

## THE LAW OF NON-CONTRADICTION

### Talking points:

1. When a person contradicts himself or herself, it usually means game over for their argument; exposing a person's views as contradictory is philosophical checkmate. But does the use of reasoning itself involve, paradoxically, a contradiction? To appreciate this, consider a rational person who demands that reasons must always be given for one's beliefs. We may ask of this person: "What about using reason itself? Can this be justified using reason(s)?" If not, then it seems that this person has contradicted himself: demanding reason be used to justify beliefs but not able to justify the use of reason itself. Similarly, can one really give reasons for laws such as the law of non-contradiction when using such a law is part of the reasoning process itself? In other words, can you use reason to justify using reason? In Chapter 2, you will discover that this is an example of a fallacy called *begging the question* (see SE pp. 52-53). If the answer to these questions is no, then it seems that a rational person is somewhat non-rational! Perhaps we can get out of this paradoxical conclusion if we consider philosophy as a game played, like any game, according to rules. On this view, the rules themselves are not justified, just as is the case when you play games such as soccer or badminton. Philosophers, then, attempt to formulate responses to fundamental questions by playing the game of rationality. Once we play this game, we buy into the law of non-contradiction. Furthermore, as we will discover in Chapter 3, once a contradiction is permitted, the game collapses and any and every proposition, no matter how absurd, is true. In other words, from a contradiction anything logically follows (see SE p. 83).
2. The definition of philosophy as inquiry wherein an attempt is made to formulate rational responses to fundamental questions is a working definition. We have to start somewhere, including embracing laws such as the law of non-contradiction. However, we must reflect from time to time on the use and limits of reason itself as a means by which we are able to answer fundamental questions. If we find that our reasoning processes are severely limited, we might ask what other game can we possibly play? What other modes of comprehension and knowledge acquisition are there, aside from that attained with the help of reason?

### Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think that the analogy between using reason and playing a game, where the rules of the game are not themselves justified, answers the paradox of reason, where we cannot rationally justify the use of reason?
2. If we are not going to try to reason out answers to fundamental questions, then how else can we go about answering such questions? What other game can we play?
3. Regarding alternatives to reason, will these alternatives enable one person to convince another of his or her beliefs? Or is the attempt to convince someone else of one's beliefs inevitably bound up with offering reasons?

