***Paradox is Here to Stay: A Review of Graham Priest’s Beyond the Limits of Thought***

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**Get used to it**: paradox and contradiction are inherent in human thought. Australian philosopher of logic Graham Priest is a primary champion of *dialetheism*, a philosophical position that allows some contradictions to be true and is based on extensions of classical logic, extensions that that are metaphorically similar to how Einstein extended Newtonian conceptions of physical truths. Priest argues that the classical Law of Non-Contradiction has too long held the western mind hostage and kept it from exploring other types of truth and developing other forms of logic such as *paraconsistent* logics. It is at the boundaries of human thought that these kinds of dialetheias or true contradictions arise most prominently.

In this volume Priest examines the boundaries or limits of thought in four areas, 1) the limits of **expression**, 2) the limits of **conception**, 3) the limits of **cognition** (what can/can’t be known), and 4) the limits of **iteration** (what can/can’t be calculated, operated on, e.g., the mathematical infinite). The book proceeds mostly historically, examining examples of the limits of thought in pre-Kantian philosophy such as Cratylus, Aristotle, Cusanus, Sextus, Aquinas, Leibniz, Berkeley, then explores the limits of thought in Kant’s noumena, categories, and antimonies, and then Hegel’s conceptions of infinity. Later Priest explores modern forms of mathematics and logic starting with Cantor, Russell, Ramsey, Zermelo, Von Neumann, then on into the limits of language with Frege, Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, and Derrida. Most of the chapters are readable by those with little or no experience with logical notation but some of the chapters (8-11) are rather technical. This second edition ends with three new chapters, one on Heidegger, one on Nagarjuna (co-written with Jay Garfield), and one on further reflections on dialetheism.

Priest sees these recurring contradictions at the limits of thought expressing a similar form and has developed what he calls the \*Inclosure Schema\* to describe their common structure. Priest concludes that throughout history human attempts to say the unsayable, to bring heaven down to earth (so to speak) have resulted in paradox and contradiction and, despite the many attempts to avoid, ignore, or get around them, they reappear later in new forms. The wise conclusion is to admit that some form of dialetheism is necessary for certain kinds of thought to proceed towards greater types of truth.

I’m not sure why Priest’s work hasn’t been discovered by more nondualist philosophers, those of us who are thoroughly comfortable with a worldview where human thought and reason are understood to be inherently bound by contradiction and paradox. If you are a Buddhist, Advaita, or Taoist philosopher, you are probably already very familiar with this territory and should be happy that western philosophers are slowly coming to understand what the philosophy of India has known for centuries: that the human mind is coextensive with conventional reality and truth in which all attempts to characterize ultimate-final truth [paramartha-satya], can only come up with paradox, contradiction, dualisms, oppositions, inconsistencies, incompleteness, and the like. Buddhist philosophy consistently employs paradox and contradiction in order to point out the limitations of the mind and conventional truth and point the practitioner’s awareness to the ultimate truth that lies waiting free of all forms of mental grasping.

If there a problem with Priest’s project it is that there is little or no support for the kinds of methodologies that could confirm and support his dialetheist philosophy, namely the methodology of meditation. Philosophers of India have employed dialectical reasoning and argument together with meditation for centuries and have therefore developed a deeper and more complete understanding of the nature of the mind and consciousness. In meditation the limits of thought are revealed and confirmed in ways that conventional methods of argumentation, discourse, language, and conceptualization are unable to. No need for dialetheism. Unfortunately, however, meditation is a long way from becoming a standard practice among western philosophers, but it is catching on in the culture at large for other reasons.

Whatever your background, if you are a philosopher and are interested in the larger metaphysical questions of philosophy—God, infinity, the absolute, fundamental ontology, limits and boundaries, etc., Priest’s book will delight you. I can also recommend Priest’s other books *In Contradiction,* 1987; *Doubt Truth to Be a Liar,* 2006; and the mouthful, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness,* 2014,(review forthcoming).