can be ruled out as logically absurd, then the only metaphysical position that it would be rational to take up is a neutral one. Or, at least, it would be the only rational position to take up just so long as it is not also logically indefensible, and this is why the Proposition *b*) of our syllogism is required.

If a metaphysical position is logically indefensible then it need not follow that it is false. We usually take it for granted that a false proposition will be logically indefensible and a logically indefensible proposition will be false. This is because we usually assume that the universe is reasonable. We cannot take this for granted in metaphysics, however, where everything depends on it. For a rigorous syllogistic argument we would have to close this loophole or add a proviso. Aristotle spots this problem and in *De Interpretatione* tells us that whether we can legitimately apply his three laws of logic to the world is not something that can be known *a priori* but is an empirical matter. Nagarjuna expects his readers to take it for granted that the universe is reasonable and step with him directly from *a*) to *c*). Bradley addresses the issue more directly and tries to persuade us that we must at least believe the universe is reasonable since any attempt to prove otherwise would be self-defeating. This is less than a proof of its reasonableness, however, and Aristotle must be right to say that whether the universe obeys some set of logical principles is an empirical matter. It may be possible to logically prove that the *best* explanation of the universe would be that it is reasonable, but a sceptic could still argue that what appears to be the best explanation may not be the correct one, and who is to decide what 'best' means. Perhaps in philosophy the most we can hope for is a proof that it would be perverse to believe the universe is unreasonable, and in philosophy, apart from a few proponents of Dialethism and Mysterianism, we may all believe this already.

³ This discussion is heavily reliant on Garfield, Jay. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*, (OUP, 1995).

b) A neutral metaphysical position is not logically indefensible

For a neutral metaphysical position we must abandon all positive metaphysical positions.⁴ There is, therefore, only one such position, for if we deviate even a fraction from neutrality we abandon it. In this negative way it is possible to define metaphysical neutralism briefly and precisely, it being quite easy to say what it is not. It is a lot more difficult to say what it is, but we need not do this quite yet. All that matters initially here, for the sake of the case being assembled, is that in metaphysics there are powerful reasons for investigating whether Proposition *b*) is true or false, or at least a reason for hearing out the case. If we can show that Proposition *b*) is false, as we usually assume it is for metaphysics, then while metaphysics may continue to be helpful as ‘an antidote to dogmatic superstition,’ as Bradley puts it, as a path to positive knowledge it would be a dead end. The universe would be incomprehensible in any rational philosophy since all metaphysical positions would be demonstrably absurd. The most we could hope for would be an immediate revelation or intuition of the truth about ‘life, the universe and everything,’ as Paul Davies conjectures is our predicament in his *Mind of God*, and the study of metaphysics is not known to increase the likelihood of our having one of these. By contrast, if we can show that our second proposition is true, and if the first is true, then metaphysics would be a very direct path to knowledge. It would be a way of working out that the metaphysical scheme proposed by the Buddha and Lao-tsu is logically defensible and that it is the only one that is. Looked at in this way Proposition *b*) is an immediate challenge in metaphysics. It is rarely taken up, but we must take it up once we have extrapolated from the absurdity of positive metaphysical positions to their falsity. If we believe the universe is reasonable a neutral position is now all that remains available to us, and there is little we can do but try to show that it is logically defensible. This will be our situation regardless of what a neutral metaphysical position actually is, what it would imply for God, consciousness, space-time, ethics and so forth.

PART II

Reality is one. It must be single, because plurality, taken as real, contradicts itself. Plurality implies relations, and, through its relations, it unwillingly asserts always a superior unity. To suppose the universe plural is therefore to contradict oneself and, after all, to suppose that it is one. Add one world to another, and forthwith both worlds have become relative, each the finite appearance of a higher and single Reality. And plurality as appearances ... must fall within, must belong to, must qualify the unity.

We have an idea of this unity which, to some extent, is positive. It is true that how in detail the plurality comes together we do not know. And it is true again that unity, in its more proper sense, is known only as contra-distinguished from plurality. Unity therefore, as an aspect over against and defined by another aspect, is itself but appearance. And in this sense the Real, it is clear, cannot be properly called one. It is possible, however, to use unity with a different meaning.

Francis H. Bradley
Appearance and Reality

We have said that the syllogism presented earlier is an argument for mysticism. This was on the basis, first, that if proposition *b*) were removed what would remain is the argument presented by the Nagarjuna in his *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*,⁵ and, second,

⁴ In case there should be any confusion, the neutral position for which I am making a case for here is not the Mind-Matter neutralism rejected by Peirce as dualism, for which Mind and Matter would be irreducible. Peirce calls this ‘metaphysical neutralism,’ a rare use of this phrase, but this would be Chalmers’ ‘naturalistic dualism,’ which is explicitly nonreductive and therefore not a metaphysical theory.

⁵ *Mulamadhyamakakarika* Lit. ‘Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way.’

that metaphysical neutrality is a feature of the doctrine of all the world's principal wisdom traditions. This may be known as the Middle Way, *advaita* or nondual doctrine; the doctrine of dependent origination; relative phenomenalism; the doctrine of emptiness, unity or unicity; the perennial philosophy or the primordial cosmology. In metaphysics it would be a form of absolute idealism or neutral monism but these phrases will not be used here. They are imprecise, and both could be interpreted as implying a positive claim about the universe. Their use here would muddle the issues. The phrase 'metaphysical neutralism' is inelegant and unevocative, but is it at least unambiguously the absence of any such claim.

Although the proposition that the doctrine of mysticism is metaphysically neutral raises many complex issues, if it can be justified then the difficult relationship between metaphysics and mysticism can be to some extent simplified. This is because even if the only thing we know about a cosmological theory is that it is metaphysically neutral we can nevertheless deduce how, in principle, it would solve all metaphysical problems and account for their undecidability. It would be no great feat of deduction or learning. The answer would be the same in each case. It would be to reject both extreme views. Metaphysics would be the study of extreme views and mysticism would be their rejection. Without any need to study the literature, let alone take up the practice, it allows us to easily identify mysticism's solution for any particular metaphysical problem and what we would expect to find is said about it in the literature of the various traditions.

It may seem implausible that all metaphysical problems have the same solution, and yet, at the same time, it may be what makes this solution plausible. It would be in accord with Heidegger's conclusion that all metaphysical problems are essentially the same problem, or arise from the same problem, and this is not usually considered a controversial idea. At any rate, it is unlikely that anyone will ever prove him wrong on this point. Let us assume he was right. By making this assumption we do not make life any easier for ourselves, for now the solution for one metaphysical problem must be the solution for them all, and if it is not the solution for all of them then it cannot be the solution for any one of them. This is a tough constraint for a solution to meet. Yet a neutral metaphysical position meets it. Heidegger seems to have known this, for after reading a book by the Zen master D. T. Suzuki he is quoted as saying, 'If I understand correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.'⁶

The idea of a neutral metaphysical position may also be useful well beyond metaphysics, for if the doctrine of mysticism is metaphysically neutral this is all we would need to know about it in order to infer many of its most profound predictions for fundamental physics, consciousness studies, psychology and elsewhere. Because of this, the stakes are high here. The proposal that mysticism is a neutral metaphysical position and logically defensible as such puts at risk two common ideas, that the doctrine of mysticism is unreasonable, and that it makes no testable predictions for the natural sciences.

We will examine the truth of Proposition *b*) later. For now let us just note that given the truth of our first proposition there are just four possible outcomes for an investigation into the truth of the second, two of which are equivalent.

1. We find that Proposition *b*) is demonstrably false. In this case all metaphysical positions are logically indefensible and the universe is demonstrably unreasonable. The unfalsifiability of Proposition *a*) and the falsity of Proposition *b*) could be explained only by assuming that that there are true contradictions. The doctrine of mysticism would be logically indefensible and something like Priest and Routley's Dialethism or McGinn's Mysterianism would have to be true.

⁶ In Kapleau, Philip, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Anchor Books, 2000

2. We find that *b*) is demonstrably undecidable. In this case it is demonstrably true.
3. We find that *b*) is undecidable in practice, but that its undecidability cannot be demonstrated in philosophy. This would be not so much an outcome as a predicament, one we could never know we are in. If we cannot show that proposition *b*) is false, true or undecidable, and cannot even show that this is our situation, then it will always be reasonable to argue, with Nagarjuna and Bradley, that *a*) directly implies *c*). It is just that this conclusion could never be forced on us. It would always remain a possibility that *b*) is false. Logical reasoning alone would allow us to establish no more than what Nagarjuna and Bradley establish by its use, which is that *a*) is true and *c*) might be.
4. We find that *b*) is demonstrably true. It would be premature to claim that the truth of *c*) would follow, since the argument as stated is simple and clear at the expense of formality and rigour. The truth of *c*) would follow if the argument can be made rigorous.

Before trying to decide Proposition *b*) let us first examine the idea that for all its many and varied appearances there is just one doctrine of mysticism and it is metaphysically neutral. This claim cannot be well justified here as it would require an extensive literature survey, but by indicating how it might be justified the idea of a neutral metaphysical position can be brought to life a little and the claims made by propositions *b*) and *c*) partially clarified. Nagarjuna provides us with a place to start with his *theory of emptiness* and concomitant doctrine of two truths or two worlds.

For many people Nagarjuna would be the most significant figure in Buddhism after Shakyamuni Buddha. He is the founder of the *Madhyamika* or 'Middle Path' schools of Mahayana Buddhism and the most widely studied of all Buddhist philosophers. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* is his largest and best known text. Here he systematically refutes the idea that psychophysical phenomena have an inherent or independent existence, that there is an 'essence' to which their attributes adhere. Such phenomena would have to be conceived as something like Shannon's 'information', aggregates of 'differences that make a difference,' not as substantial subjects and objects. Mental and corporeal phenomena would exist in a sense but would have no existence 'from their own side,' and for an ultimate analysis would be illusory. Nagarjuna shows that the adoption of any other view would lead directly to absurd metaphysical positions.

Fortunately, for it is notoriously difficult to follow, we need not to worry here about the details of Nagarjuna's argument, nor even about whether it succeeds. We need note only two things. First, that for Nagarjuna's theory we must abandon all positive metaphysical positions; second, that a defining feature of a neutral metaphysical position is the illusory nature of psychophysical phenomena. From the first we can infer that his theory does not bring him into conflict with the results of natural philosophy, which are known to be consistent with the absurdity of positive positions, while the second lends plausibility to the idea that all fundamental theories or doctrines for which psychophysical phenomena are illusory are metaphysically neutral, since otherwise these phenomena would unambiguously exist or not-exist.

We are not yet concerned with how reasonable Nagarjuna's theory would be in a technical sense, but we can note in passing that his proof of Proposition *a*) is entirely dependent on the reasonableness of the universe. If the universe were unreasonable then its true explanation would contradict reason, and positive metaphysical theories would become logically defensible after all. Were Nagarjuna defending an unreasonable universe his argument would never get off the ground. His argument fails unless we assume that where a proposition or theory is not true it is logically indefensible, and that where it is logically

indefensible it is not true. His argument states that a logically defensible and (in this sense) reasonable explanation of the universe would not embody a positive metaphysical position.

Nagarjuna's theory is complemented by his doctrine of two truths or worlds. This states that there is typically a fundamental disparity between the way we perceive the world and the way things actually are. There would be two worlds, or aspects of the world, the conventional and the ultimate, and because we would, as it were, have a foot in each camp, there would be these two distinct standpoints from which we can make statements about the world as a whole. These two worlds or aspects would stand in a relationship of contradictory complementary such that a statement true for one would be false for the other. Psychophysical phenomena would exist in one world but not in the other, for example, and so would 'not really exist,' or would 'exist and not-exist,' while an unambiguous statement to the effect that these phenomena do or do not exist would be neither exactly true nor false, but, rather, unrigorous, inadequate and logically indefensible. For Nagarjuna's doctrine we would require a logic and language of two truths, where each truth on its own could only take into account half of what it ought to take into account, and within which a statement of the whole truth would seem self-contradictory. With its characteristic brevity and rigour the *Tao Teh Ching* puts this as, 'True words seem paradoxical.' This doctrinal statement could only be true in a universe which is metaphysically neutral, and so from just these four words we can derive the entire metaphysical scheme of Taoism and confirm its compatibility with the doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism. In his translation and commentary for *Fundamental Wisdom* Jay Garfield writes, 'It is this sophisticated development of the doctrine of the two truths as a vehicle for understanding Buddhist metaphysics and epistemology that is Nagarjuna's greatest philosophical contribution.'⁷

Nagarjuna's dual-aspect doctrine is a vehicle for understanding and not a form of dualism. The true principle or original phenomenon would be nondual and it would be for didactic reasons only that it is spoken of as dual. Considered as dualism his theory would clearly be nonreductive. Insofar as it suggests that the universe is divided into two worlds, however, it could be viewed as a mystic equivalent for Chalmers' *naturalistic dualism*, which is a double-aspect (psychophysical) theory of information very similar to the theory of emptiness and which seems to me to require little modification to be indistinguishable. Neither theory claims that dualism is true, but both take advantage of it for pragmatic reasons. Logic finds dualism absurd at the limit, whether of mind and matter or of any other matched pair of categories, but Chalmers proposes that a nonreductive theory, one which puts this problem aside for the time being, may nevertheless provide a useful framework within which conduct research and discuss the issues.

At the limit, however, the universe must be a unity of some sort or there is no such thing. For naturalistic dualism this unity is implied but absent from the theory, as it must be for all Mind-only or Matter-only theories, a missing ingredient or explanatory gap. Mind and Matter would be treated as irreducible categories, and in this way the metaphysical problems arising for dualism are postponed and there is some justification for calling the theory naturalistic. For a metaphysically neutral theory, however, Mind and Matter would be something more like mutually supervenient epiphenomena, and an all-embracing unity would take the leading role. The Mind-Matter distinction would be emergent, and this would be why it makes no sense to us that either of them is fundamental.

For the Buddhist and Taoist, as for Kant and Hegel, wherever categorical distinctions are applied to the universe as a whole, or reified, they would be psychological or philosophical errors. Kant calculated this, for the universe must be a unity if all selective conclusions about it are logically absurd. There could be no other explanation. For

⁷ Garfield, Jay, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way - Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. OUP (1995). Garfield unpacks Nagarjuna's nihilistic arguments and repackages them in a Western philosophical language.

Nagarjuna, however, this result would be not only calculable in philosophy but an empirically verifiable fact. It would be empirically verifiable because the universe is metaphysically neutral. A doctrine of unity allows the possibility of such knowledge, for it would be from this original unity that our individual consciousness arises and from which it can never be separated. Thus Imam Ali, the first Shia Imam, asks, 'Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form, when within thee the universe is enfolded?' Far away and many centuries earlier Lao-tsu writes,

Since before time and space were, the Tao is. It is beyond *is* and *is not*. How do I know this is true? I look inside myself and see.

This is an astonishing claim, and yet it is not impossible to make some sense of it in philosophy. It would not be inconsistent with Kant's proposal that if we look inside ourself we will eventually find a phenomenon that is not an instance of a category, nor with his proposal that the universe as whole is not an instance of a category. *A priori* there can be only one phenomenon that is not an instance of a category. From Kant, therefore, it is only a short step to Hegel's spiritual unity, Lao-tsu's Tao, Islamic mysticism, a neutral metaphysical position and the theory of emptiness. Far from being the opposite of Kant's rational psychology the psychological scheme of mysticism might be derived from it. While mysticism makes far grander knowledge claims, even that it is possible to know what is prior to the psychophysical universe, these claims would not contradict Kant's philosophical results and may even shed light on them.

To see why true words must seem paradoxical for a neutral metaphysical position we could imagine we have been outside and verified that it is raining by getting wet. Under these conditions we would normally judge the statement, 'It is raining' to be exactly true, and in the natural language of our everyday psychophysical world of rain and wetness, where all we mean by these words is that it is raining as opposed to not-raining, it would be exactly true. For a neutral metaphysical position, however, there would be a sense in which these words would not be true, for we would have to take into account the ultimate unreality of such phenomena. The statement 'It is raining' leaves something out and could never be exactly true. At the same time, we cannot simply reverse our judgement and say, 'It is not raining,' for this statement would also be inadequate. It claims too much. Accordingly, we would have to say something like, 'It is raining and not-raining.'

Hence for a saying which seems wise and 'mystical,' all we need do is state something about the universe as a whole that would not imply a positive metaphysical position. A famous case in philosophy would be Heraclitus' existential assertion, 'We are and are-not.' Armed with Nagarjuna's theory we need not, with Plato and Aristotle, who according to Whittaker may have learnt of Heraclitus' ideas from a lecture given by a student, conclude that Heraclitus had abandoned his reason, nor even, I hope to show, that he had abandoned any of the latter's three rules for the dialectic. We need only interpret his words as indicating a metaphysical position for which each assertion on its own would be untrue.

That the universe is a unity having only complementary and contradictory aspects is a necessary condition for a neutral metaphysical position. The idea is found in all the principal traditions of mysticism, albeit not often in the clear and explicit form it takes in Buddhism after Nagarjuna. Even so, it is quite easy to track it through the literature of the various traditions and in this way confirm their common metaphysic. 'They do not understand that the all-One, conflicting in itself, is identical with itself: conflicting harmony as in the bow and the lyre,' complained Heraclitus. His Janus-faced all-One appears again as Jung's *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the state of *unus mundus* which for the Alchemists is the third and final stage in the union of the individual with reality. We meet it again in G. S. Brown's *Laws of Form*, the underlying thesis of which is that the psychophysical universe, including space and time, arises from a pristine unity by a process of category-making or symmetry-breaking. To our senses and our the intellect this unity must be featureless or transparent, the absence of everything, the desert of the

real, a Void, an Abyss, in psychology the metaphorical Chasm that provides the final test of courage for Indiana Jones in Spielberg's treatment of the Grail mythology. In reality, however, it would be both an absence and a presence. In his *Seven Sermons to the Dead* the gnostic Jung speaks in words of which Lao-tsu would have approved.

Nothing is the same as fullness. In the endless state fullness is the same as emptiness. The Nothing is both empty and full. One may just as well state some other thing about the Nothing, namely that it is white or that it is black or that it exists or that it exists not. That which is endless and eternal has no qualities, because it has all qualities.⁸

It matters not where we look, in the literature of mysticism we keep meeting the same uncategorisable phenomenon, and always we find ourselves struggling with a language of paradox and contradiction. If we rigorously avoid all positive metaphysical positions we are reduced to speaking in riddles. This causes intense problems for communication, but it does at least mean that it is not usually difficult to spot metaphysical neutralism wherever it appears.

Beautiful Painted Arrow, a shaman of the Ute and Pueblo Indians, tells us that in his tradition human beings may be conscious in two ways, or have access to two states of being.⁹ In translation these are 'Believing We Exist' and 'Awakened Awareness,' terms it would be easy to relate to 'Samsara' and 'Nirvana,' the two states of being with which Nagarjuna's worlds are often (but not always) equated, or to the states of ignorance and enlightenment spoken of by the Buddha. One would think that the opposite of 'believing we exist' would be 'believing we do-not exist,' but a third alternative is implied, a resolution of Heraclitus' contradiction. We find the idea of a unity having dual-aspects in theistic and atheistic traditions alike, it is only that the terminology changes. Here is Dionysus the Areopagite from *The Mystical Theology* followed by a traditional Zen teaching story. In both we see the rejection of positive metaphysical positions.

. . . [H]e possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the Universal Cause), yet, in a more strict sense, He does not possess them, since He transcends them all; wherefore there is no contradiction between the affirmations and negations, inasmuch as he infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.

Yamaoka Tesshu, as a young student of Zen, visited one master after another. He called upon Dokuon of Shokoku. Desiring to show his attainment, he said: "The mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, after all, do not exist. The true nature of phenomena is emptiness. There is no realisation, no delusion, no sage, no mediocrity. There is no giving and nothing to be received."

Dokuon, who was smoking quietly, said nothing. Suddenly he whacked Yamaoka with his bamboo pipe. This made the youth quite angry.

"If nothing exists," inquired Dokuon, "where did this anger come from?"

At first glance Nagarjuna's doctrine divides the world into two categories. It would appear to be a dual-aspect theory of information along the same lines as Chalmers' naturalistic dualism. It would differ, however, in that the two basic categories would not be Mind and Matter but a more basic distinction, more like that between *information* and *information space*. For Schrödinger these were the contents of consciousness and 'the canvas on which they are painted.'¹⁰ This is not a nonreductive dualism, however, since these two categories would be reducible. For the Buddhist philosopher the phrase 'naturalistic dualism' would be an oxymoron. Dualism would not be naturalistic. In the final analysis the information and the information space would not be categorically distinct phenomena but would comprise merely another Hegelian distinction or Kantian antimony to be

⁸ *VII Sermones ad Moruos*. In S. A. Hoeller (Trans) *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead*, Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House (1982)

⁹ Joseph E. Rael, *Beautiful Painted Arrow*, Element Books (1992)

¹⁰ Schrödinger, Erwin, *Mind and Matter*, Cambridge University Press, (1992)

transcended on the path to unity, whether in logico-mathematical analysis or in experience. The Middle Way doctrine is reductionist with a vengeance. By reduction all distinctions, even that between Samsara and Nirvana, would be category errors. 'I have put duality away. I have seen that the two worlds are one,' writes the Persian poet and Sufi adept Jalaluddin Rumi of this final reduction. For the Grail scholar Joseph Campbell, the Kingdom of the Grail is, 'To be achieved only by one capable of transcending the painted wall of space-time with its foul and fair, good and evil, true and false display of the names and forms of merely phenomenal pairs of opposites.'¹¹ For the Kabbalist it is only through the transcendence of the discriminating intellect in experience that the Unity of God spoken of in the *Shema* of the Jewish liturgy is revealed.

If a phenomenon is defined as unconditioned or beyond the categories then it cannot exist or not-exist. For a theory of information consistent with Buddhism's theory of emptiness, therefore, the unity to which the information and information space would reduce must lie not only beyond the mind-matter distinction but beyond even that between existence and non-existence. Only with an unconditioned phenomenon would a reductionist analysis of the universe finally end. This could be seen as a strong epiphenomenalism for which mental and corporeal phenomena would be emergent and only one phenomenon would be truly real.

Kant's reluctance to equate the subject of rational psychology with the universe as a whole, despite their conceptually identical nature, has awkward consequences for his cosmology. He is forced to conclude that space-time phenomena are *empirically real* but *transcendentally ideal*, where a *transcendentally ideal* phenomenon is an idea and in this sense unreal. They would be empirically real but logically unreal. For the *Madyamika* philosopher this view would be incorrect, as the contradiction implies. Kant concludes that reality has two aspects and to this extent he and Nagarjuna are in agreement. Nagarjuna, however, proposes that space-time phenomena are *conventionally real* but both *logically* and *empirically unreal*, where a *conventionally real* phenomena would be a conceptual imputation and in this sense unreal. On the issue of what empiricism can tell us about the reality of space-time phenomena, then, these two philosophers do not agree at all, taking directly opposing positions. They agree that from logical analysis we must conclude that space-time phenomena are in some sense real and unreal at the same time, that their reality is somehow dependent on our point of view, but once Kant has denied an identity between the parts and the whole he cannot make his double-aspect theory of reality work. He makes an assumption about the limits of empiricism which renders his view paradoxical. Reason would lead us to one conclusion and empiricism would lead us to another, while common-sense would suggest that reason and empiricism should not lead us to two directly opposing conclusions about the reality of tables and chairs. For Nagarjuna they would lead us to the same conclusion, that space-time and all it contains are conceptual imputations. These phenomena would reduce to *sunyata* or emptiness, and this would be both demonstrable in logic and empirically verifiable. For Kant reason outruns empiricism. For Nagarjuna it is the other way around, but logic would not mislead us.

While placing the origin of experience or sentience beyond the categories of thought, Kant stops short of inferring that individual experiencers have empirical access to a world beyond the categories, beyond the distinct mundane and transcendent worlds, beyond experiencer and experience, is and is-not, knower and known, perceiver and perceived, appearance and reality, mine and not-mine, Being and not-Being, existence and non-existence, subject and object, you and me. Yet this is clearly implied. Körner summarises Kant's view.¹²

In the Analytic of Concepts Kant has drawn a sharp distinction between the '*I think* which must be *capable* of all my presentations,' thereby giving them synthetic unity, and the empirical,

¹¹ Campbell, Joseph, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, (Viking Press, 1968)

¹² Körner, S, *Kant*, (Pelican Books, 1955)

introspective, self which is itself a presentation. To be truly *a priori* rational psychology must have for its subject the former, i.e. the self of pure self-consciousness. This however is *not*, according to Kant, an object of experience and so of the applicability of the Categories. It is not an instance of any Category.

Perhaps *Fundamental Wisdom* could be read as an attempt to demonstrate what Kant came so very close to concluding, that the psychological and physical universe can be reduced to a phenomenon which is not an instance of a category and to which all beings with a psychology have unmediated access. Inevitably we cannot say what this phenomena is, since natural language is inherently dualistic. All predication must be part of the conventional or lower world, or half or the world, and in this sense, as Lao-tsu puts it, 'The Tao that is eternal cannot be talked'. A predicate is a selective conclusion and cannot be legitimately attached to a phenomenon that is unconditioned. Predication is necessary for a conventional description of phenomena but impossible where the subject is defined as not an instance of any category. Nevertheless, Lao-tsu goes on, 'The Tao must be talked.' As he demonstrates so well, however, we would have to speak of it apophatically or in a language of contradictory complementarity. Thus, for example, we might say that Tao is an instance of a category that is not an instance of a category, or that there are two opposite ways of looking at it. .

Predication is the very basis of language according to Nietzsche and others, and it seems true for all but the most primitive system of grunts. For language we are forced to separate subject and predicate, essence and attribute, particular and universal, set and member of set and so forth, and in this way are forced into dualism. In everyday life this linguistic dualism is appropriate and indispensable, it is the very basis of set theory, but in philosophy it reveals the reification of a distinction and thus the adoption of a positive metaphysical position. For a neutral position dualism in any form must be avoided. Further to Bradley's remark about the use of the term 'unity' in the passage quoted at the head of this essay, the Sufi sage Al Halaj warns that strictly speaking it would even be unrigorous to claim that God is One, since 'Whoso testifyeth that God is One thereby setteth up another beside him,' namely his own individual self as testifier.¹³ Thus the metaphysically neutral interpretation of the Hindu Upanishads expounded by Radhakrishnan in his *Philosophy of the Upanishads* is characterised as *advaita*, a term which means 'not-two,' but which we are constantly reminded should not mean 'one'. We would naturally attempt to conceive of a unity as something that is numerically one, but this would be a mistake for the original unity spoken of in mysticism, as for Bradley's Absolute and Hegel's Absolute Idea. This would not be an instance of a numerical category. The language of unity and metaphysical neutrality is full of such pitfalls. In his unfinished book *A Guess at the Riddle* C.S. Peirce notes, 'We can easily recognize the man whose thought is mainly in the dual stage by his unmeasured use of language.' In order to talk about Tao at all we must assign it predicates, (for a start we must call it 'it'), yet in no case can we say that it is *this* as opposed to *that*. Bradley speaks of this problem when he writes that in metaphysics, 'The separation of the predicate from the subject seems at once to be necessary and yet indefensible.'¹⁴

Having briefly sketched out what a neutral metaphysical position is, and perhaps lent a little plausibility to the claim that mysticism depends on such a position, it is almost time to investigate whether Proposition *b*) would be reasonable in the Aristotelian logic of traditional metaphysics. Just before that, however, we must return to Proposition *a*) to deal with a loose end.

There is one metaphysical position which is not eliminated from our enquiry by Proposition *a*). This is Dialethism. That the universe disobeys the rules of Aristotle's logic is an axiom for Dialethism. Being neither a neutral nor positive metaphysical position it perches on the fence between the stereotypically 'Eastern' and 'Western'

¹³ In Baldock, John, *The Essence of Sufism*, (Arcturus Publishing, 2004)

¹⁴ Bradley, Francis, *Appearance and Reality*, (Oxford University Press, 1951)

kinds of philosophy, in some ways serving as a useful bridge between them. As noted earlier, even if we conclude that all positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible we are not actually forced by abductive reasoning to adopt a neutral position. There remains one other possibility, which is that the universe does not conform to *any* logically defensible metaphysical position. This is what Dialethism claims.

For Dialethism the first proposition of our syllogism would be true but the second false. All selective conclusions about the world as a whole would be undecidable, but this would be explained not by the idea of an Hegelian unity or Kantian metasystem in which all categories are exposed as errors. It would be explained by positing the existence of true contradictions. The universe would be paradoxical and a strictly true description of it would be logically absurd. This is the loophole in Nagarjuna's argument. He proves Proposition *a*), but he does not directly address the possibility that the universe disobeys the rules of his proof.

Graham Priest has proposed that Dialethism, a term which translates roughly as 'two truths', is not a new philosophy but merely a new name, and that it was probably endorsed by Heraclitus, Nicolas of Cusa and Hegel.¹⁵ These philosophers are given a different interpretation here, but this interpretative disagreement does at least show the similarity of our positions. Dialethism and the doctrine of mysticism share important features, and in his *Paradoxical Nature of the Universe* Melhuish has shown that their logical schemes are almost isomorphic.

At least one of them must be false, however, or not entirely true. This is because for mysticism the universe would not be paradoxical. It would only appear to be paradoxical. There would be no true contradictions. This is what Nagarjuna and Bradley prove. For mysticism we would have to extend our ontology, epistemology and psychology to include 'something' that lies beyond Cusa's *coincidentia oppositorum*, beyond the 'conflicting harmony' of Heraclitus's bow and lyre and Lao-tsu's *is* and *is-not*. The Holy Grail of Christian and pre-Christian legend is said to have the power to dissolve all distinctions. Here we would find, whether in logic or practice, a phenomenon that is uncategorizable, a phenomenon which is not nothing but which is of necessity a conceptual void, the unconditioned element, the transcendent principle which in Kabbalism is prior even to God. As Hegel's Absolute Idea this would be the culmination of philosophical thinking, the final reduction that would be necessary for a fundamental theory, the transcendence of the dialectic by a sublation of all categories to reveal a spiritual unity. It is the original unity which allows Brown to overcome Russell's paradox where Frege could not. As Bradley's 'Real' this unity cannot properly be called one, but it is possible 'to use unity with a different meaning.' Alone among the multitude of phenomena painstakingly catalogued in Buddhism's Abhidhamma *pitaka*, where the Buddha's underlying ontology is framed in terms of bare ontological factors called *dhammas*, this one alone is undefined, the only one not evanescent and subject to conditions.

It is important to note that for the Mahayana Buddhist this is a phenomenon, not just a mythological entity or explanatory device. In Buddhist phenomenology the term *dhamma*, which would include all mental and corporeal things or 'thing-events', (everything that would be 'information' for Chalmers' naturalistic dualism), can be rendered as 'phenomenon' just as long as this term is not thought of as implying a correlative 'noumenon'. *Nibbana*, the unconditioned element, is spoken of as one of these, and it appears in the Abhidhamma literature in the 'Enumeration of Phenomena' in several of the classificatory groups. This phenomenon, however, would be 'supramundane', and not included in the realms of conditioned existence. In his *Abhidhamma Studies - Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*, Nyanaponika Thera writes,

¹⁵ Priest, Graham, *Dialetheism*, (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online)

'Though Nibbana ..., does in fact appear quite often in the *Dhammasangani*, it should be noted that: (1) In all cases it is merely mentioned without any further explanation beyond the classificatory heading under which it appears, and so it differs in that respect from the other "things," to all of which a definition is added; (2) the classifications of Nibbana are all negative in character. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Nibbana is definitely termed a *dhamma*, ...'

A phenomenon lying beyond the categories is an unavoidable implication of a neutral metaphysical position. It is denied by all positive metaphysical positions and also by Dialethism. Nevertheless, for Dialethism the universe would be metaphysically neutral in a way, or up to a point. Positive metaphysical positions would be false and logically indefensible, and this would render all selective conclusions about the universe as a whole undecidable. As a consequence, we would require a logic of contradictory complementarity or 'two truths' for an adequate description of the universe as a whole or to speak the whole truth about it. A selective description of the universe would be partial and inadequate. In no case would we be able to say that the universe is *this* as opposed to *that* without abandoning rigour. For an assertion that would still be inadequate but at least less misleading we would have to say that in all cases the universe is *both* this and that, or *neither* this nor that. About much of this the dialethist and the mystic can agree. For the latter, however, all opposing views would have to be sublated for the truth, exposed as category errors. The universe would have all attributes and no attributes, or this would be the two ways we can think about it, but neither would be a fundamental view. It would be just that two contradictory half-truths is the best the discursive intellect and natural language can do to represent a perfect unity. The same problem would arise for any kind of representation. The Yin-Yang symbol is an advance on the clear-cut contradictions we are forced into by language but does not entirely avoid an implied dualism. By the use of a language of contradiction and paradox we can approach a step closer to the truth than we can in natural language, but not quite all the way. The Tao that is eternal cannot be talked, and in philosophy, where it must be talked, we must be content with a language which points in its direction. The dialethist would disagree here, and would say that this language points nowhere but simply reflects the paradoxical nature of the universe. He or she might agree that assertions about the universe as a whole must take the form of pairs of seemingly contradictory truths but more properly complementary half-truths, but would not agree that this language of contradictory complementarity is inadequate to the whole truth and points beyond itself to a unity, and would reject the idea that when Meister Eckhart says, 'Why does thou prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of Him is untrue,' it would be this problem he is talking about, along with the idea that this is the origin of the Biblical injunction against idolising the ineffable, for on this view any such idol could only ever be a gross misrepresentation.

For Dialethism true words would not just seem paradoxical, they would actually be so. The universe would be absent the undefined phenomenon on which Nagarjuna's solution for the problems of philosophy depends, and its absence would render the universe paradoxical and incomprehensible. Far from being a reasonable theory, Dialethism states that all reasonable theories are false. This is the position we are forced to adopt if we find that the first proposition of our syllogism is true and the second is false.

We must note that Proposition *b*) would not render Dialethism false. It states, or this is its implication, that Dialethism is *ad hoc*. This is as much as it can state, since it would be impossible to demonstrate in logic that the universe is not paradoxical. Logic alone could never force us to believe that the universe either is or is not paradoxical. Logic can prove nothing about reality, and even if we could rigorously demonstrate that Propositions *a*) and *b*) are true we would not have refuted any doctrine for which the universe is paradoxical. Our first proposition would render positive positions absurd, while the second would render absurd positions redundant. This is a regrettable weakness in our argument here, that we cannot quite dismiss Dialethism, but it seems unlikely that many people would want to exploit it. As Bradley notes, as long we are committed to the idea that the universe is reasonable then the first two propositions of our syllogism will imply the third. Once given *a*), and the self-proclaimed logical indefensibility of Dialethism, then if a neutral metaphysical position is logically defensible the case is closed. If Proposition *b*)

is demonstrably true, or not demonstrably false, then to suppose that the universe is paradoxical would be perverse.

Part III

Anything that contradicts experience and logic should be abandoned.

The Dalai Lama
The Little Book of Buddhism

Let us now examine whether a neutral metaphysical position would be logically defensible. This cosmological theory makes claims about the world which appear to be 'illogical' or self-contradictory, and it would be easy to conclude from this that it must be logically indefensible, that it can be reduced to absurdity in the dialectic. Even in mysticism we find the view that the universe would transgress (and not simply transcend) the rules of classical logic. Nagarjuna's logical refutation of positive metaphysical positions asks us to reconsider this view. The logic he employs for the task is no different from Aristotle's, and unless his own position is impregnable then his argument fails. In Nagarjuna's hands this logic would require no modification to accommodate his two worlds doctrine. Indeed, his argument could be interpreted as a proof that a neutral metaphysical position would be consistent with Aristotelian logic. He would have seen no *logical* reason not to step immediately from the absurdity of all positive metaphysical positions to the conclusion that his Middle Way doctrine is true.

But this is a very big step, and in a strictly inferential philosophy we cannot take it unless we must. This is especially true here, where a neutral metaphysical position is mysticism. To know whether we are forced to take this step we would have to decide Proposition *b*). It ought to be decidable, for it makes no claim about the universe and if it is undecidable it is true. Admittedly, a proposition stating that the language and philosophical scheme of Zen Buddhism and the *Tao Teh Ching* obey the laws of classical logic might seem surprising, but unless it is true then Nagarjuna's argument fails.

That Lao-tsu's doctrine is systematic, that it can be represented as a formal system of terms and theorems, has been shown by George Spencer Brown in his *Laws of Form*. Russell praised the 'calculus of indications' Brown presents us with there, and, consistent with the idea that the metaphysical scheme of Taoism is not paradoxical, agreed that it did away with the need for his Theory of Types. Brown's calculus is a model of a metaphysically neutral universe and of the process by which forms emerge from formlessness. Russell's set-theoretic paradox cannot arise for it because the system is emergent from a unity that cannot be characterised as container or contained, one or zero, something or nothing. Elsewhere Brown likens it to a blank piece of paper. Paradoxes of self-reference cannot arise for a cosmological doctrine for which categories are not fundamental. In any case, notwithstanding all this, a cosmological doctrine for which it is rigorously true that strictly true words will seem paradoxical, and for which all positive metaphysical positions are false, can hardly be accused of being unsystematic. But would it pass Aristotle's test for reasonableness?

On this question there is some disagreement even among its proponents, and, as usual, it may be just a matter of how we look at it. Brown proposes in *Laws of Form* that a neutral cosmology would require a modification to Aristotelian logic similar to that which Heisenberg considered necessary for quantum theory. My impression is that most physicists follow Heisenberg and conclude likewise that the universe disobeys the rules of classical logic, forcing on physics a modification to those rules. Yet I think it can be reasonably argued that neither Brown's advaitan cosmology nor Heisenberg's quantum

mechanics would require a modification of classical logic, and that this would have been Aristotle's view.

Before examining his view let us first clarify what a neutral metaphysical position would imply for logic, by reference to cases. At a first glance, and not only at a first glance, a neutral metaphysical position seems to contravene what most of us take to be the laws of thought. All the same, in scholastic philosophy the idea of taking a neutral stance on metaphysical problems is a quite common one. As an alternative for the orthodox view it is usually there among the solutions for any particular metaphysical problem. Axiomatically, it is only ever endorsed on a piecemeal basis, on which basis it is found not to work, but in a partial form the idea is easy to find. Even the defiantly non-mystical Russell was a neutral monist on the Mind-Matter question, allowing the possibility that this is not a dilemma but a trilemma with a term missing. Like Kant, however, he does not extend this neutrality idea to the One-Many problem, and so his theory belies its title and ends in an irreducible plurality of indistinguishable neutral entities, one step beyond naturalistic dualism but still one step away from Hegel's fundamental solution. Physicists adopt a neutral position on various dualities and are accustomed to dealing with the problems that arise for logic and language, but they do not extend this idea to the metaphysical underpinnings for their theories, the Something-Nothing problem, the closure principle, the background-dependence problem and so forth, and so are forced to defend positions which are known to be logically indefensible just as if metaphysics does not exist.

Perhaps those who conjecture that the question of whether space-time is fundamental is undecidable in physics are close to adopting a neutral position, for this might suggest that spacetime is fundamental or emergent depending on how we look at it, or on how we define physics. We could say that spacetime is a Kantian initial condition for the appearance of the psychophysical phenomena that comprise the exclusive subject matter of today's physics, and fundamental in this sense, but not a necessary condition for the unconditioned phenomenon from which spacetime would be emergent, which must remain beyond physics. This neutral solution will not work, however, unless it is generalised into a principle. We must answer all metaphysical questions or none at all.

For physics a difficult problem is that it would be impossible to observe the unconditioned phenomenon prior to spacetime predicted by metaphysical neutralism. For any formal description of the universe it would have to remain an undefined term or undecidable axiom. Nevertheless, in physics and philosophy, and most apparently where these strands of research intermingle in modern consciousness studies, it could never be a redundant entity. It survives Occam's razor because it makes its presence clearly felt by its absence. Once this phenomenon is assumed to be a mystical fiction our theories are beset on all sides by intellectual dilemmas, ignoramibuses, contradictions, explanatory gaps, missing ingredients, antinomies, undecidable questions and other barriers to knowledge. We may be sceptical of Nagarjuna's solution, but we cannot deny the problem. The problem may arise in part because it is inevitable that for every conceiving observer there will be one phenomenon that is inconceivable and unobservable, namely that which conceives and observes. It may also arise because for any formal axiomatic description of the universe we would require at least one undefined term. Mathematics and logic tell us this, but currently physics does not allow for the possibility of this being the most primitive term in the system, let alone a real phenomenon.

To see how Nagarjuna's solution would work in practice we can look at any metaphysical problem. In respect of logic the story will be the same for all of them. One of the most closely studied and clearly delineated is the Internalism-Externalism problem, by extension also the Subject-Object and Mind-Matter problem. Most philosophers of mind favour one or the other horn of this dilemma. Robert Pepperell, however, has proposed a neutral approach as its solution, arguing that it is not a dilemma but a trilemma. It would be a dilemma only when we assume that there either is or is-not a fundamental distinction between our mind and the universe it inhabits.

Of course, there is no denying it, and it hardly needs saying, it is natural to suppose that there is this fundamental distinction between ‘my mind’ and ‘my world’, and extremely difficult to suppose otherwise. All the same, the dualistic view to which we commit ourselves makes no sense when examined closely. Yet the opposite theory, for which mind and world are identical, also brings with it intractable intellectual problems. Thus a neutral position seems forced on us. Pepperell writes,

The uncertain relationship between mind and world has of course generated countless finely nuanced philosophical arguments. But, put starkly, it seems there are three options:

That the mind and world are distinct.
That the mind and world are unified.
That the mind and world are both distinct and unified.

... While there are many powerful arguments in favour of the first two options, it is the third which I explore here, and the one I will suggest is most plausible.

René Descartes (1596-1650) is often credited with formalising the dualistic distinction between thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and material substance (*res extensa*); that is, between ideas attributable to the mind on the one hand and the material world of bodies and objects on the other.

... Descartes’ reputation as the prototypical dualist, however, does not fairly convey the complexity, some would say confusion, of his view on the distinction between mind and world. In the synopsis of the *Meditations*, we read:

... the human mind is shown to be really distinct from the body, and, nevertheless, to be so closely conjoined therewith as together to form, as it were, a unity.

And again in *Mediation VI* itself:

Nature teaches me ... that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am besides so intimately conjoined, as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity.

Despite the hint of qualification, Descartes is quite explicit: The mind and body are both ‘really distinct’ and united - they are two and one.¹⁶

This is the solution offered by Nagarjuna. The idea that there could be a middle path between Internalism and Externalism seems paradoxical, and yet this is the only alternative to the demonstrable absurdity of the extreme views. It would not be that my mind and my world are identical, for then they would be distinct, but that by reduction this distinction is unreal.

If we stray away from metaphysics into mysticism proper for a moment it becomes possible to show the surprisingly close relationship between the views of Pepperell, Kant, Decartes and Nagarjuna, and also to place the origin of the metaphysical scheme of mysticism where it belongs, beyond logic and conjecture in empiricism. Alan Wallace takes Peperell’s neutral solution to its conclusion in his *Taboo of Subjectivity: Towards a New Science of Consciousness*.

Conceptually unstructured awareness – which is nondual from the phenomena that arise to it – is regarded as the ultimate reality, and the realisation of such nondual consciousness is the final goal of contemplative practice. In this experience, the very distinction between public, external space, in which physical phenomena appear to occur, and private, internal space, in which mental phenomena appear to occur, dissolves into a “mysterious space,” which is the very nonduality between the conceptually constructed external and internal spaces. The ultimate nature of objective phenomena, therefore, is found to be none other than the ultimate nature of subjective phenomena; and that is the nonduality of appearances and awareness. When one achieves perfect realisation of this state, in which there is no longer any difference between one’s awareness during and after formal meditation sessions, it is claimed that one’s consciousness becomes boundless in terms of the scope of its

¹⁶ Pepperell, R., & Punt, M.. *Screen consciousness: cinema, mind and world*. (Consciousness, Literature & the Arts, 4, 2006)

knowledge, compassion, and power. Hence, the contemplative pursuit of such realisation is said to be the most sublime of sciences.

Perhaps Descartes, Kant and those who share Wallace's view are not so far apart on this issue as they are usually portrayed. We would expect the views of philosophers to converge, like roads to Rome, and perhaps they are often closer than they can appear. Many people would vehemently object to the idea, rife among practitioners, that mysticism is a science, but at least we see here that it is not the opposite of empiricism. We see that a neutral metaphysical position solves the Internalism-Externalism problem, or at least transforms it into a different kind of problem, and also that a neutral metaphysical position is necessary for a doctrine of unity. Perhaps it also indicates how for its exponents mysticism can be a metaphysical position, a practice, a religion and a science all at the same time.

In scientific consciousness studies at the present time these ideas, while not unknown, would be heretical, but they may not remain so forever. As recently as 1913 the American behaviourist John B. Watson was writing, 'the time has come when psychology must discard all references to consciousness,' and attributing belief in the existence of consciousness to ancient superstition and magic. Although this was probably never the majority view, for a while it became that of the establishment. Only half a century later, as it became increasingly clear that this view is unsustainable and unproductive, perhaps even incomprehensible, did the idea of studying consciousness scientifically become entirely respectable in psychology. Today, another half-century on, it has become perfectly respectable in physics, with some researchers proposing that consciousness is the most important problem in the natural sciences. In an appeal for continuing change Wallace writes,

It is reported that some of Galileo's clerical opponents were loath to gaze through his telescope to take a closer look at the planets, sun and moon for fear that what they saw would violate their beliefs. In a similar fashion, many cognitive scientists are loathe to observe their own minds, for the principles of scientific materialism deny that such observation is possible; or even if it is, the phenomena observed introspectively must be misleading or nonexistent. What new avenues of scientific enquiry might open up if we were to challenge this dogmatic injunction against the firsthand, empirical investigation of mental phenomena?

In a sense, of course, mental phenomena are all we can investigate, or at best they are psychophysical, and it is who or what that is doing the investigating that is the more interesting question. Kant called our inability as investigators to demonstrate that psychophysical phenomena are any more than the conceptual imputations of the investigators the 'scandal of philosophy,' but this interpretation of the data betrays a prejudice. It need not be a scandal if they are conceptual imputations. Were we to study our own minds, say the mystics, we would eventually realise that rather than a scandal it is a triumph of reason, a clear demonstration that we can trust our reason to lead us to truth. It ceases to be a scandal just as soon as we call it a result. This simple and straightforward approach, where we take the results of philosophy at face value, trusting in the experts, is only possible, however, if we bring our metaphysical scheme more into line with that of the Buddha and Lao-tsu.

Turning back to something more like metaphysics, we can say that for a neutral metaphysical position, as for Dialethism, mind and body would be both two and one, different in a sense and identical in another, as would be all psychophysical phenomena. Were they not identical they could not be different, while the view that they are either is nonreductive. Accordingly, Internalism and Externalism would be false. It is far from obvious that this idea is reasonable, and it is for claims such as this that a neutral metaphysical position is so often judged to contradict the laws of logic, in particular Aristotle's *tertium non datur* rule, and perhaps even the laws of thought. Precisely the same situation would arise in respect of all metaphysical problems.

Despite this, for the sake of our syllogism we must now try to reconcile Metaphysical Neutralism with the principles by which we usually judge the reasonableness of philosophical positions. For most people these would be the three principles formalised by Aristotle for the dialectic. For better or worse we have adopted these principles from the start here, and so are forced to say that wherever a theory, explanation or description of the universe requires that we abandon any one these principles we must judge that theory absurd and unreasonable. Aristotle's laws would be inviolable for a rational worldview.

PART IV

Very few seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask. On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds – justifications, explanations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind. The answer may annihilate the question and the questioner.

Anne Rice
Marius - The Vampire Lestat

Aristotle's laws for dialectical reasoning are the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. The law of identity (LI) states that A is A. It need not concern us for the moment. The law of non-contradiction (LNC) states that for any A it is impossible for both A and $\sim A$ to be true. That is to say, if the assertion 'x is square' is true, then the assertion 'x is-not square' cannot also be true. Finally, the law of the excluded middle (LEM) states that for any A it is necessary for one of A and $\sim A$ to be true. Either x is square or it is not, there is no third alternative. Where there is a third alternative then A and $\sim A$ are not legitimate dialectic propositions.

These latter two laws are simple and clear, and we use them with hardly a thought from almost the day we are born, regardless of whether we have heard of the dialectic or Aristotle. When we go to the cupboard for the marmalade either it is there or it is not. We do not expect it to be both in the cupboard and not-in the cupboard. In everyday life we are utterly dependent on these principles of reasoning for our moment to moment survival. Simple and familiar as they are, however, it is quite easy to inadvertently abuse them. Most importantly, where we apply these laws to pairs of assertions such as, 'The marmalade is in the cupboard,' and 'The marmalade is-not in the cupboard,' it is vital to ensure that A and $\sim A$ really are two precisely contradictory assertions. If they are not, then it would not be legitimate to apply either the LNC or the LEM. Logic would allow for both assertions to be true and for both to be false. The assertions 'It is raining,' and 'It is foggy,' for example, would not form a contradictory pair of the form A and $\sim A$. Both assertions could be true without this breaking the LNC, and both false without this breaking the LEM. As a consequence, the idea that it can be both raining and foggy at the same time does not seem paradoxical to us, nor that it is sometimes neither. Only where A and $\sim A$ are a true contradictory pair could the LNC and LEM be the laws of thought. To know how to apply these laws legitimately, therefore, we must be very clear as to what, according to Aristotle, would constitute a true contradictory pair of assertions.

Aristotle deals at length with contradictory pairs in *De Interpretatione*.¹⁷ Here, for the dialectic, he gives the rule for contradictory pairs, or the formal condition under which it is legitimate to apply the LNC and LEM.

Of every contradictory pair, one member is true and the other false.

¹⁷ Cf. Whittaker, C. W., *Aristotle's De Interpretatione: Contradiction and Dialectic*. I follow Whittaker's reading of this text throughout and am heavily indebted to him for this part of the discussion.

It follows from this rule that unless it is legitimate to apply the LNC and the LEM to a pair of assertions then they are not a true contradictory pair. Thus a (first-order) metaphysical question is a dilemma only if it asks us to choose one member of a true contradictory pair of assertions. Or, to look at it another way, it would be a first-order metaphysical question only if it does this.

Aristotle gives examples of permissible exceptions to his laws, or instances where it would not be legitimate to apply them. These are usually considered to be exceptions, but here I would prefer to call them illegitimate applications. A law with exceptions is a rule of thumb, and we cannot confidently decide Proposition *b*) by a rule of thumb. If we look upon them as illegitimate applications of the laws then we can say that the LNC and LEM are inviolable for a rational philosophy, and that wherever Aristotle says it is legitimate to apply these laws we can allow of no transgressions or modifications whatsoever. A rational way of reasoning would obey Aristotle's three laws just so long as they are rigorously applied.

If we take this approach, then were we to find that Heraclitus' statement, 'We are and are not' is comprised of two contradictory assertions we would have to judge his doctrine unreasonable. Not necessarily false, although this would be the implication. If, on the other hand, his statement would not comprise a true contradictory pair, then it cannot be refuted in Aristotelian logic and in this sense is not paradoxical. It might be merely be a case of it being raining and foggy at the same time, or neither.

What we must establish, then, if we are to decide Proposition *b*), is where it would be legitimate to apply Aristotle's laws and where it would not. Heisenberg concludes that the LEM at least must be modified for quantum mechanics and it may seem necessary to modify this law for a neutral metaphysical position, but if it is illegitimate to apply it in either case then it would be unnecessary to modify it in either case.

The importance of being able to identify true contradictory pairs stems from their essential role in the practice of the dialectic. If we cannot identify such pairs then we cannot reason dialectically. For a dialectical debate one player adopts a thesis and the other attempts to refute it by asking a series of questions. These questions will be chosen in such a way that the first player is led to contradict themselves and thus refute their own thesis. Probably more often than not these two roles are played by the same person.

For this kind of refutation to work the questioner must ask only legitimate dialectical questions. A dialectical question is one which forces the answerer to assert the truth of one member of a contradictory pair of propositions and the falsity of the other. Simply put, a dialectical question is a question which demands a yes or no answer. To such questions the first player is free to answer as they please and the answer they give must be accepted. To refute their thesis we would not challenge their answers but lead them to a self-contradiction, thus revealing the absurdity of their position. Nagarjuna's and Bradley's method for refuting positive metaphysical positions is dialectical in this sense.¹⁸ They show that for any positive metaphysical position there is a series of dialectical questions by which it can be reduced to absurdity. Proposition *b*) states that it is not possible to refute a neutral metaphysical position in this way.

Aristotle warns us against using pairs of assertions for which it is not the case that one member is true and the other false. In such cases the answerer cannot be expected to provide an answer. The answerer would have to assert that one member of the pair is true and the other false while knowing this is not the case. 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' would be a notorious example. Category-errors are fatal to the system, as we see when we ask 'Is the marmalade in the jar or in the cupboard?'

¹⁸ The practice of dialectical debate is a part of the core curriculum for the Tibetan universities. In philosophy, the Dalai Lama remarks, 'there can be no progress without contradiction.'

Heraclitus' assertion, 'We are and are not,' therefore, may or may not break the laws for rational thinking, depending on exactly what he meant. If we assume that he shared Nagarjuna's double-aspect view of reality, for which nothing *really* exists, then his statement would contain a complementary pair of assertions. It would be partly true that we are and partly true that we are not, whereas if we simply state that we are or that we are not then we are adopting an absurd positive metaphysical position. His assertion would state no more than that it would not be exactly true to say that we are *or* that we are not. There would be no contradictory pair, just two false assertions combined so as to point beyond themselves to a more subtle truth, the need to sublimate these contradictory ideas for the final truth. Clearly the assertions 'We are' and 'We are not' cannot form a contradictory pair if our thesis is that neither assertion is true. In metaphysics these two positions are usually considered mutually exclusive and as exhausting the possibilities, but this is not a view forced on us by logic. Rather, logic suggests it is an incorrect view.

There is another condition a contradictory pair of assertions must meet before it would be legitimate to enforce Aristotle's rules. Aristotle tells us that the negation of an assertion must be internal to it, such that one statement will assert the combination of subject and predicate and its contradictory their combination. Whittaker explains:

For Aristotle, negation is internal to a sentence. An affirmation claims that two elements, denoted by two words, are combined. In 'Socrates sits,' for example, it is asserted that Socrates and sitting cohere as a single compound entity. A negation makes the opposite claim about the same simple elements: that is, it represents them as separated rather than as combined. In an affirmation, it is the verb that signifies the combination of subject and predicate, and so makes an assertion into a claim that something holds of something else, rather than a mere list. Since it is the verb which expresses the combination of subject and predicate, it is the verb which must be negated if they are to be represented instead as divided. As 'is' expresses a combination, so 'is not' expresses a separation. The process of negation, then, involves going to the heart of the assertion, rather than treating the assertion as an atom, and affixing the negation sign to the outside.

He considers the situation for the sentence, 'Man is just.'

We find that other words in the sentence may also be negated, as in 'not-man' or 'not-just,' but an assertion will only be a negation if the verb or copula itself is negated. So, the negation 'man is-not just' must be distinguished from the affirmation 'man is not-just.' One asserts a combination between man and not-just, while the other asserts a separation between man and just: thus, one is an affirmation and the other is a negation, and, since the two assertions do not both cite the same predicate, they must belong to different contradictory pairs.

Hence the assertions, 'An electron is a wave' and 'An electron is a particle' would not form a true contradictory pair. Each would belong to a different pair, and the rules for the dialectic would need no modification for a theory which states that electrons have both or neither of these properties. Hegel would say that these two concepts, a particle and a wave, an unextended point and an infinitely extended field, are equivalent and co-dependent. One is impossible without the other, as we can verify by a thought experiment. We can imagine an infinitely small point to just the same extent that we can imagine an infinitely large space containing it. The two concepts are complementary, a single concept comprised of two aspects, each dependent on the other for its existence. For the truth we would have to look beyond this apparent contradiction. This would be as true in physics as in philosophy, since for Hegel logic and ontology coincide. An atoms and void theory would be nonreductive since since these concepts are co-dependent. Aristotle's laws do not fall apart just because quantum mechanics is very strange. He covered all the eventualities. The correct negation for the affirmation 'An electron is a wave' would be 'An electron is-not a wave.' Consequently, we can assert that an electron is both a wave and a particle or neither a wave nor a particle, and these assertions cannot be reduced to absurdity in logic. They are reasonable ideas even if they are incomprehensible.

In the same way, if we want to show that a neutral metaphysical position gives rise to contradictory assertions about the universe such as to render it logically indefensible, unreasonable or irrational, as we would have to do to falsify it, then first we would have

to show that these contradictory assertions would qualify as true contradictory pairs and are not just mismatched assertions that could lawfully both be true or false. At the very least we would have to be sure that the truth of one or both of them is being asserted. As we have seen, for a neutral metaphysical position this will never be the case.

There is a further complication, which is not important here except that from it arises the weakness in our argument noted earlier. It is what prevents us from being able to calculate that Dialethism is false. There is always the possibility that the laws of thought are not the laws of creation. Whittaker continues. ('RCP' here is the rule for contradictory pairs)

It does not follow inevitably from this view of contradiction that one contradictory will always be true and the other false. Thus, truth and falsehood... form no part of Aristotle's definition of contradiction. Instead, whether one contradictory is true and the other false will depend on the nature of the items which form the subject matter of the assertions: if there are subjects and predicates in the world which may truly be said to be combined and separated, or neither to be combined or separated, then RCP will not hold. We cannot infer from the mere nature of contradiction that no such subjects and predicates exist: rather, we must make an investigation of the types of items with which the world is stocked before deciding whether RCP is universally true or not.

Thus the question of whether the rule for contradictory pairs is universally true is one for empiricists and not logicians. The rule for contradictory pairs is a rule for the dialectic and universally true only in the same sense that the rules of chess are universally true. For Aristotle, even if the two assertions 'here is a table' and 'here is-not a table' form a true contradictory pair it would not follow that only one of them is true. In the absence of strong evidence to the contrary it might be most reasonable to suppose that only one of them is true, but this would not be the case *a priori*. Establishing the truth and falsity of either assertion would be a matter of examining the facts. If a thesis violates the LNC or LEM then what follows is its logical absurdity, not its truth or falsity. Nothing follows ineluctably for the truth or falsity of a theory from its absurdity until we assume that the universe is reasonable. Logic is our sole guide to truth here, however, where our entire case depends on a reasonable universe, so we cannot use this 'get out of jail' card. The possibility that the universe is unreasonable is of use only to doctrines which give rise to contradictions.

If the professors at Butler's Colleges of Unreason see the middle way solution for philosophical dilemmas as 'illogical,' this can only be on the grounds that it would require a modification to Aristotelian logic. If it actually broke the laws then it would be no less absurd than the two other solutions, and if it required no modification of them then it would not be illogical. This view is sustainable because we cannot demonstrate that the universe obeys Aristotle's rules. However, while the view that this solution is illogical rather than absurd may allow it to survive in philosophy departments, as a curiosity, it is not enough to make it plausible. What would make it plausible is if Butler's Professors are wrong, as Proposition *b*) claims. For Nagarjuna there would be no such thing as a philosophical dilemma and no modification to logic or recourse to 'illogic' would be required to solve one. They would seem to be dilemmas only when we ignore Aristotle's rules. In dialectic logic when we ask whether the universe begins with Something or Nothing we are breaking those rules. The true contradictions would be between Something and not-Something, or Nothing and not-Nothing. If, therefore, we answer 'no' to the Something-Nothing question, then our answer would be paradoxical or illogical only in the sense that it is impossible to imagine a phenomenon that is not unambiguously one or the other. This failure of imagination has no bearing on the formal reasonableness or even the plausibility of our answer. At any rate, if we take this approach to all problems of philosophy then it would be Nagarjuna's solution for them, and the reason why it survives the Aristotelian argument he makes against all other solutions.

If this is a correct analysis then there is nothing paradoxical about Pepperell's proposal that Internalism and Externalism are false. The proposition that Mind-only and Matter-

only metaphysical theories are false cannot be refuted in logic, and nor can the conclusion he draws from this, just as long as we apply the laws of logic more carefully than we would normally need to in everyday life, when hunting for the marmalade say, or even than we do for much of metaphysics, and more as we would for quantum mechanics or Dialethism. If a neutral metaphysical position seems incomprehensible that is another matter. This author makes no claims to a profound understanding but is moving chess pieces about. If, however, the difficulty of making sense of Nagarjuna's doctrine does bear on its plausibility, then it probably lends it some. 'The way we have to describe Nature is incomprehensible to us,' Feynman famously remarked during a public lecture given in the 1950's, and for physics little has changed in the meantime. If a neutral metaphysical scheme describes Nature correctly then we would not expect it to be easy to comprehend. In all other respects its comprehensibility is probably irrelevant here. If we decide, on the basis of Aristotle's guidelines for their use, that a neutral metaphysical position would not constitute a breach of the laws for the dialectic, nor require their modification, then we must find Proposition *b*) true.

Part V

The position is simply this. In ordinary algebra, complex values are accepted as a matter of course, and the more advanced techniques would be impossible without them. In Boolean algebra (and thus, for example, in all our reasoning processes) we disallow them. Whitehead and Russell introduced a special rule, which they called the Theory of Types, expressly to do so. Mistakenly, as it now turns out. So, in this field, the more advanced techniques, although not impossible, simply don't yet exist. At the present moment we are constrained, in our reasoning processes, to do it the way it was done in Aristotle's day.

G. Spencer Brown
Laws of Form

This is the case that can be made in metaphysics for a neutral metaphysical position, or a sketch of its main components. Perhaps in this version it is not very convincing, but it may be enough to show that while there is undoubtedly a sense in which mysticism is 'at the opposite end to rational thought,' as Paul Davies puts it, this is not in the sense that its metaphysical implications would be contrary to reason. We can now update our syllogism with a necessary proviso.

- a) All positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible.
- b) A neutral metaphysical position is logically defensible.
- c) The universe is metaphysically neutral or paradoxical.

The conclusion is now more secure and all three propositions ought to be decidable by analysis. No appeal to mysticism is necessary, and yet this is one of the arguments that must be defeated if we wish to dismiss mysticism's doctrine of unity as self-delusion or superstition.

It is a strictly metaphysical argument, and as such it leaves open the possibility that a neutral metaphysical position would contradict the facts of other sciences. There is a widespread presumption that it would, or will eventually be found to do so. If it would then either the argument here is faulty or the universe is paradoxical. This objection cannot be met in logic, where it must always remain a theoretical possibility that such contradictory facts exist. All we can say is that none has been found to date. We need not worry that such a fact has been discovered and we have not heard about it, since the first person to announce a fact inconsistent with the truth of the doctrine of mysticism will become world-famous immediately. Moreover, if do we look into the facts what we see is that this doctrine has become more and more obviously in conformity with them over

time. The theory of emptiness was wholly incompatible with the old Newtonian universe, while it is difficult to see how it can be a bad theory if quantum mechanics is a good one. Moreover, on the analysis here it would be as true in physics as it is in philosophy that proving Nagarjuna's theory false would entail proving that the universe is paradoxical, so unless the universe is paradoxical no scientific observation can be inconsistent with his theory.

By adding two further propositions our syllogism can be converted into something like a proof that the universe is not paradoxical. Any logical argument depends on a universe that is reasonable, that is systematic, that is in many respects predictable, that evolves over time according to laws which would not contravene the laws by which we think. At the very least we must assume that this is true of our own minds. We may not often make this premise explicit but it must always be there at least implicitly. It must be there as an initial premise even for an argument that the universe is reasonable. But this is the very idea that our argument is examining here and so some tautology is entailed. In order for our syllogistic argument to work we must either assume that the universe is reasonable or, as we have here, add a proviso to its conclusion. If we drop this proviso and instead make the reasonableness of the universe our initial premise, then this premise immediately becomes also our final conclusion. Our initial premise would now state that all explanations of the universe are unreasonable except the correct one, and our syllogism would go on to prove that this is the case.

It might be objected that neither Nagarjuna's nor Bradley's proof is successful, that Proposition *a*) has never actually been satisfactorily proved. This objection is possible because it is so difficult to decide whether these proofs are successful. The issues are fiendishly difficult and there are many sceptics. While it would reflect badly on the competence of these philosophers if their proofs did fail, however, it would not matter much here. Their conclusion is unassailable. Metaphysics depends on the assumption that the universe has exactly one reasonable explanation. This explanation may or may not be comprehensible, whether in principle or in practice, but *a priori* it will not be logically indefensible. If, therefore, we make the 'reasonable universe' assumption, and if there is not an infinite quantity of logically indefensible explanations of the universe, then sooner or later, by a process of elimination, metaphysics must arrive at a reasonable explanation and it will be the correct one. This will be the only positive result that metaphysics can produce. And right from the start, over and over again, it has produced the same result. Nagarjuna's proof is famous for its rigour, brevity and elegance, but he proves only what quite ordinary metaphysicians routinely discover. His proof is an important philosophical exegesis of the Buddha's teachings but seen simply as a proof it would be redundant in today's metaphysics, where his result has been reproduced in so many ways by so many people during the intervening centuries.

It may seem wildly implausible that it is possible to work out the truth about the universe in metaphysics. Yet, at the same time, is this not exactly what we would expect to be able to do? When we assume that the universe is reasonable we assume that in principle it is possible to work out the truth about it in metaphysics. If we find that we can actually do this then it should not be very surprising, regardless of how surprising our conclusion turns out to be. Metaphysics can be an antidote for dogmatic superstition only to the extent it is a guide to truth. It proceeds by contradiction, which is to say by abduction to the best explanation, and if the universe is reasonable, and if we make no mistakes, then this procedure must eventually eliminate all superstitions.

Suppose that the case for a neutral metaphysical position has been made. What would remain to be done? Nothing? Do we all go home? Is there still a research program or is it the end of metaphysics, at least metaphysics as we know it? It seems clear that it would be the end of metaphysics as we know it, or as many of us do. The boundaries of traditional metaphysics would have to be expanded. It would remain a compulsory stage of the analytical philosophers journey but would no longer be the destination. As a stage of the journey it cannot be missed out, for in order to calculate that it is not the

destination it would be necessary to complete the stage. There could never be an end to metaphysics while each generation of thinkers must retrace the steps of their predecessors in order to confirm their conclusions. To avoid it entirely would be possible, but only by taking its ultimate futility on faith and setting out from where metaphysics usually ends, as the Buddha, whose focus is exclusively soteriological, advises us to do. But we do not have to avoid it entirely to go beyond what a strictly scholastic metaphysics can achieve. We do not have to agree that a successful case for a neutral position is where metaphysics ends, for this is not where it ends in mysticism. If we give metaphysics a broader definition then a great deal of new and exciting work remains to be done.

Wittgenstein tells us that once we have climbed the ladder of his propositions we must abandon the ladder. It will have served its purpose. In much the same way, or perhaps it is effectively the same way, once we have used our traditional metaphysics to refute all positive metaphysical positions we can abandon it. But not abolish it. Each philosopher will want to climb the ladder themselves and it must be left in place for those yet to climb it. The survival of traditional European model of metaphysics, constrained by an unrigorous medieval neo-Aristotelian logic to the study of positive metaphysical positions, is not threatened by this diagnosis of its problems. These problems will continue to be irresolvable in this metaphysics, and the study of them will always be necessary for an intellectual understanding of Nagarjuna's doctrine. But it is already a poor kind of survival.

If we define metaphysics more as it is defined in mysticism, as the philosophical and scientific study of reality, existence and knowledge, then the case made here would revitalise the traditional western academic discipline. It would now have to include the task of translating, systematising and making sense of the doctrine of mysticism in philosophy, even if it is only for the purpose of once and for all refuting it, since we would no longer be able to simply ignore it. Whether we would still be writing footnotes to Plato would depend on how we interpret him, but even if this is all we are doing they would be important notes. We could start almost anywhere and probably continue indefinitely. We could ask, for instance, how the ethical scheme of the Buddha follows from the neutrality of his metaphysical position. If we can answer this question then we have used metaphysics to ground an ethical scheme in Nature. There seems no good reason why the study of this question should not be called metaphysics. There are dozens of such questions, and of such complexity and subtlety as to keep a metaphysician in work for ever. After all, metaphysics is alive and well in Buddhism. But the research program, which is what it would become if we throw off our shackles in this way, would have to extend beyond the boundaries of medieval European metaphysics, for these boundaries are man made and do not define where the issues begin and end. If we think these boundaries cannot be crossed then a case for a neutral metaphysical position will have no effect on our metaphysics whatsoever. We will assume that there is a flaw in the case somewhere, or that the universe is paradoxical, and carry on accordingly. If, however, we think that metaphysics is the study of the universe as a whole, its origin and nature, and the intellectual search for the truth about God, consciousness, spacetime and so forth, wherever it leads, whatever the consequences and whether we like it or not, then it is clear that most of it remains to be done.

In other areas of knowledge the effect would be similar in potential. Even if we are determined that mysticism is nonsense and want only to prove it, the target would now at least be in range. To pursue it, however, we would have to venture into some poorly charted fields of research. In physics we might ask how the topology of Nagarjuna's universe, which is somehow both extended and unextended, (or neither exactly extended nor unextended), can be squared with quantum mechanics. In religion, if we really are in search of a metaphysic, we could examine what a neutral metaphysical scheme implies for our interpretation of the scriptures. In consciousness studies we might investigate the practicality of the modifications to Chalmers's naturalistic dualism that would be required to make it equivalent with Barkin's relative phenomenalism and thus fundamental.

Mathematics is not the topic here, but so close is its connection with metaphysics that for the sake of the plausibility of our argument we must note one crucial mathematical implication. This is because it might be objected that Proposition b) cannot be true on the grounds that to be considered reasonable, in the sense this word has been used here, a theory of the world as a whole, of everything there is, would have to be a complete and consistent formal axiomatic system of sufficient complexity to include mathematics. This is usually thought to be an impossible object. This objection, however, only draws attention to one of the most credible features of a neutral metaphysical position. The incompleteness theorem would be a proof of it. Gödel showed that the problem of completing a consistent metaphysical theory arises for formal reasons, that it is not a lack of data, a fault with human reasoning or because the universe is paradoxical, and that it is not necessarily a fault of mysticism that it cannot just come out and describe the universe in a straightforward way. It is simply a property of (sufficiently complex) formal axiomatic systems of description that they cannot describe a universe which is complete and consistent. To say that the universe is reasonable, however, is to say that it is complete and consistent. Accordingly, if a metaphysical theory cannot be both then it cannot be true. If such a theory were true then the universe would be unreasonable. When looked at in this way the incompleteness theorem is a proof of Proposition a). Following this, in a mathematical translation, Proposition b) would state that a neutral metaphysical position describes an exceptional kind of system, one for which all metaphysical statements with a Fregeian truth-value would be undecidable, consistent with its unconditioned axiom, the unmarked piece of paper from which Brown's calculus of distinctions emerges, and as such is not constrained by the incompleteness theorem. Proposition c) would state that the universe itself is such a system, as would be consistent with its reasonableness and our reason.

It is not an objection, but there is something a little terrifying about the idea that we might be able to work out the truth about our own existence. Were we to succeed, or come to think we have succeeded, we would no longer feel free to believe what we like. It is a worry that all philosophers have to live with. Metaphysics is playing with fire. It might be important to say here, therefore, in order to make this legalistic argument for mysticism less confrontational, that even if we become convinced that the universe can be described in metaphysics as a neutral metaphysical position, and even if we become convinced that the teachings of the wisdom traditions are essentially true, then we are not immediately forced to throw away all of our current beliefs. In this respect mysticism is surprisingly non-threatening. It requires an effort to understand it a little and no effort to ignore it completely, and if we are already sure of our beliefs there would be no reason to expend any effort. In addition, no amount of intellectual effort could reveal what can only be known empirically. Obviously we would have to delve a lot deeper into mysticism than we have here to know what it says about God, for example, who is the elephant in the room here, and it is really quite difficult to tell. In Islam, in quiet corners, the debate continues as to whether it is correct to say that Al-lah (or 'Al-ahad,' 'the One') is God, and with a unanimity which Schrödinger likens to the particles in a ideal gas the mystics say we are God. On the other hand, in his *Enneads* Plotinus reminds us that when we read the sayings of mysticism it is usually best to preface them with the words 'It is as if.' If theism and atheism form an antinomy, then when we adopt a neutral metaphysical position this confuses rather than clarifies the issue and we need not pursue it further unless we wish to. If we are swayed by the argument here we would have to acknowledge the plausibility of the doctrine of mysticism, but we would not be confronted by a list of beliefs we are forced to adopt or reject. Rather, we would be faced with a set of conundrums that make it difficult to know what to believe. Only in empirical practice, where we cannot dismiss unpalatable conclusions as sophistry or the philosophical issues as too complex to call can we be actually forced to alter our beliefs. Besides, a neutral position is not the opposite of a positive position. For a neutral position, whatever metaphysical belief we might hold there will be some truth in it. There would a certain sense in which Materialism is true and also in which Idealism is true; a certain sense in which the universe is eternal and also in which it is timeless; a certain sense in which we have freewill and also in which we do not, and so on *ad infinitum* for the attributes of the

Absolute, and even a sense in which the Absolute has no attributes, and even one for which there is no Absolute. It is really quite difficult to pick a fight with a neutral position, and its implications are not immediately threatening to our worldview or lifestyle in logic, where we can never be sure that we have not miscalculated.

We have been concerned here only with certain aspects of mysticism, those immediately relevant to the case at hand, and only with what can be learnt of mysticism from a literature review. The result is a misleadingly partial and prosaic discussion. Fortunately there is a vast ocean of literature available to correct any false impression given here, almost none of which is prosaic or off message. It is one of the joys of studying this literature that it describes a world about as unprosaic as it would be possible for a world to be, and some would say far stranger than fiction could ever be. This is not an introduction to mysticism, however, and our syllogism does not even mention it. It is an attempt to show that a case may be made for a neutral metaphysical position in logic, and, in support of this case, that this may be the position necessary for the perennial philosophy.

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