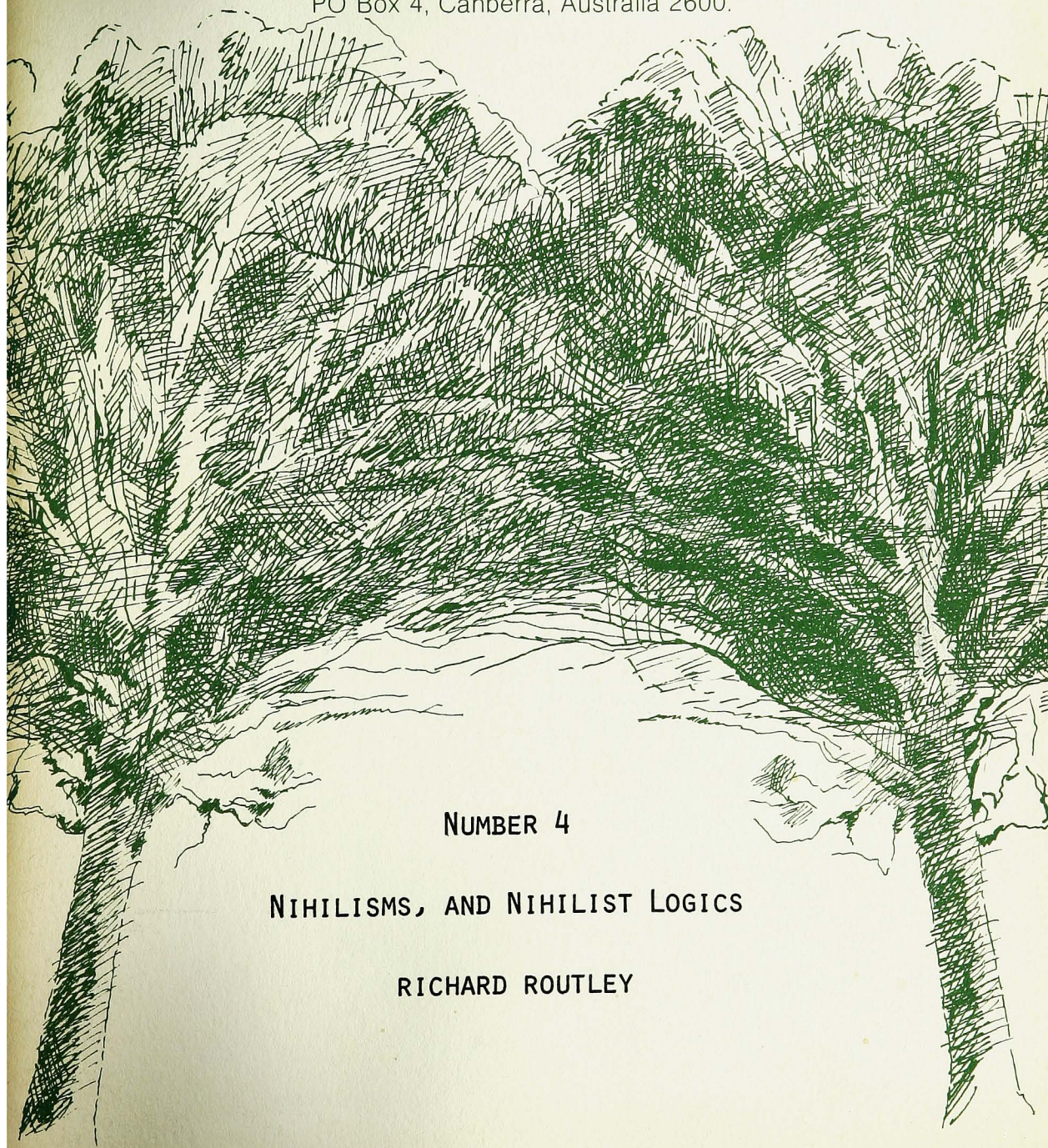


Discussion Papers in environmental philosophy

Philosophy Departments
The Australian National University
PO Box 4, Canberra, Australia 2600.



NUMBER 4

NIHILISMS, AND NIHILIST LOGICS

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by

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Discussion Papers in Environmental Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
Australian National University

1983

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NIHILISMS, AND NIHILIST LOGICS¹

It is disconcerting to try to find out what counts as nihilism. What different authors describe as nihilism and what the encyclopedias and dictionaries define as nihilism appear to have very little in common. An initial, serious, problem then in understanding nihilism is in seeing how all the various positions and theses that are said to represent or count as nihilism fit together, if they do. Such a synthesis is important if there is something to be called 'the logic of nihilism'; otherwise there may just be various nihilistic logics, perhaps of quite diverse kind, rather as there are various modal logics. Such a simple pluralist approach is pushed towards its (classical) limit by Apostel² in his path-breaking work on nihilist logics.

A rival monistic account of nihilism - which would resolve the initial problem - is however not lacking support. According to Kielkopf, the logic of nihilism is just one among modal logics, namely S6 or some extension (we are not told which); for the central nihilist thesis is $\Diamond p$, i.e. possibly possibly p. Kielkopf makes a valiant effort to show that this modal thesis asserts or entails what he takes to be the essential tenets of nihilism, namely that reality is absurd or totally unintelligible, that everything is permitted, and that there is no right logic. One would have to be more than a logical wizard to get these tenets out of the humble $\Diamond p$; and not too surprisingly, the stimulating arguments Kielkopf produces contain fatal flaws. In fact the tenets are not interderivable without large, and decidedly questionable, assumptions.

Even more astonishing connections are forged by Rosen³. Nihilism is not only the thesis that everything is permitted (or at least the situation which obtains when this is so); it is, for example, the thesis that there is no reason or justification for anything, so that a defence of reason has to come to

grips with the problem of nihilism; it is the thesis that reality is unintelligible, absurd, incomprehensible; it is the view that things as a whole are worthless; it is the attempt to overcome or repudiate the past on behalf of an unknown and unknowable yet hoped for future; it is the position that the speech of "justification" is indistinguishable from silence; and it is many other things as well (cf. the list in Magnus pp.293-4). Yet

what seem to be various forms of nihilism in fact reduce finally to one form. Similarly, in the context of nihilism, the various forms of silence in fact reduce finally to just one form, or rather to formlessness (Rosen p.xiii).

In what follows we shall come to reject both the Rosen-Kielkopf view that there is a single basic form of nihilism from which other formulations emerge, and the view, suggested in Magnus and also in Apostel, that nihilism is nothing more than a rather disparate collection of positions grouped together under a mere negative term or (on Apostel's fuller story) "reflecting a general nebulous attitude concerning the contradictory character of preference and obligation". Rather there is a genuine family of philosophical positions linked together by highly interesting, but almost invariable false, theses. Looking at some members of the nihilism family, discerning family traits, and beginning the search for the underlying unifying theory that makes the family genuine, will be among our business in what follows.

Apart from the plethora of accounts there is a second residual worry, and that is whether a doctrine supposedly as negative as nihilism should, or could, have a logic at all. Perhaps nihilism should be the theory without a logic. But doesn't every position have a logic? Not silence, which is what nihilism is often said to lead to, when all assertions are taken away, and nothing remains. Let us try to get to grips with nihilism at stages before expressive silence is reached, if we can, for at that late stage there is nothing left to get to grips with, nothing for a logic to assert or reject, no logic.

Is there more in common to the family of positions that have been called 'nihilism' than the word itself or its derivatives, nothing other than 'nothing', as a negative view of nihilist positions would have? Is it that nihilist positions have nothing in common; so they do have something in common, namely nothing? There is no need, however, for desperate resort to Alice-in-Wonderland arguments to find a common ground in genuine negativity. The general logical form of the nihilist claim is: There are no objects of type ϕ , or equivalently: There are no ϕ objects, or again: Nothing ϕ s, or again: Everything does not ϕ - where in each case ϕ is some distinctive philosophical category yet to be filled out. For nihilists are not asserting restricted non-existential claims such as that there are no unicorns, nor even presenting Parmenidean claims, such as that nothing moves, or ecological truisms, such as that there are no free lunches, or consumer complaints, such as that nothing works for very long. The cases of ϕ admitted have at least one other very significant feature in common: they are all underpinned and driven, in one way or another, by philosophical scepticism and the arguments of scepticism. It is a scepticism that is often accepted only reluctantly and with much misgiving: hence a further typical feature of nihilisms, an accompanying attitude of despair and hence the characteristic mood of nihilisms, despair, or anguish⁴, not - what are often associated - boredom and anomie. There are as well other less sweeping family characteristics of nihilism that will soon appear, for instance that adequate representation of nihilist theses and arguments commonly exceeds the resources of mainstream (classical) logic.

Nihilisms thus form a close-knit family, with identifiable family characteristics. But is the family identified and knit together simply by an accidental cluster of conventionally associated features - the way conventionalists would, erroneously, view all philosophically significant

families - or does it go deeper, does it constitute a genuine family, with an underlying factor, network, or theory which accounts for it? Clearcut examples of genuine families are provided, for instance, by diseases where clusters of surface symptoms are eventually explained through underlying factors, such as viruses. But a similar deeper picture is evident in the original family paradigm itself, where the main frame, or basic structure, consists of the blood-related family, with a peripheral cladding tied in primarily by more conventional (but still reproductively oriented) marriage relations. A genuine family has then a central nonconventional frame as well as more conventional surrounds. In the original family model the main frame comprises all descendants of some common stock, who are tied together by blood bonds, i.e. there is network (in this case a nest of trees) based on ancestral relations; and furthermore similarities of the common stock can be explained, unlike those of artificial families, through inherited genetic features.

The main frame of the nihilist family, which is rather more abstract, is to be found within atheistic scepticism. Philosophical scepticisms, which themselves form a genuine family, divide into two subfamilies, agnostic scepticisms which doubt or question certain foundational claims in everyday practices (of commonsense, science, religion, etc.), and atheistic scepticism which deny such claims⁵. Scepticisms are all concerned with adequacy of reasons or justification, and the fact that those usually offered for certain everyweek claims fail to measure up to an acceptable minimum in one way or another. However scepticism with regard to everyweek claim C (e.g. there are ϕ) can take differently scoped forms: it is not the case that there are acceptable reasons [is adequate reason] for C, as opposed to, there are acceptable reasons for the negation of C, $\sim C$; whence, if the reasons are (taken to be) adequate, the nihilist claim, $\sim C$, specifically, there are no ϕ s. From the failure to measure

up to minimal standards, the familiar justificatory gap picture emerges:

{ everyday claim C _____ what is required (perhaps under high redefinition)
JUSTIFICATORY GAP
{ usual ground or reasons _____ what is attained, attainable (so it is
said).

In terms of the picture the standard transcendental and reductivistic responses to scepticism are readily indicated. Reductionisms, such as phenomenisms, contend that the everyday claims reduce to statements about their bases or grounds, while transcendentalisms insist that the claims to exceed their bases but the claims can nevertheless be justified. (As to how some can be semantically justified, see SMM, where the gap picture is further explained.)

In a straightforward sense atheistic scepticism lodges a stronger claim than agnostic scepticism against transcendentalism and reductionism; for whereas the agnostic form leaves it open whether C, indicting only the grounds for C, the atheistic form characteristically goes on to deny C, or to assert $\sim C$, thereby ruling out any prospect of justification. The nihilist family is distinguished as among the severest of these types: not only do the usual grounds not sustain a claim C of the specific form, there are ϕ s, but on the contrary $\sim C$ obtains, so justifying serious atheistic scepticism, and the despair it brings in its train - because there are no ϕ s to underwrite everyday practices, which accordingly appear empty, unsupported, etc.

Nihilists are not usually denying that conclusions can be reached by rational methods: on the contrary, they proceed, generally by argumentative means, to challenging negative themes. Sceptics are normally very far from abandoning the rational enterprise; very often they tend to have more exacting argumentative standards, and tougher characterisation of crucial commodities such as knowledge, than the rest of us. This is the source of a very serious

problem for the orthodox philosophical opposition to nihilisms; that they cannot get to grips with nihilisms in a thoroughgoing logical way, such as befits rational rebuttal of nihilisms. For given mainstream logic, which helps define rationality for philosophical orthodoxy, many nihilist theses cannot be formally expressed and a great many nihilist arguments cannot be logically represented. It is for these sorts of reasons that philosophical orthodoxy is unable logically to assess or counter scepticism (a theme further developed in EMJB, chapter 8), but indeed is obliged to try to rule much of the nihilistic literature out somehow, for instance as meaningless or irrational or logically incoherent. Trying to do so is however a hopeless and misguided task - a point rebounding on mainstream logic and hence on philosophical orthodoxy - as will now be shown, in an inevitably piecemeal way.

For there are, as the literature discloses, many different examples of type ϕ to be considered, and - if the hopes of Kielkopf, Rosen and others are to be realised - to be synthesized. These examples are of rather unequal merit, and some of the less deserving proposals are considered only briefly (and perhaps a bit superficially).

* * * * *

Claim 1: Nothing exists. Here ϕ is the category of existents, and the nihilist thesis is that nothing exists. This determination of ϕ gives one of the philosophical senses of nihilism that dictionaries list (cf. The Concise Oxford), according to which nihilism is a scepticism which denies all existence. The thesis is an ancient one; it was presented and ingeniously argued for by the sophist Gorgias. Formalisation of this type of thesis is already beyond the scope of classical logic, but is easily encompassed within logics with non-standard quantifiers, specifically ontologically neutral quantifiers. Expressed in neutral symbolism (that of SL), the thesis is $(\forall x)\sim E(x)$, that is

$\sim(Sx)E(x)$, read 'it is not the case that for some x , x exists'. The first nihilist logic is then a neutral logic to which the thesis $\sim(Sx)E(x)$ is added⁶.

Naturally in a larger scheme of things the arguments supporting the thesis would also be formalised. These arguments, which give the thesis its interest and its sceptical grip, characteristically take the form of showing, or purporting to show, that the things that are supposed to exist do not have the required properties to exist. One line of argument, on which there are many variants, runs as follows:- Everything is either an individual concrete item or not. If it is not individual but abstract, e.g. it is a universal of one sort and another, it cannot exist because it is bound to be incomplete and indeterminate in various extensional respects, whereas everything that exists is complete in all extensional respects (cf. the argument in EMJB that the Triangle, for example, cannot exist because the lengths and relative proportions of its sides are indeterminate). But if an object is an individual concrete item it cannot really exist, because, for instance, it can have no stable consistent properties: it is bound to be transient, ephemeral, and have inconsistent features (e.g. it is, as perception seems to disclose, both heavy and light, bent and straight, bald and hirsute). Hence nothing exists. The argument is valid - since at bottom of the relevantly correct form $(A \rightarrow B) \ \& \ (\sim A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A \vee \sim A \rightarrow B$ - but the second implication is not true: some individuals do exist.

An early but rather neglected set of arguments, of this sort, that nothing exists, are due to Gorgias, perhaps the first Western nihilist. In the first division of his disjunctively-titled treatise On Not-Being or On Nature, Gorgias amalgamates several cryptic arguments each of which takes the following (contraposing) form: if x exists, then it has one or other of these properties, i.e. $g_1x \vee g_2x \dots \vee g_nx$, for some finite list of predicates. But x has none of

these properties, i.e. $\sim g_1x, \dots, \sim g_nx$. Hence x does not exist, for arbitrary x . However, stopping off to deal with Gorgia's arguments, and dealing with the many sceptical arguments designed to show, despite appearances, that concrete individuals do not exist, would seriously divert us from the present enterprise (and in any case the arguments are dealt with elsewhere⁷).

If nothing exists, then everything that appears to exist is illusory: we "live" in a world of fantasy and illusion. From there it has proved tempting to transit (as we shall see further with claim 7) to the conclusion that nothing is worth taking seriously - who except philosophers are serious about what does not exist - and thence, given that it is hard to avoid taking some things seriously, to despair. Alternatively, and differently, there is the route that Nietzsche saw leading from atheism to nihilism, to despair from the repudiation of that special class of entities, gods - a class which was thought to guarantee the point, or the existence, of everything else. Indeed this route is more appropriate in the universal case where existence is entirely denied:-

One interpretation of existence has been overthrown, but since it was held to be the interpretation, it seems as though there were no meaning in existence at all, as though everything were in vain (Nietzsche, vol.XIV, p.480).

Again jumps are involved; these big jumps we re-approach a little more slowly subsequently.

The nihilist thesis 1 is not beyond the scope of classical logic in the same way as is Meinong's law, $(\exists x)\sim E(x)$, i.e. some things do not exist⁸; for $\sim(\exists x)E(x)$ does not lead to inconsistency, in the way $\sim(\exists x)\sim E(x)$ does, upon expansion to $(\exists x)(E(x) \ \& \ \sim E(x))$, but in fact returns $\sim(\exists x)E(x)$ itself (given the standard theory of restricted quantifiers). Nonetheless the nihilist thesis is inconsistent with an interpretational assumption of classical semantics that the domain of quantificational theory is not empty, i.e. includes at least one

existent object, and thus with the theses which (amazingly) force such contingent requirements into the heart of logic, namely theses such as $(\exists x)f(x) \vee \sim f(x)$, and $(\exists x)t$ for any tautology t . For $(\exists x)t$ entails $(Sx)E(x)$, contradicting the nihilist thesis.

The case illustrates another family characteristic we shall encounter again and again; namely that the logics nihilisms yield typically (but not invariably) transcend classical resources: they are not consistently classically expressible. It is on this inadequate basis that nihilisms have frequently been written off as incoherent or inconsistent, and more, their investigation improperly dismissed, in one way or another, from the concerns of mainstream philosophy. On the contrary, we shall systematically confirm Apostel's theme that nihilism, in most of its determinate forms, is logically coherent, and philosophically assessible. It is largely because of this transcendence of classical resources that nihilism has been accused of being, for example, senseless; for it is a necessary condition for making sense, according to a revised version of the empiricist meaning criterion, to admit of classical formalisation⁹. The revised criterion is, hardly necessary to say, mistaken: much beyond the ken of classical formalisation makes very good sense, including many interesting philosophical theories. The first nihilist thesis is significant but false, for the simple reason that, sceptical arguments notwithstanding¹⁰, very many individual things do exist. $E(a)$ is true, and so significant, for certain a such as Mount Ruapehu, whence $(Sx)E(x)$, contradicting the nihilist thesis.

At least in the nineteenth century nihilism was linked with a much less pervasive form of "scepticism", namely with atheism, which denied the existence, not of everything, but of gods (and of devils, witches, angels, and so on).

* * * * *

Claim 2: Gods do not exist. Here ϕ is the category of existent gods, and the atheist-nihilist thesis is that there exist no gods, whence, in particular, God (i.e. the Christian God in the usual western context) does not exist. These theses do, of course, admit of classical formalisation (indeed theories of descriptions are commonly specifically tailored to account for such cases) and, sometimes more surprisingly, of classical "refutation" (see, e.g., Quine's proof discussed in EMJB, p.132 and Campbell's reworking of Anselm).

Much as there are many arguments designed to prove that gods exist, so there are several arguments, some equally fallacious, directed at showing that gods do not exist. These arguments against (existent) gods have not achieved quite the notoriety of arguments for gods, though they easily could have; for it is easy to envisage them clustered in philosophical textbooks as, for instance: arguments from evil, from ugliness, from purposeless; impossible nature arguments (from paradoxes of omnipotence, omniscience, etc.); wrong nature arguments (from problems of love, explanation, etc.); scientific arguments, extensive observation arguments; anticosmological arguments, etc. etc. But such arguments have receded in interest as atheists have ceased to be accounted dangerous sceptics, or sceptics at all.

The nineteenth century condemnation of atheists as nihilists was vindicated by the following sort of argument (cf. Olsen, p.515):

1. Nihilism is, as a matter of meaning, the dual doctrine that both
Na. Moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument, and
Nb. (Human) existence is empty, meaningless, everything is in vain, and the appropriate mood is despair. (Observe that here existence is presumed, rendering this version of nihilism inconsistent with thesis 1 above.)
2. Atheism implies Na. Thus, for example, Dostoyevsky's 'If God does not exist, everything is permitted', whence by detachment, the Nietzsche-Rosen form

of nihilism (4 below). But the larger argument is that moral norms and standards can only be justified in a theistic setting (something now widely rejected, that is readily enough put in doubt given a fact/value distinction).

3. Atheism implies Nb. Only theism ensures a purpose in life, a point to existence.

Hence by composition, atheism implies nihilism. But what implies what warrants condemnation warrants condemnation, and nihilism warrants condemnation because (a) whoever accepts Na would not feel bound by moral norms and would therefore tend to be, or be if it suited him, callous, selfish and even criminal, and (b) whoever accepts Nb would tend to despair and perhaps suicide. Hence the condemnation of atheism is vindicated.

The argument to nihilism, though valid, fails since crucial premisses 2 and 3 are readily countered; e.g. worthwhile purposes, like moral norms, do not have to (and cannot simply) answer back to God¹¹. There is no necessary linkage between atheism and nihilism, as Nietzsche realised, and counterexamples will show. The historical linkage of anarchism with nihilism, exploited analogously to smear anarchism, also fails at an analytical level.

* * * * *

Claim 3: There are no rules. Now ϕ is the class of rules, and nihilism coincides with one form, a non-literal form¹², of anarchism, according to which there are no rules. This is just one of the many unsympathetic opposition representations of anarchism; for anarchism implies not that there are no rules, but, what is quite different, social arrangements in which there is no (coercive) government, no concentration of enforceable power in ruling groups. Indeed anarchist positions typically rely upon the common acceptance of moral and other rules in their design of societies without governments as we know them (cf. Woodcock, Prologue): the societies envisaged would have organisation, and

rules, without state or government. Anarchism, in the intended sense, implies, then, none of the more characteristic theses of nihilism: it does not imply that everything is permissible or morally permitted, nor any of the metaphysical theses (as utopian works, which furnish countermodels, will show).

Nonetheless thesis 3, though not really anarchism, does yield other important forms of nihilism, by restricting rules to those governing conduct for instance. The thesis also permits restriction in very different directions, some of passing logical curiosity. If ϕ is taken to include rules of inference or rules of formation - the second at least a fanciful construal which appears to lack an historical basis - then logic in the modern sense of the theory of formal systems is ruled out entirely: there are no (formal) logics. And this we take to be a reductio ad absurdum of the position, since a sophisticated theory has already been developed. This does not mean that there is no hope for the notion of a purely ruleless, or lawless, logic, which is the form such an "anarchical" logic would presumably take. For a set of truths, not generated by general rules, can provide a logical theory. Naturally degenerate rules such as null rules, inoperable rules, and "particular" rules which simply take one of the truths into another, have to be excluded. But in a good sense none of these are rules: for example, a rule has to have by definition, a general lawlike character.

Nihilist theses have a way however of making a comeback: remove one thesis and another more carefully qualified thesis which is more difficult to eradicate springs up in its place. So it is with the wild claims that there are no logics and no rules or rule-governed systems: the first will reappear in such claims as that there are no correct or justified logics (claim 8 below), and qualification of the second will take us nearer the historical route nihilism followed.

Historically, serious nihilism has been exercised by much narrower classes of rules, by the actual laws of nineteenth century Russia, and less parochially, by the class of restrictions or permissions. The last gives a deontic version of Nietzsche's nihilism, which is supposed to imply the value form, that nothing is of (any) value. At this stage the route forks, into a deontological direction oriented to rules, restrictions and permission, and an axiological direction focussed on value. We shall continue in the deontic direction until the route ends, before tracking across rough country to pick up the axiological path.

* * * * *

Claim 4: Everything is permitted. ϕ is a class of restrictions, and the nihilist claim is that there are no restrictions, or, in Nietzsche's equivalent formulation, that everything is permitted. This thesis is supposed to lead to a thesis of despair, that - claim 10 - there is nothing of value, that nothing is worth anything, as follows (cf. Rosen, p.xiii):

- (a) Whatever is permitted is permissible.
- (b) If everything is permissible it makes no difference what we do.
- (c) If it makes no difference what we do, there is nothing of value.

For if there were something of value it would make a difference what we did, for instance to enhance or diminish it. Hence claim 4 implies claim 10. The argument is valid as it stands, and the premisses (can be made to) seem plausible. Nonetheless the argument has serious defects. Firstly, premiss (a) is mistaken; it is comparable with, though perhaps a little more subtle than, Mill's howler (p.234):

(a') Whatever is desired is desirable. Moreover (a) like (a') commits the prescriptive fallacy; it would have a non-evaluative antecedent entailing an evaluative consequent. And should premiss (a) be elided by replacing 'permissible' in (b) by 'permitted', the fallacy is simply transferred to

premiss (b). Kielkopf, in his attempted synthesis of nihilism, begins his defence of (a), and of its converse for the moral case, by identifying permissible with possibly permitted. Such an identification, which would guarantee (a), is a major mistake, much as the identification of desirable with possibly desired would be. For 'desirable' means worth having, which is very different from possibly desired. Analogously 'permissible' is value-laden, and means, not possibly permitted, but rather, not wrong; and not being wrong is neither necessary nor sufficient for being possibly permitted.

Secondly, there is an important, though somewhat subtle, shift in the second middle term, makes no difference, of the sorites. If everything is permissible then it makes no difference deontically what we do, i.e. as far as what is obligatory, wrong, etc., is concerned. But for premiss (c) to hold what is required is making no difference axiologically, and this making no deontic difference by no means guaranteed (see further RKU). Thus there is an equivocation on a middle term, so validity is lost once the premisses are made to hold. Hence neither universal permittedness nor universal permissibility, establish in this way - or in other ways, as modellings will show - the thesis of despair. Furthermore once the connections are broken down between theses in the deontic area, and on the other side, valuelessness and absurdity, these theses do not yield the characteristic nihilistic mood of despair, but may even lead to its opposite, e.g. to jubilation because of freedom gained through the breakdown of restrictions.

The breakdown of these connections also casts doubt on the adequacy of Nietzsche's way of formulating nihilism, but there are other ways in which the permittedness thesis can have rather devastating effects. These turn on the logic of permittedness, which is some independent interest. Nietzsche's formulation of nihilism if cast in the (significance unrestricted) form

(x) (x is permitted) entails such non-significant assertions as 'Socrates is permitted', 'The Blue Whale is permitted', 'Greenness is permitted'; so such a thesis is, in a familiar sense, nonsense (see the logical behaviour of classical quantifiers in SL, chapter 7). The (interesting) significant part of the thesis is the assertional form:

\$p\$ is permitted, i.e. that \$p\$ is permitted, for every significant assertion \$p\$. Symbolizing the connective 'that ... is permitted', i.e. 'it is permitted that ...', by \$Q\$, the thesis reduces in sentential form to \$Qp\$. Exceptional significant cases of the original thesis which escape this form can perhaps be paraphrased so as to conform to it, e.g. the borderline 'Happiness is permitted' can be rendered as 'it is permitted that one is (be) happy'.

What is the logic of \$Q\$? and how does it contrast, if at all, with the logic of \$P\$, which (as usual) symbolises 'it is permissible that'? The basic logic of \$P\$ (according e.g. to RLR, chapter 8) is that of a systemic functor of the possibility type; i.e. \$P\$ conforms to the postulates:-

R7'. $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow PA \rightarrow PB$, i.e.

where $A \rightarrow B$ is a thesis so is $PA \rightarrow PB$, with ' $\rightarrow$ ' symbolising implication; and

G'. $P(A \vee B) \rightarrow PA \vee PB$

Since $A \rightarrow A \vee B$, G' can be strengthened to the or-distribution principle $P(A \vee B) \leftrightarrow PA \vee PB$ ¹³. The semantical rule for evaluating \$P\$ is then, so it turns out, simply:

$I(PA, a) = 1$ iff for some \$b\$ such that \$Dab\$, $I(A, b) = 1$, i.e. \$PA\$ holds in world \$a\$ iff for some world \$b\$ which is ideal relative to \$a\$ \$A\$ holds in \$b\$.

It may appear that not even these basic systemic principles hold good for connective \$Q\$; in particular, it may appear doubtful that \$Q\$ is closed under provable implication, i.e. that R7' holds. But reflection tends to make these doubts vanish: for if \$A\$ really implies \$B\$ then \$B\$ is in a good sense part of \$A\$,

and it is impossible to satisfy A without thereby satisfying B: so any code which allowed A would ipso facto allow B. Wherein, then, lies the logical difference between P and Q? For one thing, in their interrelations with other notions; e.g. $OA \rightarrow PA$, what is obligatory is permissible, but $OA \rightarrow QA$ should be rejected, because for instance what is not permitted (e.g. legally) may nonetheless be obligatory. And because of such differences both the principles $PA \rightarrow QA$ and $QA \rightarrow PA$ should be rejected.

Now Kielkopf concedes that for non-moral kinds of permission there is a difference between Q and P, but claims (and this he says is 'the gist of his argument') that 'it is a phenomenological fact that there is no difference between the morally permitted and the morally permissible' (p.165). Since the equation of P and Q in the moral case is fundamental in Kielkopf's synthesis of nihilisms let us consider the equation further. Two claims can be separated: a correctness assumption, that what is morally permitted is permissible, and a completeness assumption, that whatever is morally permissible is morally permitted. Suppose that what is morally permitted is incorporated in a code, as well it might be, a moral code. Correctness requires that the code is correct, which it may well fail to be. Completeness is even more unlikely: it is more than a little tempting to think that such an ideal code is logically unobtainable for the sort of limited "automata" humans seems to be. Be that as it may, it is not difficult to point to states that are morally permitted (as things stand) which are not morally permissible, e.g. on an environmental viewpoint destruction of environmentally valuable systems, and, with a little more difficulty, to states which are morally permissible but which are not morally permitted, e.g. euthanasia, suicide, eating of humans. Kielkopf of course grants himself correctness, thereby automatically avoiding proper consideration of the latter cases, by his Millian equation: $PA \leftrightarrow \Diamond QA$, and in

the same way reduces the question of completeness to the principle $\Diamond QA \rightarrow QA$. This principle also seems far from correct: for example, it is certainly logically possible that cannibalism is morally permitted when it is not permitted. What is permitted is much more a conventional matter than what is permissible.

It is worth seeing how the equations we have rejected figure in Kielkopf's synthesis, and his derivation of QA. The main argument is the following:-

Kielkopf's Theorem: For any functor F such that $\Diamond FA \leftrightarrow FA$, any replacement system containing a theorem scheme of the form $\Diamond^n A$, with $n \geq 0$, yields FA , as a theorem, i.e. F is universal¹⁴.

Proof. By substitution in the possibility axiom, $\Diamond^n FA$, where as always $\Diamond^0 A = A$ and $\Diamond^n A = (\Diamond^{n-1} A)$. Then by progressive reduction steps using the condition on F and replacement, $\Diamond^{n-1} FA$, $\Diamond^{n-2} FA$, ..., $\Diamond FA$, FA .

Corollary 1. In any extension of the Lewis system S6 in which Kielkopf's equation $\Diamond QA \leftrightarrow QA$ holds, QA, i.e. Nietzsche's deontic nihilism is provable.

Proof. In any extension of S6, in which of course replacement holds, $\Diamond \Diamond A$; so the theorem applies.

Corollary 2. Similarly in extensions of S6, with Kielkopf's equations, PA, everything is permissible.

Proof. By the equations $PA \leftrightarrow QA$, so PA.

The most astonishing corollary is however this: if some things are forbidden morally the proposition that logic is unjustified has to be rejected (p.169). The argument is that if, for some p , p is forbidden then p is not permissible, so by corollary 2, $\sim \Diamond p$, i.e. $\Box \sim p$, which Kielkopf swiftly connects with the justification of logic. The connection, like the argument (which also incidentally illustrates the prescriptive fallacy), is mistaken; for even if some proposition is necessarily necessary this does not show that

all, or enough, of the propositions of the chosen logic are (see further claim 8 below).

Breaking Kielkopf's equations, especially $QA \leftrightarrow \Diamond QA$, destroys the argument to universal permittedness. And as relevant counter-models which take Q as a systemic connective will reveal, the argument to QA using $\Diamond\Diamond QA$ cannot be reinstated. This should emerge from the analysis of permissivism, to which we turn.

* * * * *

Claim 5: Everything is permissible. ϕ is the class of what is impermissible, and the thesis is that nothing is impermissible, everything is permissible. This is the thesis of permissiveness to which nihilism is commonly thought to lead.

Permissivism, a radical form of libertarianism, has a long and torrid philosophical history. For it was the way of the (philosopher's) Beast: 'the philosopher's Beast Within is a lawless monster to whom nothing is forbidden. It is so described both by moralists like Plato, who are against it, and by moralists like Nietzsche, who are for it'¹⁵. It was also the practice of the lawless (ignoble) Savage.

But permissivism, despite its remarkable history, is often regarded as an incoherent position. The main reason for this assumption appears to derive from application of principles of standard, classically-based deontic logic, in terms of which permissivism leads to logical collapse. Standard deontic logic makes the connection, $OA \leftrightarrow \sim P\sim A$, and is committed to the thesis that what is necessary is obligatory, in particular OA wherever A is a tautology. Hence $O\sim(q \ \& \ \sim q)$, whence $\sim P(q \ \& \ \sim q)$, contradicting the permissivist claim that $P(q \ \& \ \sim q)$. Triviality then ensues¹⁶, by the spread principle, $A \ \& \ \sim A \rightarrow B$. The position is

scarcely better with the weak deontic logics of Lemmon. Admittedly these logics reject the thoroughly undesirable thesis that whatever is a tautology is obligatory, but they include the almost equally damaging principle that if anything is obligatory then each tautology is obligatory, e.g., in Lemmon's symbols, $OB \supset O(A \ \& \ \sim A)$. Hence if anything is obligatory triviality is the upshot. So, contraposing, nothing is obligatory, Oblomov's thesis.

Classically this is of course the immediate inference from permissivism; for since $P\sim A$, for every A , $\sim OA$. But the permissivist does not have to say this, and might not want to. All he is committed to by his thesis is that nothing is forbidden, $\sim FA$ for every A , where $FA \leftrightarrow \sim PA$. And he may well deny that whenever some matter A is obligatory something else - $\sim A$ on the classical view - is forbidden. Certainly if he acknowledges, as he may, moral dilemmas, where both OA and $O\sim A$ for appropriate A , he will have a good case for rejecting the classical linkage. The difficulty here for the permissivist lies not in rejecting the classical connections then - for there are good independent reasons (we should contend) for rejecting these - but in explaining how any stuffing is left in the notion of an obligations's holding if nothing is forbidden, if certain omissions are not morally ruled out. The familiar literary-figure permissivist is not troubled by these considerations; for he boldly asserts, as classically expected, that nothing is obligatory either.

Though these permissivisms are hardly to be applauded, and fail, it can be convincingly argued, on substantive moral grounds, they are logically coherent¹⁷: in particular, they do not fall down on simple logical grounds, as sometimes charged. To show this consider a general semantical framework for the core deontic notions for obligation and permission and the modelling of versions of permissivism within this framework. Both obligation and permission, approximated sententially by connectives O and P , are minimally rational in that

they transmit over entailment; accordingly O and P are systemic, but for one twist to make the framework sufficiently general, namely that they are non-normal. The respective evaluation rules for O and P are then, for $a \in K$:

$$I(OA, a) = 1 \text{ iff } (b)(Sab \supset I(A, b) = 1) \ \& \ Na;$$

$$I(PA, a) = 1 \text{ iff } (Pb)(Tab \ \& \ I(A, b) = 1) \ \vee \ Ma;$$

where N and M are properties of worlds, i.e. they are 1-place relations defined on K. With conditions on S and T corresponding exactly to those given for $\Box$ and $\Diamond$ in RLR (i.e. hereditariness conditions) and no conditions on N or M, the logic of O and P is precisely as in the normal systemic case. That is, O and P conform to the following postulates:

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow OA \rightarrow OB$$

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow PA \rightarrow PB$$

$$OA \ \& \ OB \rightarrow O(A \ \& \ B)$$

$$P(A \ \vee \ B) \rightarrow PA \ \vee \ PB$$

In establishing completeness N and M are defined as follows:

Na iff $OB \in a$ for some wff B, i.e. a is an obligatarian world;

Ma iff $PB \in b$ for every wff B, i.e. a is a libertarian world.

Permissivism, with postulate PA, is then modelled by the semantical condition: Ma for $a \in O$, i.e. normal worlds are libertarian. In stronger relevant systems the condition reduces to MT, the actual world is libertarian. The adequacy of the postulate is almost immediately established.

Literary permissivism, with the further postulate, $\sim OA$, is modelled by adding the additional semantical requirement: $\sim Na^*$ for $a \in O$. This modelling condition makes it evident that there is nothing to stop permissivism, certainly not permissivism of the literary type, from adding postulates to the effect that this or that is permissible and further expected postulates such as $OA \rightarrow PA$: it will simply avoid stipulating that $\sim NT^*$, where T^* is the reverse world of the factual world, reality, T.

In sum, relevant semantical modellings establish the coherence, in a weak sense, of various permissivist ethical positions. But coherence is not truth. False positions may be quite coherent, and permissiveness is, even if more coherent than has been classically granted, hardly true. In a similar way the thesis of universal possibility, $\Diamond A$, can be modelled. But this does not mean either that the thesis is true, or cannot be refuted. It can, simply by producing some necessary truth. Similarly permissivism can be rebutted by pointing - it can surely be done - to something that it not wrong, such as, in ordinary circumstances, watching the sun rise or set.

The analysis and the justification of such (paradigmatic) claims as to permissibility or necessary truth is however something else again, as philosophers like Moore have stressed and as more penetrating nihilists have realised. So result "fall-back nihilisms" (considered below) which challenge the possibility of satisfactory analyses or water-tight justification of such paradigmatic claims¹⁸.

Kielkopf rightly rejects the thesis of universal possibility (which he does however reckon close to nihilism), on the ground that there are many necessary truths supplied by logic and mathematics¹⁹. But he does not in a similar way reject, as he should, the S6 thesis $\Diamond\Diamond A$ or $(\Diamond^n A \text{ for } n \geq 2)$ on the ground that necessary truths of logic are necessarily necessary.

* * * * *

Claim 6: Everything is possibly possible. ϕ is the class of necessarily necessary statements, and nihilism is the thesis $\Diamond\Diamond A$, Kielkopf's candidate for formulating nihilism. Kielkopf imposes two conditions of adequacy on any formulation N of nihilism, namely

- A1. N must entail QA;
- A2. N must (assert or) 'entail a metaphysical position that can be construed

as saying reality is absurd or totally unintelligible' (p.166).

And subsequently he suggests a third condition

A3. N must entail that there is no right logic. Kielkopf's ground for including A2 as well as A1 is that the Nietzsche-Rosen formulation of nihilism 'does not adequately express the total pointlessness or ultimate unintelligibility of everything'. His counterexample (p.166), of the theological voluntarist who accepts QA but has a reason for everything, is a worthwhile one: it not only indicates, what is independently evident, that QA does not entail the metaphysical position, but also begins to bring out how the metaphysical position, as Kielkopf construes it, lumps together a number of different theses that deserve separating out, namely

Nc'. Some things are without a reason.

Nd. Everything (or Reality) is ultimately unintelligible.

Ne. Reality is absurd.

Nf. Everything is totally pointless.

Nc', which unlike the other theses is particularly quantified, amounts to a denial of the principle of sufficient reason, a principle sometimes reinstated as the first law of dialectics (cf. Novak, p.77ff.). It is evident from quantification modellings that Nc' is not sufficient for the thesis

Nc. Everything is (ultimately) without a reason,

which is what is required to make the thesis comparable with the other theses Nd-Nf fit to count as nihilism. It thus emerges that associated with each of these different principles Nc-Nf there are three sets of positions, not two.

Consider, to illustrate, the Hegelian principle

H. Reality is rational

or its quantificational expansion

HQ. All that is real is rational²⁰.

This is denied by existentialism, which adheres to the particular thesis ~HQ,

and strongly denied by that nihilism which has it that nothing that is real is rational: Reality is thoroughly irrational. A familiar triadic situation thus prevails. Though the metaphysical issue separating Hegelians and existentialists as to the rationality of reality may appear difficult, if not impossible, to settle conclusively, the nihilistic position is surely false, it is often thought, and is refuted simply by reference to real things that have paradigmatically rational explanations. This is to miss the point of the nihilist thesis which need not deny local explanations, but insists rather that explanations sooner or later, and mostly sooner, give out, in a damaging way for rationality assumptions. Such a modification, reflected by the insertion of such terms as 'ultimately', bring nihilism much closer to existentialism when that too is explained in terms of reason(s) sometimes giving out (however differences may remain as to the extent to which reason fails). After these modification it is the Hegelians who appear to be in the difficult position of supplying a - new - model of explanation under which nothing is ultimate and reasons never give out (e.g. a cyclic model, which however requires types of explanations beyond those of the tree forms of accepted deductive and inductive explanation)²¹.

It is worth recording, before returning from this impressionistic detour, that practically none of the entailments supposedly connecting Nc, Nd, and Nf hold. Consider (i) x is pointless; (ii) x is incomprehensible; (iii) x is impossible; (iv) x is without sense (i.e. senseless); (v) x is without reason. None of (i)-(v) entails, or is entailed by, another. Perhaps, however Nd does link with Ne when absurdity - a terms smudging (and thereby linking) so many fundamental notions - is equated with incompatibility, since incomprehensibility and unintelligibility are (?) coentailing. It appears indeed to be equivocation on absurdity that has led to the conflation of many

distinct nihilist theses. For consider the different theses that are equated as absurdity moves from meaningless to impossibility, to incomprehensibility, to being without reason, to pointless - all of Nc through Nf and other theses as well.

Kielkopf's argument from $\Diamond A$ to Ne, the absurdity of Reality, is scarcely more adequate than his earlier argument from $\Diamond A$ to QA. The first assumption, which is used in claiming that $\Diamond A$ is nihilistic in conveying a sense of absurdity, is that contradictory states of affair or worlds are totally incomprehensible. The intended argument is perhaps this:- According to Kielkopf (p.170) in a non-normal

world, amongst what could happen, you accept what is totally incomprehensible to you, e.g. you accept all explicit contradictions as descriptions of what could happen. In such a world, one would indeed feel alien and possibly terrified.

But in the non-normal worlds of S6 and extensions it is not that explicit (truth-functional) contradictions hold: they fail to hold, and all tautologies hold. What fail are all necessitated statements, i.e. those of the form $\Box B$ for some B (and so, given the strict reduction of entailment, all entailments), and what holds, that is of importance, is $\Diamond A$. Thus for each contradiction C, $\Diamond C$ holds; and C, though it does not hold, could hold. Now although what Kielkopf claims as to incomprehensibility of contradictions, and the alienation and terror they cause, may perhaps be explicable given a modal Weltanschauung and a Strict upbringing, it is hardly defensible from a wider standpoint which takes relevant and dialectical logics seriously (e.g. from the viewpoint of RLR). For explicitly inconsistent situations can be designed and exploited logically, their implications follow through, their features deduced, and so on; in short, they exhibit the marks of being comprehensible. And should the actual world turn out to be inconsistent - as dialectical logics would have - one's alienation would hardly be increased or diminished (for, as we know alienation

is typically caused by quite other factors than inconsistency, e.g. by social and political conditions and by conditions of work).

The preceding argument, from $\Diamond A$ to absurdity (or a sense thereof), was an important preliminary, designed to soften us up for the main argument from $\Diamond\Diamond A$, which however applies the argument from $\Diamond A$ to absurdity. The main argument accordingly fares no better: indeed it should be rejected step by step. The argument in outline is this:

(a) The truth of $\Diamond\Diamond A$ implies being on the brink of (more precisely, one R-step from) absurdity, i.e. one R-step from a non-normal world.

(b) 'Being one [R-]step removed from absurdity is not significantly different from being right in it' 'for having the feeling of absurdity, i.e. subjective absurdity' (p.170).

Ergo, the truth of $\Diamond\Diamond A$ implies being in subjective absurdity. But

(c) Being in subjective absurdity implies 'that the world is totally unintelligible'.

An unstated detail, which helps explain the argument, is that a simple modelling condition in modal logic for $\Diamond\Diamond A$ is this: for some world b which is non-normal, b is R-accessible from the actual world, or Reality, T (i.e. $(Pb)(\sim Nb \ \& \ RTb)$), where a non-normal world is (as before) one where, though all truth-functional tautologies hold and no truth-functional contradictions hold, no necessitated statements hold, and accordingly all possibilitated statements hold. In $S6$ and extensions it is supposed in the semantics that T is "normal". That is, where b is a non-normal world $\Diamond A$ holds in b , whatever A . However though normal T is, by the modelling conditions, only one R-step removed from a world where $\Diamond A$ for every A , i.e. where the universal possibility assumption holds.

What is claimed in premiss (a) goes beyond what the semantical modelling will support. Kielkopf supposes that the semantics tells us that, given $\Diamond A$, 'we (can) always move into a world which is totally absurd, viz. one in which everything is possible'. But - quite apart from the moving and brink metaphors which modal semantics can hardly supply, and the eminently rejectable equation of total absurdity with universal possibility - the semantics only tells us that a world where some impossibilities, such as $\Diamond(D \ \& \ \sim D)$, hold is R-accessible. As remarked, such impossible worlds (with perhaps isolated contradictions, e.g. modally they never affect truth-functional statements) are not incomprehensible; and they are not absurd in Kielkopf's sense, or in other senses.

Premiss (b) is perhaps the weakest link in the argument. Being one world away from absurdity is very different from being in an absurd world. More generally, being one step removed from some disaster is often very different, and feels very different, from the disaster. Kielkopf's only defence of premiss (b) is this: 'I would certainly not feel that the world was intelligible if I accepted that it could always change so that it would be totally unintelligible'. The defence not only mistakenly equates total unintelligibility with universal possibility, and possibility of change with, what is quite different, R-accessibility, but makes a large and dubious assumption, that given (as Kielkopf assumes) the factual world T is intelligible, there could not be an absurd world (whatever that might be) such that every A that is necessarily true (in T) holds in Ω . It is far from evident that such an assumption holds. Finally, Kielkopf does not defend (c); and it is not readily defensible and is all too readily countered by cases of intelligible worlds inhabited by thoroughly confused beings. However (c) could be dispensed with and A2 correspondingly weakened: subjective absurdity, or (a little differently) the absurdity of perceived life, not Reality, would be

enough for Kielkopf's synthesis, were the rest of it to work. But the rest does not, and, it is conjectured, cannot. For there appear to be no necessary and sufficient conditions for an adequate formulation N of nihilism. Nihilisms form a family, irreducibly.

Kielkopf's argument for subjective absurdity is an indirect one, from his unifying postulate for nihilism. But in those authors he appeals to in introducing the requirement that nihilism must somehow account for a 'feeling of absurdity', Camus and Nagel, absurdity - the absurdity of life, not reality - is argued for rather more directly.

* * * * *

Claim 7: Life (or human existence) is absurd. ϕ is the class of non-absurd serious human situations, and nihilism is the thesis that every serious human situation is absurd or, more succinctly: The human situation is absurd, or: (Human) life is absurd. The qualification to serious cases may be replaced by others, e.g. to rational cases, or deleted altogether, for instance, on the questionable ground (urged e.g. by Nagel) that humans are bound to take their situation and lives seriously. The thesis itself, which is familiar from existentialist literary productions, especially those of Camus, is advanced and argued for in a somewhat clearer fashion than usual by Nagel²².

The argument to absurdity - which has much in common with an argument for epistemological scepticism - is however defective, and for similar reasons to corresponding arguments leading to scepticism. Much turns on how absurdity is characterised, and here Nagel relies upon an excessively low (re)definition of absurdity, much as scepticism relies, and thrives, upon excessively high standards for certainty and knowledge. A main characterisation Nagel offers, which is adapted from Camus, is as follows:

In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretention or aspiration and reality (p.718)²³.

Then follow several examples of "ordinary life" absurdity which are supposed to fall under the account. Unfortunately the account also appears to catch - though what it catches depends on which discrepancies rate as conspicuous - rather familiar aspirations and pretensions which do not rank as absurd. For instance, ordinary little Bert aspires to be Prime Minister, while Bill's ambition is to be a millionaire; and K is pretender to the throne though there is no hope that he will ever attain it. The account would appear to make unrealisable aspirations absurd, though many are not. Also rendered absurd under the account are many non-absurd situations where people are systematically fed mistaken or misleading information. Really, the genuinely absurd situations in which figures like Don Quixote and Woody Allen appear are to be contrasted with most everyday situations, just as dreams are to be contrasted with everyday experience. It is worth keeping a grip on these contrasts to avoid being eased by the philosophical sceptic into the position where every human situation is absurd, where all experience is (or may be) dreaming.

Moreover the account is not general enough to cover, as it should, situations beyond the actual, what might happen; and it does not even fit particularly well with the main application Nagel wants to make of it, which assumes the discrepancy - or collision as Nagel now calls it -

between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt (p.718).

It is this collision (it is said) that makes life absurd. The account of absurdity is supposed to apply in the following way in the philosophical case:

- the aspiration or human pretension is taking life seriously, but
- the real situation is that life is not serious, that seriousness is gratuitous (at least sub specie aeternitas); hence
- the conspicuous discrepancy between human pretension and the reality of the

human situation.

According to Nagel his

analysis requires defence in two respects: first as regards the unavoidability of seriousness; second as regards the inescapability of doubt (p.719).

But in fact there are other important assumptions in the "analysis" which require defence; namely (3) that this sort of discrepancy implies absurdity; and (4) that the universal possibility of doubt is an adequate basis for not taking things, the real situation, seriously. These assumptions receive no satisfactory defence in Nagel, and indeed undermine one another, e.g. if everything is open to doubt (1) certainly is, as is the argument. It may look, however, to put the best front on it, as if (3) is given definitionally, (1) is more psychological data and in any case plausible, and Nagel's supplementary argument for (2) - the step back argument - also supports (4).

The stepback argument is a many-faceted one. The first component is this:

humans have the special capacity to step back and survey themselves, and the lives to which they are committed ... and the view is once sobering and comical (p.720).

Semantically we transfer from T to a situation d from which we view T and our situation in T: this is presumably the 'point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous' (p.719). But the view from d is varied, and it may cause not amusement but increased seriousness. What shows the view undermines seriousness? Nothing so far at all: thus a further component - a heavy sceptical component - of the argument has to be wheeled in:

We step back to find that the whole system of justification and criticism, which controls our choices and supports our claims to rationality [and seriousness], rests upon responses and habits that we never question: that we should not know how to defend without circularity, and to which we continue to adhere even after they are called into question.

This giving-out of justifications argument is however broken-backed as an

argument to absurdity. For the 'natural extension' proposed is from wider contexts in which alternative standards make our lives comical or absurd to (still) wider contexts in which no standards make all our lives absurd. Nothing warrants that extrapolation. But there is a further sceptical argument to be considered:-

'Justifications come to an end' thereby providing 'universal doubt with its object', and allegedly making it inescapable, but we make no adjustments to our serious behaviour.

We see ourselves from outside, and all the contingency and specificity of our aims and pursuits become clear. Yet when we take this view and recognise what we do as arbitrary, it does not disengage us from life, and there lies our absurdity (p.720).

Here several different elements are conflated; none of them, when disentangled, sustains the intended analysis.

Suppose, for the moment, that justifications for actions do come to an end (certainly a person's finding of justification may); it does not follow that such action is arbitrary, and Nagel only reaches that conclusion by sliding there. The slide goes through contingency. But the contingency does not imply arbitrariness ($\forall A \neq \text{Arb } A$). The fact that it is contingent that someone does something does not imply that it is arbitrary, or not to be taken seriously. Likewise the fact that something, A, is open to doubt does not imply that A is not to be taken seriously. These may be the arguments of the sceptic, but that does not make them any more valid. It is a contingent matter that da Costa lives in Brasil, but it is hardly arbitrary. It is open to doubt that the present drought in NSW will continue; even so the continuation of the drought is a matter to be taken seriously. Indeed we can go further: one can adhere to the libertarian thesis that every proposition can be doubted²⁴, i.e. $\Diamond A$ - a thesis that can be defended on Meinongian grounds for instance, as a sort of obverse of Meinong's freedom principle that any proposition whatsoever can be

assumed, given that whatever can be assumed can be doubted. Alternatively the thesis may be defended by ostentation in much the way that the parallel thesis "anything at all may be disputed" is defended, namely given any arbitrarily selected statement we'll exhibit someone, ourselves if necessary, who disputes it or doubts it. Thus, for example, you put up the statement "anything at all can be doubted": we produce a traditional or a classical logician who cites the "laws of thought", say, as indubitable, or some empiricist (who may be one and the same as the logician) who reports some incorrigible deliverances from sense perception.

But the universal possibility of doubt thesis does not lead to scepticism, because such principles as that what is known cannot be doubted ($KA \rightarrow \sim \Diamond DA$) fail rather conspicuously. The case of necessary truths makes this evident enough. Where $\Box B$, B can be known on logical grounds, and moreover justification procedures for B do not run out (as we shall see in 8 below). None of this however excludes the possibility of doubt about B, and the universal doubt thesis would only run into difficulties on this move if it were mistakenly supposed - as supposed it might be - that doubt implied possibility, i.e. $DA \rightarrow \Diamond A$ - which would lead by $\Diamond$ -distribution to $\Diamond \Diamond A$, and hence to the undermining of logical justifications of $\Box B$ (in the ways we have already seen). Rather as the universal possibility of doubt thesis does not undermine logical necessity, so it does not undermine certainty, truth, seriousness, rationality, etc.: these classifications remain standing, untouched, as they stood before modern Cartesian methods of doubt were unleashed.

Some propositions that can be doubted are propositions to be taken seriously, others are not; some are certain and others are not, and so on. The sceptic commonly tries to make it look as if certainty, seriousness, etc., were undermined by sliding from the possibility of doubt to doubt; for certainly

what is doubted is not certain. Thus he may shift, as Nagel illicitly does, from "x can be doubted" to "x is open to doubt", and thence from the openness to doubt of x to "x is in doubt". But the central principle involved in the sceptical slide, $\Diamond DA \rightarrow DA$, is invalid; and once the problem is glimpsed the argument is not readily restored.

Given these points there is no collision between seriousness, for instance about the continuation of droughts, and the possibility of doubt about this, or about anything else, and accordingly no absurdity so generated: that is, assumption (4) fails completely. There may be a collision between seriousness and arbitrariness (depending on how arbitrariness is construed), but no argument establishes - or can establish - arbitrariness in the requisite sense; certainly mere contingency, or alternatively dubitability, does not. That is, in the case of the arbitrariness argument the collision, or conspicuous discrepancy, required is not proven, and is not there. And even if it were, it is open to reasonable doubt that it would warrant the absurdity judgement: that is, assumption (2) is also outstanding. Nagel's sceptical argument to life's absurdity fails.

There is a further thing that needs to be said about arguments like those of Camus and Nagel for the absurdity of the human predicament; it is a thing that is important as regards the nihilism generated by modern industrial society and its social and political pressures. A modern image of the nihilist is as a robot-like conformist produced by modern industrial society, with its familiar assembly and supermarket lines, its queues, its seemingly endless licences and hierarchies of authority. (But there are also other nihilist types, e.g. Kafkaish characters, for which modern industrial society has to answer.) The nihilistic despair or hopelessness of those alienated by such a society is of a different character from that attributed to earlier nihilistic prototypes: it

ranges (cf. Olsen, p.515) from indifference and ironic detachment to sheer bafflement to deep anger and hostility. But the disaffection is not a mere physical one; it is caused by alterable social and political conditions. The absurdity which intelligent modern nihilists of this variety feel, is the result, to put it in Camus' terms, of a serious discrepancy between how things are socially and how they might easily or realisably be. This sort of "absurdity" - unlike Camus-Nagel universal absurdity - does have a solid basis. Accordingly, to represent the absurdity of life as a universal, unavoidable, and inevitable feature (evident at least to the more reflective), is, if it is intended to comprehend such modern disaffection and nihilism, a serious misrepresentation: it offers yet another cop-out for modern industrial society; it supports, in an oblique way, the social and political status quo²⁵.

Nagel's case appear to rest at bottom on the thesis that we do not know how to defend without circularity our whole system of justification procedures: Kielkopf is concerned only with a special case of that general thesis, namely that we are unable to justify our justification procedures for logic (see p.167). If, as we now try to indicate, the special case fails, so does the general thesis.

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Claim 8: There is no correct logic. Kielkopf, having completed his argument that his two conditions of adequacy are satisfied under his formulation of nihilism, $\Diamond A$, is quick to press his advantage: moreover we have to accept it [$\Diamond A$] if we cannot show that there is a correct logic (p.170). Observe that this claim, deintensionalized to:

$\Diamond A$ unless there is a correct logic, and then generalised to
A4. If there is no right (i.e. correct) logic then N,
is precisely the converse of A3. This leads to the current formulation of

nihilism, with ϕ as the class of correct logics.

Explaining what counts as 'a correct logic' is important if the objection to the thesis that there is no correct logic as self-refuting is to be avoided. Nihilist theses are particularly vulnerable to the criticism that they are contextually self-refuting or the like. This is especially conspicuous with (philosophical) theses such as "There are no philosophical theses" (which Rosen includes in Wittgenstein's nihilism) or "There can be no (correct) theses". On the face of it it looks as if "There is no correct logic" is in a similar predicament. For any argument for the thesis requires a logic, which, if the argument is to succeed, will have to be correct; put differently, verification of the thesis is going to refute the thesis. This impasse can be avoided by appropriate adjustment in what is meant by 'a correct logic': if logical truths can be separated from a correct logic.

Unfortunately for the assessment of his claim connecting formulations 6 and 8, i.e. theses A3 and A4, Kielkopf nowhere explains what counts as 'a correct logic'. However some useful conditions on a correct logic can be learned from the details of his argument, and these are enough to dispose, at least temporarily, of the self-refutation objection. One half of the argument can begin in this way:- Although it is a necessary condition on the correctness of a logic that its theses be true this is not sufficient; for the theses must be necessarily true, i.e. logical correctness entails necessity. But similarly it is not enough that the theses are necessarily true: it must be a logical matter, a matter of necessity, that this is so, i.e. the theses must be necessarily necessary. But given

K3. If L is a correct logic then its theses are necessarily necessary (and its primitive rules preserve the property of being necessarily necessary),

A3, in Kielkopf's form, does follow, since $\Diamond A$, i.e. $\sim \Box \Box A$, negates the

consequent.

Not only however are there problems about vindicating K3: K3 does nothing to support A4. What is required is the converse of K3,

K4. If L is a logic whose theses are necessarily necessary, then L is correct, together with a very liberal interpretation of what counts as a logic, which lets us assemble any statements into a logic. Then let A be any statement such that $\Box\Box A$. Then the logic L consisting of A is correct by K4, so confirming A4, in contraposed form. But suppose there are some restrictions on what statements can make it into a logic, e.g. 'Brothers are male siblings' doesn't say, because it does not conform to familiar requirements of truth in virtue of logical form. Then the argument only shows that where there is no correct logic $\sim\Box\Box A$ holds for logical A, not generally as required.

Kielkopf's standards for correctness of a logic, if astonishingly slack as regards K4, are much higher than those commonly imposed when it comes to K3: for commonly logical truth is taken as a necessary and sufficient condition for correctness of a logic. This commonplace condition makes K3 more difficult to establish, and destroys K4 if, as is usually claimed, there are necessary truths which are not logical truths. As to the latter, let L be a logic which contains a statement A which is necessary, and indeed necessarily necessary, though A is not logically true. Then L, even if in order according to K4 standards, is not correct, since it contains statements that are not logically true. Kielkopf lets himself out of this sort of difficulty for K4 by assuming that 'logically necessary' is 'synonymous with "is a logical truth"' (p.171). While "logical truth" can be adjusted to guarantee this connection, the move, like the semantics on which it rests, again violates requirements commonly imposed on logical truths, e.g. truth in virtue of certain sorts of (rather restricted) logical form.

There is no need to try to adjudicate on the conditions that should be imposed on what counts as a 'logical truth'. For A4 is false, independently of this, as inspection of its contraposed form A4'. If for some A, $\Box\Box A$, then there is a correct logic, reveals. Consider a statement B, of the form $\Box\Box A$, about whose truth there is agreement, e.g. $\Box(p \supset p)$, i.e. $\Box\Box\sim(p \& \sim p)$ (the matter of agreement is not especially important, just convenient). The correctness of B, e.g. of the double necessitation of an instance $\sim(p \& \sim p)$ of the law of contradiction (if it is correct), is hardly enough to guarantee that there is a correct logic. For the logic BL with no rules and sole axiom B, even if minimally a logic, is not correct. For it does not even represent correctly the classical tautologies or the first degree logical truths. Correctness is not achieved by saying nothing - by silence - or by saying very very little: it requires, not comprehensiveness or completeness certainly, but enough of what is correct²⁵. Compare correct answers to questions, especially examination questions: and consider the question: How much structure must a minimally correct logic have? It seems (what RLR argues) that a correct logic must have, for example, an implication symbol conforming to a modus ponens rule and to certain axioms. This BL does not imply or guarantee; and accordingly A4' is false.

The rejection of A4 leaves two questions of interest open. Firstly, how does one formulate at a systemic level, if it can be done²⁶, 'There is a correct logic', given that $\Box\Box A$ is not adequate to the task. There is also the question of how a less than trivial non-systemic formulation would go - (PL)C(L) being a trivial formulation. The second question, which we cannot so easily put aside, is whether the nihilist argument for 8 in any case succeeds, since it depends, not on A4, but only on A3 or, more specifically, K3. If we grant K3, as it is tempting to do, the question is how do we establish it, and put down the

nihilist case against it. The answer to how we establish it is, through a (revised) version of Carnap's procedure (at the end of MN); namely we carry the formalisation of the semantics of a correct logic to a sufficient point that we can prove the L validity of the theorems of L (a slight extension of US will show this for any logic). Then where A is a L-theorem, logically provable logically true A. But if what is provable is true, as it must be for a correct logic, then logically true, logically true A. But what is logically true is logically necessary (and logical truth distributes), so $\Box\Box A$. Like all arguments, the argument is not assumptionless, and accordingly, insofar as the assumptions can be challenged, not watertight.

Kielkopf, however, claims 'that we cannot abandon the logic [classical sentential logic] whose ultimate grounds we cannot justify' (p.173); in other words, though each theorem is necessary that necessity cannot be proved (p.172). Kielkopf's case is that from an epistemological perspective it is not necessary that it is logically necessary that $(p \ \& \ \sim p)$, i.e. keeping the different modalities distinct, $\sim\Box\Box(p \ \& \ \sim p)$, or $\Diamond\Diamond(p \ \& \ \sim p)$. Kielkopf then

submits that such epistemological claims can be expressed simply as "It is not necessary that it is necessary that $(p \text{ or not-}p)$ " or "It is possible that it is possible that $(p \text{ and not-}p)$ " ...

Given that epistemic and logical modalities are mixed in this way, $\Diamond\Diamond p$ does follow. For $p \ \& \ \sim p \rightarrow p$, and $\Diamond$ distributes, whence upon equation $\Diamond$ with $\Diamond$, $\Diamond\Diamond p$. But the equation can hardly be accepted. It is doubtful that logical possibility is necessary for epistemic possibility (which, unless sentient creatures are aggregated, or averaged, or some such, varies from one to another); it is certainly not sufficient, which is what Kielkopf's argument would require. Thus the argument fails.

The question of the correctness of a logic is not independent of the question of a justification of a logic. For explaining the correctness provides a justification; and conversely a really satisfactory justification establishes correctness. Hence the next intimately connected nihilist thesis.

* * * * *

Claim 9: There is no (ultimate) justification for the statements of logic;
i.e. logic (even a correct logic) is without justification. This formulation, already criticised implicitly, is, in turn, a special case of a much more sweeping claim of nihilism:

9g. There is no justification for any of the basic or central statements of our conceptual schemes.

This general theme (which varies Nc) yields, by restriction, many special cases of philosophical interest other than 9, for instance the ethical pair

9m. There is no justification for ultimate moral (deontic) judgements, and

9v. There is no justification for basic value (axiological) judgements -
and similarly for other central classes of philosophical interest, e.g. claims as to existence, to knowledge, etc. The reasoning behind the theses is essentially sceptical, e.g. in the very characteristically nihilistic ethical cases, 9m and 9v, there is disbelief in or scepticism about the possibility of justifying moral judgements, value judgements, and choice of life-style in a rational way.

A refutation of 9, of the type outlined in combatting 8, also refutes 9g, but not 9m and 9v and other special cases of 9g. The sorts of arguments that do counter 9m and 9v are however well-enough known. They are included among those designed to combat moral scepticism. The usual run of these arguments are however reductionist, and accordingly fail because they try to reduce evaluative judgements, for instance, to what they are not, e.g. rules or judgements of

preference or satisfaction or about pain and pleasure, etc. But although evaluative judgements do not reduce to their emotive and factual bases they can be connected with these justificatory bases by way of their semantical analyses. And then it can be explained how the bases do justify the claims based upon them though the claims do not reduce to the bases (for details, which are crucial, see SMM and SFV)²⁷.

No-justification nihilist theses such as 9v are not without their own serious problems²⁸. For example 9v has a self-refuting aspect if justification is itself evaluative, as accounts of justification through making good (as well as the related etymology of the term) imply²⁹. 9v is without proper foundation on its own grounds, since it includes itself within its own scope. Should it be reformulated to avoid this problem, e.g. by specially exempting 9v, it can reasonably be asked why 9v obtains exception, and why the same sorts of considerations that support 9v cannot also support other evaluative claims. Mainstream nihilist positions, such as Nietzsche's cannot afford to be caught with theses like 9v, because they include their own value judgements such as 10, that nothing is of any value, that things as a whole are worthless, which, if the positions are to hold up, cannot be admitted to be without foundation. Indeed could mainstream nihilism justify its thesis of (qualifying) despair, so, it would thereby refute nihilistic thesis 9v and so also 9g. The same applies if claim 10 is rebutted in the obvious way, by establishing that some representative thing is of value.

* * * * *

Claim 10: There is nothing of value; nothing has any worth. This very typical nihilist thesis has already featured as a supposed consequence of claim 4. There it was called, not too misleadingly given its role, the thesis of despair. For it is from this thesis, especially, that many have reached the conclusion

that life is meaningless. (How it does underlie that gloomy conclusion is explained in UML.)

Some of the arguments for claim 10 have thus already been broken. Other arguments for the thesis generally assume at bottom the following form:- In order for an item to be of value it must be eligible and have property v. But no eligible item has property v. Therefore, no item is of value. One favourite candidate for v is the property of permanence. Material goods, the consumer goods of economics, are what most of us take as the locus of value: these are the eligible items. But material things that decay and pass away cannot, it is persuasively argued by way of examples, be of real value (real value being implicitly but illicitly equated with lasting value). Neither premiss should be conceded. Immaterial items such as truth and beauty have long been prized. And things that decay or pass away or are destroyed, such as palaces, humans, forests and rivers, can be of great value while they last³⁰. Other candidates that have in effect been advanced for v include being of independent interest (and not soon inducing boredom, e.g. when repeated), exciting some chosen jeremiah, and making some list or register sufficiently many times. It is not a testing feat to show that premisses of the argument fail for each such candidate, and are bound to fail given that some (paradigmatic) items are of value.

The argument is often given a further twist: it is argued, from a higher level so to speak, that there can be no suitable property v. A suitable property would have to be, variously, objective or person-independent, scientific or "natural", etc. The argument thus effectively takes us back to scepticism over values³¹. For there to be values, they would have to be of type t (objective, natural, etc.); but they are not, but are the opposite (subjective, nonnatural, etc.); therefore there are no values, and accordingly

no suitable property v. None of these arguments succeed, but explaining why in requisite detail is quite a business³². Some of the arguments depend on a false contrast, e.g. that between objective and subjective, and are met by navigating a way between the "opposites" (on such bogus dichotomies, see EP). Other arguments depend upon false expectations, arising from false premisses, e.g. that values have to be naturalistic.

The form of nihilism Hare thinks he has rebutted, that nothing matters, is virtually a variant upon claim 10, and admits of similar treatment. For to matter is to be important or significant (cf. OED), and significance imposes a similar map on things to value; it is similarly person-independent and similarly value-laden. Simply keeping the (dictionary) sense of 'matter' in view will enable us to fault material parts of Hare's argument. For Hare's ploy is to person-relativise the matter of what matters, which he does by first illicitly equating mattering with expressing concern. Thus in saying 'something matters or is important' 'what we are doing ... is to express concern about that something' (pp.33-4); and 'the function of the word "matter" is to express concern' (pp.37-8). In fact we can both express concern over what does not matter (much, or at all) and fail to express concern over what does matter.

Once the equation is made, relativism is easy: '... when somebody says that something matters or does not matter, we want to know whose concern is being expressed or otherwise referred to?' (p.34). Hare suggests that it is the speaker concerned (the concerned young man, z let us say, Hare is directing back to the straight and narrow). But the person referred to, like almost everyone (except the comotose, etc.), has many concerns, some of them serious enough. So something does matter: z's problem is solved! Unfortunately for z and Hare, Hare's argument is invalid, coming down to the following: z is concerned about some things, so something matters to him (about which he may express concern),

so something matters (cf. p.36). One cannot with any semblance of legitimacy argue in this way to value (which is what Hare switches immediately to in his next section). It is like the subjectivist response to scepticism about value: I like some things, so something is good for me, so something is good - an argument whose manifest invalidity has been adequately dealt elsewhere (among others by Hare in his earlier work). That something matters to one, e.g. not losing face or being caught out, does not show that it has any positive value (or that a life with such concerns has a worthwhile point)³³. It is enough however to show that something, e.g. helping to extinguish a large fire (or to suppress a potential fire storm) threatening many people's lives, is important, to rebut the charge that nothing matters.

Even if something does matter, that is not enough to defeat nihilism. Even if things are sometimes worthwhile, what help is that, when things remain incomprehensible. In fact ethical forms of nihilism, centred on the worthlessness of things and the failure of morality, are not sharply separated from metaphysical forms, as to the absurdity of life and the unintelligibility of the universe. So it has been easy, as we have seen, for authors to slide from one form to another, e.g. from the worthlessness of things to the absurdity of human life, to the absurdity of life, to the absurdity of things, to the unintelligibility of things.

* * * * *

Claim 11: In the end nothing is intelligible, comprehensible. ϕ is the class of ultimately intelligible situations or things, and nihilism becomes the thesis Nd, that everything (or Reality) is ultimately unintelligible. It is easy to be baffled by themes like Nc and Nd, and, as a result, to be lured off, or to rush off, in wrong directions. And wrong directions include all non-transcendental ones: specifically, sceptical assent to the nihilist themes, and reductive

attempts to remove them. A very typical reduction attempt is through conventionalism, with human conventions, especially agreement, providing (somehow) the final ground of intelligibility. 'The world's intelligibility is merely a human product, with no basis external to human agreement to certify intelligibility, rationality, meaning, value, even truth and correctness' (to paraphrase Rosen's presentation³⁴, p.11).

Wittgenstein, in his later phase, tried to elaborate this conventionalistic reduction, extending it beyond its usual (but not invariable) confines to account also for logic and for mathematical truth. This desperate doctrine is fundamentally mistaken: for it is not as if the world would be unintelligible, truth would disappear, without humans around to agree on truth and explanation. The truth of mathematics, for example, would not somehow be destroyed along with humans in a total nuclear disaster. These things are not human dependent³⁵. That ought to be obvious as regards claim 11, simply in virtue of the '-ible' suffices. But to suppose that agreement is alternatively to be sought among possible humans - or a little better, among rational creatures - is still to err: agreement is the product of creatures' perception and reflection, and mirrors something external behind agreement, such as the way things are. Conventionalism, trapped in a hall of mirrors, mistakes images for what they reflect.

Nihilistic theses like 11 intimidate just through the immensity of the claims they make. Once again in cutting these theses down to assessible size, application of analytic methods - such as those Moore (for one) repeatedly applied - pays off. Surely the operation of the modern equipment most of us are surrounded by, such as automobiles, television sets, computers, etc., is perfectly intelligible, even if many of those who are propped up by these objects do not understand their operation. Hence the Moorean claim: some

(quite complicated) things are comprehensible. Everything then turns, if claim 11 is to be made good, on what gets packed into 'in the end' which succeeds undercutting the Moorean claim. Several different things can be involved: for instance, a more comprehensive scepticism, which implies, for instance, that computer technicians and designers do not really understand what they are doing; or ultimate explanation puzzles, and the apparent eventually giving out of theoretical explanation (without the prospect of an ultimate theory which explains all theories, including itself). And a somewhat different range of responses is appropriate in each sort of case. Sceptical lines, for instance, are rather easily cut³⁶, but doing so does not remove other ways to claim 11 as further explicated.

Of course any nihilist will have a difficult time verifying, or even weakly confirming, such an explicated claim, 11++ let's call it. For one thing that would involve assumptions the claim eventually undercuts (i.e. self-refutation threatens again); for another what has to be shown is not, what is evident, that we lack very deep explanations and theories, but that such are unattainable. While the atheistic claim 11++ is a tall order, agnostic claims are easier to insinuate, especially general philosophical worries. To reduce these vague worries, specificity is again important. For what happens, in moving to explication, 11++, is that claim 11 tends to vanish. Such claims as that there can be no ultimate theory hardly sustain the worries associated with claim 11. In sum, claim 11 and its puzzles tend to vanish, apart from its heavy sceptical component which can be separately met (as in EMJB), into ultimate-explanation issues (which will be tackled elsewhere, especially YXE). Trading one philosophical problem for others in this fashion constitutes a³⁷ definite advance .

FOOTNOTES

1. This work has been much improved as a result of comments from a referee for the American Philosophical Quarterly (where a shorter amended version should appear), and of criticism by members of the Logic Group, Australian National University, to which an earlier version was presented in 1977.

The work forms part of a trilogy on closely interconnected topics, the other parts comprising UML and YXE. N. Griffin, coauthor of UML, also supplied points concerning the notion of absurdity considered under claim 7.

2. Apostel is forced to this pluralist approach by his much too classical a logical framework, which excludes adequate representation of core nihilist themes, such as that everything is permitted or possible. As a result the best he can offer, in his (accordingly) unsuccessful attempt to show nihilism logically coherent, is a spectrum of approximations to the core themes, which however elude his approximation net. For his approach, see Apostel, p.18, middle.

Note that authors' names also serve as reference indicators. Thus 'Apostel, p.18' refers to page 18 of the work of Apostel cited in the references. Acronyms, explained in the reference list, are however also adopted, primarily for frequently referred to work (by joint authors). Where a name or acronym is omitted from a reference, either the intended author is obvious from the context, or the author is Kielkopf, whose work has helped to focus this presentation.

3. In a text which, despite all its perplexing difficulty and obscurity, is bound to remain one of the basic sources for contemporary discussions of nihilisms.
4. Indeed from Sartre's characterisation of nihilism it follows that nihilism just is anguish. For nihilism is the 'permanent possibility of finding oneself "face to face" with nothingness ... this possibly is anguish' (p.17). But the characterisation, though revealing, borders on the non-significant; and it should be rejected because, for example, it fails to encompass most of the positions normally accounted nihilisms.

In fact Sartre subsequently abandoned his theme concerning the importance of despair and anguish. Thus, as regards anguish,

I have never known anguish. That is a key philosophical notion of the '30s. It came principally from Heidegger. It's one of the notions people were making use of, but to me it meant nothing (Interview, p.400).

5. With epistemic claims there is a typical scope difference between, e.g., the agnostic forms $\sim xKp$ and $\sim xBp$ and the atheistic forms $xK\sim p$ and $xB\sim q$, where p represents such claims as that there exists material objects, other minds, etc., and q claims like "inductive behaviour is justified".
6. A system investigated in EMJB and in papers on which that work builds.

7. Several of these sceptical arguments are considered in EMJB (chapter 8, §10), where too it is directly argued, applying criteria for existence that some things do not exist (see chapter 9). Gorgias's arguments, so far as they are directed against concrete individuals, rely on assumptions, which though widely accepted and philosophically tempting, are nonetheless false, such as that what exists cannot have come from what does not exist (see the discussion of ex nihilo fit in EMJB, chapter 2).
8. Another principle too often attributed to Meinong without due qualification, the Unlimited Characterisation Principle, that each thing has all the features assumed of it, leads to what might be reckoned yet another form of nihilism, that the universe, or Reality, is trivial, because everything holds. Under this position, which is refuted by the empirical fact that some things do not hold true, the universe would indeed be, what is often applauded, a seamless whole, in which no separation of truth and falsity could be effected.
9. Earlier on logical positivists had reached similar conclusions more directly, Ayer for example taking a nihilist thesis, as expressed by Heidegger in the appealing form 'Nothing noths', as a paradigm of the nonsense positivistic criteria removed. But in fact Heidegger's principle that non-existence does not exist - which follows from the nihilist thesis that everything noths (to noth = to not exist) - is perfectly intelligible, indeed true since properties like non-existence do not have the requisite determinacy to exist.
10. Much of logical interest is to be found in these arguments: but, since characteristically intensional, these arguments also lie beyond the scope of satisfactory classical formalisation, and thus have remained, until recently, logically neglected. For formal investigation of some of these arguments see EMJB p.662 ff. and references there cited.
11. An allied range of points, worked up since the Enlightenment, defeats the contention that the scientific world view leads to nihilism. Certainly more old-fashioned scientific approaches remain seriously deficient, especially in their attempted reductions of goals and purposes and more generally of intensionality. But on all but the very worst of these theories (which do have to be ditched), things still had goals and purposes (even if as a manner of speaking), intensional principles still applied, etc. Nor do new attempts at reducing goals and purposes fare better than old.

Of course the (pseudo-) scientific world view has also been applied to argue against such things as purposes and to nihilism. Consider Russell's argument, from unrestricted thermodynamical laws, against purposes, an argument which can be extended to yield nihilism (or differently, though Russell makes none of these applications, God's non-existence):

The second law of thermodynamics makes it scarcely possible to doubt that the universe is running down, and that ultimately nothing of the slightest interest will be possible anywhere (pp.24-5).

But all this can show is that that at some eventual stage (which may not persist) goal- and purpose-oriented objects will not exist. It does not show that there are not (now) - as there evidently are - goal-directed creatures, etc. (To discount these because at some future stage such

creatures will have vanished requires the erroneous permanence assumption, criticised in UML.)

12. Literally, anarkhos means 'without ruler' or 'contrary to authority'; and a ruler, or government, is neither necessary nor sufficient for laws or rules: even so 'anarchical' has come popularly to mean 'lawless'.
13. This lands us in what is called Ross's paradox, $PA \rightarrow P(A \vee B)$, e.g. that it is permissible to post a letter implies that it is permissible to post a letter or kill one's aunt. The assumption that there is some sort of paradox here is based on the false proposition that the permissibility of the consequent takes one some distance towards the permissibility of killing one's aunt. The proposition itself seems to be based on an application, never articulated and quite inadmissible, of Disjunctive Syllogism, $\sim A \ \& \ (A \vee B) \rightarrow B$. For it may certainly be permissible not to post the letter. However it is assuming more than standard deontic logics will grant to go on to the permissibility of not posting the letter and also either posting the letter or killing one's aunt, especially given the derivation of the latter disjunction. Still going on apparently remains tempting (and would presumably be warranted by a Lukasiewicz deontic logic). But so going on is to no avail in a duly relevant setting: there is no admissible route here to the permissibility of killing one's aunt, however desirable the act might otherwise be.
14. The argument also indicates in a simple way why S6 and its extensions are, as is well known, not modally combinable with S4 which yields $\Diamond A \leftrightarrow \Diamond \Diamond A$ or with S5 which delivers $\Diamond \Box A \leftrightarrow \Box A$. For these would yield the thesis of universal possibility, $\Diamond A$, contradicting such modal principles as that contradictions are not possible, $\sim \Diamond (B \ \& \ \sim B)$. But in relevant, as distinct from modal systems, $\Diamond A$ remains a real option, not inevitably leading to triviality (cf. RLR, chapter 8).
15. Midgley, pp.36-7, where too passages from Plato and Nietzsche are assembled. Curiously - such is the immense tangle in this area of freedom, license and restriction - it is also, at one modal remove, the way of God, and what faith is said to be characterised through: '... if Abraham's faith can be defined as "for God everything is possible", the faith of Christianity implies that everything is possible also for man'. 'Faith in this context ... means absolute emancipation from any kind of natural "law" and hence the highest freedom man can imagine'. 'Only such a freedom ... is able to defend modern man from the terror of history - a freedom, that is, which has its source in and finds its guarantee and support in God' (Eliade, p.161). If faith and freedom are to stand a chance, Eliade had better be wrong on most counts.
16. A substantially weaker version of permissivism, according to which whatever is logically possible is permissible, $\Diamond p \rightarrow Pp$, can, as Snare observed, be classically formalised without collapse. For this position only proceeds - perniciously enough - to reduce deontic "modalities" to alethic ones, permissibility to possibility. It is possible that the superpowers destroy the human race, so it is morally permissible.
17. Thus even positions like PA and $\sim OA$ conform to Apostel's theme that nihilism is logically coherent. A marked drawback of Apostel's excessively classical framework is that that excludes application of his own theme to these very typical nihilist positions.

The reason these permissivisms fail on substantive grounds is simply that some things, readily exemplified, are not permissible but morally forbidden, e.g. nuclear devastation of planet Earth. The point is developed in the text below.

18. Nietzsche's truth scepticism, which is distinct from his value and deontic scepticism, and which appears in such claims as that there is no possibility of discovering the truth, is likewise readily forced into a fall-back form - unless the ambiguous claim is about the whole or total or (differently) final truth. For a creature (e.g. a child at a computer terminal) may discover something that is true, such as an elementary arithmetic truth, in a range of ways, e.g. by skill, by accident, by luck, The problem then shifts to questions of justification, certainty of identification, etc.
19. Strictly the "new" empiricism which takes what truths there are in mathematics to be empirical should be rebutted at this point; but that too would take us rather far afield. For criticism of such empiricism (as well as of other types of empiricism) see e.g. EMJB, p.740 ff.
20. Hegel of course adopted the much more dubious converse as well. For the case for rejecting the converse, see EMJB, e.g. p.833.
21. This issue is pursued much further in YXE.
22. The argument advanced is, however, only one among those to be extracted from Camus. His best known argument, that concerning Sisyphus, is considered in detail in UML, along with a wide sweep of other arguments purportedly showing the meaninglessness of life, and apparent variations or complications of claim 7 such as: There is no meaning or point in (human) existence.

While Camus's notion of absurdity is usually thought to connect with that of meaninglessness, so that the claim that life is absurd is roughly the same as that life is without meaning, with the notion of absurdity Nagel introduces that connection gets broken. The lives of Nietzsche, Wagner and Scriabin were absurd enough in Nagel's sense but not so obviously without meaning. Nor does the converse connection hold; e.g. a quite empty life may be recognised as such (by the liver) and so induce no discrepancy between pretension and reality.

23. An initial semantical explication might take the following shape: a situation a is Nagel-absurd for x iff there is a conspicuous discrepancy between the way a is taken to be by x and the way a is, i.e. iff the situation b, representing the way a is taken to be by x, differs substantially from (is markedly dissimilar to) a - with similarity accommodated after the fashion of the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics for counterfactuals. Then people's actual lives are Nagel-absurd given that there is a marked dissimilarity between the situation representing the way people take their lives, namely with much seriousness which does not appear gratuitous, and the way Reality T is, namely lacking a basis for such seriousness.
24. This differs from the stronger dictum de omnibus dubitandum, that everything should be (or must be) doubted, promoted recently by Fromm and others, a dictum that encourages a healthy critical attitude to much dogma and conventional wisdom.

Freedom theses like Meinong's are defended in EMJB, pp.529-30, pp.863-4.

25. A similar point is developed in more detail in UML.
26. For similar reasons, correctness is not attained by nihilistic silence, or by purchase or a phenomenalist throwaway "language": cf. Wisdom's splendid discussion, and his explanation of how 'if you can't go wrong you can't go right either' (especially chapter 7).
27. If a metalogical formulation can be obtained it can presumably be reexpressed, by Gödel numbering, in a sufficiently rich, and comprehensive, system.
28. The analyses, which are not reductive, contain much apparatus which many philosophers find both difficult and problematic. That is perhaps as well: it would be wrong to give the impression that ultimate justification and ultimate explanation issues are simple, or, for that matter, can be met just through a semantical theory. Just one of these ultimate issues, that of existence, involves a great deal more: see YXE. These ultimate issues appear to be among the hardest there are in philosophy.
29. Thesis 9v is not a fall-back claim in the obvious way 'There is no justification for judgements that there are Xs' is a fall-back from 'There are Xs', where Xs comprise such items as material objects, other minds, gods, etc. There is however a justificatory claim 9v' concerning basic values, closely related to 9v, that is a fall-back claim.

Nor is claim 10 the claim 10', that there are no values, which is not a value judgement like 10, but a status or ontic claim. If 10' were true the point of 9v' would be removed, just as the point of fall-back claims is removed when that from which they fall back holds.
30. Thesis 9g faces similar destruction given appropriate central statements.
31. The argument from permanence, like several of the other arguments for thesis 10, is examined in much more detail in UML.
32. Much of the business has been undertaken in the literature however, and is brought together in work on moral scepticism.
33. Hare's further move (p.39) that 'you cannot annihilate values', all you can do is to change values, hardly helps. It suffices to demonstrate that there is some value to begin with, not to pronounce a dubious conservation of values theme. On the face of it it would seem that those who run bulldozers through rainforests do annihilate values; i.e. in the sense of 'value' in which it makes sense to speak of annihilating values, values, can be annihilated.
34. Much of Rosen's text is directed against Wittgenstein and "ordinary language" philosophy. To that extent it is misdirected, because the positions are not nihilist, or even sceptical. Linguistic philosophy, always smugly anti-sceptical, tended to avoid the problems raised by nihilism and, when it could not, to trivialise them (by conventionalist strategies however: 'we would say that ...', 'the received standard for ...'). And while there are undoubtedly nihilistic strands in Wittgenstein's work, a main thrust of his later work amounted to an endeavour to meet nihilism - by

conventionalistic reduction.

35. This deeply entrenched human chauvinism, incorporated in very much modern philosophy, especially that influenced by Hume or Kant, deserves a much more thorough trouncing than Rosen has so far succeeded in giving it. A significant start on this enterprise has been made in the innovative parts of environmental philosophy; for one example, see EP.
36. See the Moorean moves above.
37. Here, as at most earlier points, it has been taken for granted that nihilists are amenable to, if not necessarily committed to, broadly rational - as opposed to narrowly classical - methods: they need not be moved otherwise. But although the sceptical component of nihilism characteristically deploys rational methods, there is also a strong irrationalist element in modern nihilism. While it would be a mistake to claim that there are no rational methods - there all too evidently are - the serious limitation of these methods is easier to claim (if not to defend rationally), e.g. that they do not apply everywhere. This leads at once to another explication of 11. Traditionally, this theme was met by an extension of the principle of sufficient reason: that rational methods apply everywhere (that R(eality) is thoroughly rational). But this is just what irrationalists deny. For progress to be made beyond this blockage, some demarcation of rational and irrational methods, both so-called, has to be made. Irrationalists were certainly right in jeering at the restricted rational methods of positivists, empiricists, etc. Such is one of the themes of this tract.

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APPENDIX: Apostel and nihilist logics.

Apostel's framework for the logical treatment of nihilisms is too narrow; the sweep of theses he tries to account as nihilism is too broad.

Firstly, the framework is too narrow, primarily, because it is classically based. Thus Apostel has trouble both with nihilist themes that require features of neutral logic (e.g. with "Nothing exists", p.25), and with nihilist positions such as permissivism which call for distinctively nonclassical logical settings (see his discussion of $O \sim p$, p.25). These problems are however easily removed, along the lines taken in the main text.

Essentially all that is required then to obtain a comprehensive logical framework for nihilist logics is to reset Apostel's logical theory on a neutral relevant logical basis, with that logic duly tensed. Then the whole logical sweep of nihilist thought appears to admit of formalisation. The extent of

formalisation will depend of course on the state of what is formalised, e.g. on the extent to which it is precise, developed, etc. Of course too, formalisation of some parts will require use of chronological logic - to account for what Apostel has called 'dynamic nihilisms' - and other parts will call for investigation of notions not so far subject to much logical study (e.g. that of power as in Nietzsche's "will to power"). There is more to the logical enterprise, however, than formalisation (as Phalet's appendix to Apostel's paper in effect acknowledges). Another major part comprises semantical foundations and analyses. A substantial start in this enterprise for nihilist logics (not attempted by Apostel and only gestured towards in the main text) is made in RLR, chapters 8 and 9.

A second major problem with Apostel's logical explication of nihilism, is that it presents as nihilistic theses a variety of principles that are in no way nihilistic, but concern rather intensional reduction claims. The theses presented amount mainly to reduction principles concerning iterated intensional functors.¹ Thus, for example, 'deontic nihilism', which takes the respective weak and strong forms, $Op \supset P \sim Op$ ('where p is obligatory, it is permissible that it is not the case that p is obligatory') and $Op \supset O \sim Op$ (p.15). Such reduction theses do not take proper nihilistic form ("there are no ϕ objects"), they do not connect with scepticism, and they do not link with historical nihilism. In short, such theses do not, whatever their other interest, belong to the nihilist family.

1. Apostel's explication is disrupted in a further - but inessential - way by reduction themes. For, early on, he proposes several, very dubious, definitions of obligation in terms of preference (p.11) and conversely of preference in deontic terms (p.13).

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