Crossing Boundaries

Graham Priest

January 10, 2019

1 From Mathematics to Philosophy

I suppose that my professional life started by crossing a boundary: that between mathematics and philosophy. Most of my undergraduate studies, and all my graduate studies, were in mathematics—all be the latter in mathematical logic. But by the time I had finished that, I knew two things: first, that philosophy was a lot more fun than mathematics; second, that I would only ever be, at best, a mediocre mathematician. So when St Andrews offered me a job in the Department of Logic and Metaphysics, I jumped at it. (In those days, as was the tradition in Scottish Universities, there were two philosophy departments: a Department of Logic and Metaphysics and a Department of Moral Philosophy.) To this day I have no idea why they offered me a job: they hired me to teach the philosophy of science. But I am forever grateful that they did.

Thus, when I became a professional philosopher, I knew virtually no philosophy. I have had to learn nearly everything I know about it by reading, talking to colleagues, and teaching it. (Something that students never know is that the teacher always learns more about the subject than do the students.) And I have loved every minute of this. In retrospect, I regard the fact that I came to philosophy without the blinkers imposed by an undergraduate education in the subject an enormous advantage. It has meant that I was free to wander the length and breadth of the land of philosophy, as its various regions took my interest.

It is not my aim to discuss this journey in detail here, though. For philosophy itself has made a journey in the last 100 years, crossing many boundaries of its own; and I am as much a product of the *Zeitgeist* as an

agent in it. In what follows, I will talk about some of the boundaries it has crossed, and, in the process, make a few comments about myself.

2 From Classical Logic to Non-Classical Logic

Formal logic is a distinctive part of philosophy, since it tends to deal in technicalities which can appear rather alien to those in other areas of philosophy. It is an integral part of philosophy none the less. It has close relationships with epistemology and metaphysics—though at some times, those metaphysical connections have been denied.

Formal logic has undergone significant developments in Western philosophy for over 2,000 years, theories of what follows from what and why, coming and going. Perhaps the most significant development in the history of the subject occurred around the turn of the 20th century, when sophisticated mathematical tools (such as formal semantics, algebraicisation, axiomatics) were applied to the subject for the first time. What emerged was so called classical logic—though how inappropriate this terminology is is evident to anyone who knows the history of the subject. This was the account of logic delivered by Frege and Russell, and polished by succeeding generations of logicians, including Hilbert, Tarski, and Gentzen. So successful was this account that it soon became the orthodox logical theory of its day; and it is still the account of logic that one will learn now if one takes a first course in logic.

From its origins, it has never been free of problems, however. Indeed, the problems concerning truth, conditionals, vagueness, were manifest. In the initial flush of success, these problems could be swept under the carpet. The paradigm of reasoning for logicians of this period was the mathematics of their day, and classical logic did a good job of accounting for the reasoning in this. Other things could be taken as fringe concerns.

Matters started to change in seriousness around the 1960s and 1970s, when it became clear that the mathematical techniques that delivered classical logic could be applied to deliver a whole host of other logics. And many of these non-classical logics appeared to provide a much more successful account of reasoning than did classical logic once one moves it away from the platonic mathematical heaven.

Unsurprisingly, then, we have since seen the rise of a sophisticated study of non-classical logics, their properties and applications. This, in turn, has

generated intense philosophical debates about whether classical logic can be endorsed as the "one true logic", whether some other system warrants this label, or whether there is any such thing. These investigations and debates now continue apace. Thus is was, that logic crossed over the boundary from classical logic to non-classical logic.[1]

Though my training was in classical mathematical logic, I had acquired an interest in non-classical logic as an undergraduate at Cambridge, when being supervised by Sue Haack. (She was then a PhD student, writing a thesis which would eventually appear as her *Deviant Logic*.) I found these logics technically fascinating, but could also see many of the philosophical advantages such logics possessed over classical logic.

For many years as a professional philosopher I taught logic courses, including many on non-classical logic. I had never intended to write a text book, but by the late 1990s I got fed up with the fact that there was really no text book on non-classical logic: one had to select many little bits of the research literature that were simple enough for undergraduates to understand. So it was that over one summer I wrote up my lecture notes. *Introduction to Non-Classical Logic* was the result.

The original *Introduction* covered only propositional logic. Several friends who used the book to teach told me that they had to augment the material with notes on quantified non-classical logic. I came to agree that leaving the matter at propositional logic was leaving the job half done. So I wrote to Cambridge University Press, suggesting a second volume on quantifiers and identity. Within the space of a few days, I had a contract from CUP for this. (I have never had a book accepted so fast!) So (not without some regrets about the amount of time it was taking me to write the material from scratch) I wrote the second volume. CUP eventually decided to publish the two volumes as one, producing the current *Introduction*.

It now seems to me that, for the most part, the undergraduate logic curriculum in philosophy departments has not caught up with developments in the subject. Many departments, because of their size, cannot afford to appoint a specialist logician, so some poor individual is assigned to teach the subject. They pull a text book off the shelf, and simply teach students to fill in the 1s and 0s. This can be not only rather dull, it can give the impression that logic was brought down by Frege on tablets of *Begriffschrift*, from Mt Jena, leaving the misleading impression that there is nothing more

[1]For more discussion of the revisability of logic, see Priest (2014).

to be said. The first course in logic being on classical logic, the second course, if there is one, is on metatheory. Now, of course one has to know metatheory if one wants to be a card-carrying logician; but most philosophy students do not, and they do not need to know how to prove soundness and completeness results. What they need to know are the techniques of non-classical logic (such as those of modality, counterfactuals, truth value gaps and gluts, intuitionism), since these have now become integral to many areas metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language.

It still seems to me that a first course on logic should cover classical logic. That, after all, is where contemporary logical techniques are at their simplest. But the course should also highlight the problem areas of classical logic, to avoid giving the impression that that is the end of the story. The second course on logic should be on non-classical logic. A more technical course, if one can be taught, should come later for those with the appropriate mathematical inclinations. I hope that *Introduction to Non-Classical Logic* is helping to move the curriculum towards something more appropriate to philosophy at the start of the 21st Century.

3 From the PNC to Dialetheism

The thought that contradictions cannot be rationally accepted has been high orthodoxy in Western philosophy. Aristotle succeeded in persuading philosophers, by means of arguments that can only be described as both convoluted and lame, that the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) was not only true but obviously so. (What this says about philosophers' rationality, I leave the reader to contemplate.) True, there have been some who have balked against the orthodoxy. The obvious example is Hegel. But such exceptions serve to underline the orthodoxy of the view, not to undermine it—particularly since most Hegel commentators since have tried to interpret Hegel as a friend of consistency. It is a striking fact that in Western philosophy every aspect of Aristotle's philosophy has been rejected, or at least seriously problematised, since his death—with one exception: the PNC.

In the first part of the 20th century, some progressive thinkers did start to challenge the orthodoxy, however. The most systematic was Łukasiewicz. But one also finds thoughts which challenge the idea in Meinong and Wittgenstien (after the period of the *Tractatus*). However, I think it fair to say that philosophy crossed the bridge to contemplating the possibility of holding that

some contradictions might be true only with the contemporary dialetheic movement.

I do not intend to imply by this that a rejection of the PNC is now orthodox; it most certainly is not. Rather, the point is this. In the 1970s and 1980s, dialetheism was viewed by most philosophers as so absurd as to be entirely ignorable.[2] This, I think, is no longer the case. As people have come to see how hard it is to defend the PNC, and as the possibilities of plausible applications of dialetheism to a number of different areas have grown, most philosophers have at least been forced to recognise that it is an option in logical space that has to be at least acknowledged.[3]

I first started to countenance the view that some contradictions might be true when I was writing my doctorate (which had nothing to do with the matter). The idea struck me as absurd as everyone else. But considerations to do with Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, which quickly moved to closely connected issues concerning paradoxes of self-reference, eventually persuaded me otherwise. I started to work out the idea of how this might be possible in formal logical terms by formulating the logic which has now become known as the Logic of Paradox, LP. The name was given to me by Alan Slomson, when I gave a talk in Leeds. I don't now think it's a great name, since lots of dialetheias don't seem to have much to do with paradoxes of any kind. But the name has stuck.

Over the next few years I started to think through matters much more carefully. What other applications of dialetheism might there be? How might one defend the PNC? How does rationality work if contradictions are rationally tolerable? It still seemed to me that there must be something obviously wrong with dialetheism, which I was simply missing. Every time I gave a talk on the matter, I expected someone to put up their hand and show me what I was missing. But this never happened, so I started to think that the PNC was, after all, a bit of outdated dogma.

Anyway, I put those early reflections together in *In Contradiction,* which

[2]Though dialetheism was soon on the philosophical agenda in Australasia in the 1970s and 80s, it took a long time for it to be taken seriously in the rest of the English-speaking philosophical world. In fact, Hugh Mellor once told me that he didn't realise that *I* was serious till my debate with Timothy Smiley at the Joint Session in 1993! The fact that such good philosophers as Hartry Field, Stewart Shapiro, and Mark Sainsbury (in his book *Paradoxes*) were prepared to engage with dialetheism helped to change matters. I owe them a debt of gratitude.

[3]For more on the history of PNC and dialetheism, see Priest (2008).

has since become something like a dialetheist's manifesto. It took me four years to find a publisher for this. I had rejection after rejection. Some were simply polite refusals. Some were on the basic of caustic reviewer's reports. My favourite (in retrospect!) was from a referee who said that the whole idea was so absurd that there was nothing more to be said about the matter, and then spent the next five pages engaging with the ideas. (Maybe the person was a secret dialetheist...)

After this book, because of discussions with Uwe Petersen, I came to see the connection between the paradoxes of self-reference and the limit phenomena central to the thought of Kant and Hegel. That prompted *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (a book which is, in its own way, about crossing boundaries). Because of the reading that I was doing for that, I developed a strong interest in the history of Western philosophy, which has never disappeared. It was easier to find a publisher for that book than for *In Contradiction*. Cambridge University Press accepted it, though when the initial print run had sold out they refused to do another. They said that it had 'sold about the number of copies we expect for a book of this kind'. The copyright then reverted to me. Peter Momtichiloff at Oxford University Press agreed to bring out a second edition, and that began the strong and happy relationship with Peter and Oxford University Press I have had since then.

4 From Explosion to Paraconsistency

If one asks a contemporary philosopher why dialetheism cannot be true, the first thing they are likely to say is that contradictions entail everything, and since it is clear that not everything is true, contradictions cannot be true. Appealing to the principle of inference that a contradiction implies everything, *ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet*—or Explosion, to give it its modern and more colourful name—is clearly question-begging here. A dialetheist holds that some contradictions are true; if they hold that not everything is true, they will hold Explosion to be invalid. However, the matter of Explosion takes us to another way in which modern philosophy, or logic anyway, has crossed the bridge into the land where inconsistencies may be tolerated

Explosion is not to be found in Ancient Greek logic. Indeed, Aristotle himself tells us that syllogisms with contradictory premises may be invalid. The discovery/invention of the principle seems to arise in Western logic about the 12th Century. And the appropriateness of its use is discussed at length

in Medieval logic after that. The principle becomes baked in to logic only around the turn of the 20th century, with the rise of classical logic.

Its validity is clearly highly counter-intuitive, however, as teaching any first-year logic class suffices to establish. It is therefore unsurprising that in the rise of non-classical logics some appeared in which Explosion is invalid. Such logics are, by definition, paraconsistent. Paraconsistent logics, based on very different principles, were developed within a period of about 20 years by logicians working quite independently of each other in different countries—indeed continents: Jaśkowsi (Poland), Halldén (Sweden), da Costa (Brazil), Anderson and Belnap (USA).

The name itself was coined by the Peruvian philosopher Miró Quesada. The prefix 'para' in Ancient Greek is ambiguous. It can mean something like 'quasi', as in 'para-military', parachute (sort of falling); or it can mean 'beyond', as in 'paradox' (beyond belief). I had always thought that in 'paraconsistent logic' it had the latter meaning. But some years ago Newton da Costa told me that Quesada had the former meaning in mind. I still think that 'beyond the consistent' is better than 'sort of consistent'. For an exploration of things beyond the consistent is exactly what paraconsistent logic allows.unfortunely

The use of a paraconsistent logic is clearly necessary for dialetheism unless one wishes it to lapse into trivialism—the view that everything is true. Most paraconsistent logicians are not dialetheists, however. They simply feel that inconsistent information/theories/scenarios should not blow up in one's face. Even so, the mere thought that contradictions might be tolerable in any sense was anathema to most people in the early years of paraconsistent logic, so the logic had a very hostile reception. That changed as the mathematical development of such logics put runs on the board that one could not deny—whether one approved of such logics or not. Paraconsistent logic is now a very well established branch of non-classical logic.[4]

LP is a paraconsistent logic, and I put it to the service of dialetheism. Indeed, I do not think that dialetheism would have been taken seriously at all without developments in paraconsistent logic. When I developed LP in the UK I knew nothing about earlier developments of paraconsistent logic in other parts of the world. Things changed when I moved to Australia, where I was offered my first permanent academic position at the University of Western Australia. I was, in fact, emigrating, though at the time I did not know

[4]Again, for more on the history of paraconsistent logic, see Priest (2008).

this. I now regard the move to Australia as an exceptionally serendipitous event in my academic life. There, I became part of a community of philosophers who were both open-minded and tough-minded, just the atmosphere in which new ideas can flourish if they have value.

In particular, I became part of the group of logicians centred around Richard Routley (later, Sylvan) and Bob Meyer (later Meyer) at the Australian National University in Canberra (though, like many of the group, my job was elsewhere). The group was very much concerned with relevant logic, and throughout those years I worked a great deal on technical issues in this and related areas, exploring or discarding many logical avenues. For the most part, the logicians there were not dialetheists, but since relevant logic is one kind of paraconsistent logic, I found myself very much with a bunch of fellow travellers.

I still remember my first meeting with Richard Sylvan. I read a version of 'The Logic of Paradox' at the first conference I ever attended in Australia, a meeting of the Australasian Association for Logic in Canberra. After the paper, we were walking up the stairs to the tea room. Richard turned round to me and said 'So you're a dialectician then?' So began many happy years of fruitful collaboration, which ended only with Richard's untimely death. 'Dialectician' was the word that Richard was using for what we would now call 'dialetheist'. Richard had been toying with the idea that the world (all that is the case) was inconsistent before I arrived. It was my arrival, I think, that pushed him over the edge into dialetheism.

Richard knew about developments in paraconsistent logic in other countries; and so it was that I came to know about them. It was clear that paraconsistent ideas were being worked on in several different countries, by relatively isolated groups of logicians. We thought that it was about time to make the people involved more aware of their common interests, so we collected a bunch of papers from all those we knew to be actively working in the area and published *Paraconsistent Logics* ("the Big Black Book"). Because of oversights by the publisher, the book's publication was delayed for nearly a decade, and when it appeared it sold for about US$200. Perhaps we are now accustomed to logic books costing this much; but at the time this was a small king's-ransom. I think the only people who ended up with the book were the contributors and a few libraries. We also decided that there should be a conference bringing all those working on paraconsistent logic together. We figured that Australia was not the place to hold it: it was too far and expensive for most people to come. Diderik Batens generously offered to or-

ganise it in Gent, and so the first World Conference on paraconsistency took place there. Sadly, Richard died suddenly and unexpectedly a few months before the conference.

When we were producing the Big Black Book, Richard and I agreed that we needed a distinctive name for the view that some contradictions are true. At that time, the word 'paraconsistency' was being used for both the failure of Explosion and for dialetheism. (Sometimes 'strong paraconsistency' was used for the latter.) This was leading to many unfortunate confusions. Richard soon agreed that 'dialectics' was a poor name: it came with too much baggage. We couldn't think of anything appropriate, so we decided to search some foreign dictionaries. We went to the reference library at the ANU and looked up things like 'contradiction', and 'inconsistent' in the Ancient Greek and Latin dictionaries. No luck. We then tried every other dictionary the library possessed—including the Gaelic and Hebrew dictionaries. Still no luck. So, drawing on a remark by Wittgenstein in his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, where he likens the liar sentence to a Janus-headed figure facing both truth and falsity, we coined the rather ugly neologism 'dialetheism' (two way truth). Unfortunately we forgot to agree how to spell it. I spelled it with the 'e'; Richard without. So both appear in the literature of that time. The spelling with the 'e' has now become standard, probably because of *In Contradiction*.

We did have a very narrow escape in this process, however. When looking up words in English-to-Greek, we found one that we liked. (I forget now what English word we were looking up.) So we fixed on that. As we were leaving the library, it occurred to us that it might be a good idea to look up the word in the reverse direction, the Greek-to-English. It was translated as something like 'contradictory, stupid, absurd'. Needless to say, we then junked our choice; but we came within a hair's breadth of providing our critics with a rhetorical own-goal.

5 From Existence to the Non-Existence

The view that some objects do not exist is usually, now, associated with the Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong. Meinong's view is bizarre—just a touch short of insanity, so the story usually goes. Fortunately, drawing on Frege's view of quantification, it was disposed of by Russell—allbeit the case that he had held a similar view earlier in his life. Russell's view was

hammered home by Quine, and common sense once more prevailed.

The view is distorted on many fronts. First, Meinong was an important philosopher, as Russell himself realised. He was concerned with intentionality; and it is clear that one can admire something, desire something, fear something, where that something may or may not exist. One admires/desires/fears *something* none the less. So some things do not exist. All perfectly straightforward.

Next, Meinong had history on his side. Nearly all logicians in the history of Western logic—from Aristotle onwards—held some things not to exist. Medieval logicians had sophisticated theories of merely possible objects, in their doctrine of ampliation. Some even held that this doctrine extended to impossible objects in the context of intentionality. It was the Russell/Quine view which was historically aberrant.

Third, attributing this view to Frege is incorrect. Frege points out that the German phrase that is normally translated into English as 'there is', *es gibt*—the verb in which, note, is part of the verb 'to give' (*geben*) not a part of the verb 'to be' (*sein*)—can be used to mean much the same thing as the quantifier *some*. However, he, himself, points out that this use has nothing to do with existence or reality in any metaphysically loaded sense.

Finally, the arguments used by Russell and Quine in support of the view that everything exists are frightful. Their effect was, arguably, more the result of Quine's silver rhetoric than their rational content. (Again, I leave the reader to ponder what this says about rationality and philosophy.)

Be all this as it may, the Quine/Russell view was high orthodoxy in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1980s a number of philosophers started to challenge the orthodoxy; most relentlessly, to my mind, Richard Sylvan, who coined the neologism *noneism* to describe the view that some things do not exist. (It's pronounced by saying *none*, and just sticking *ism* on the end.) Meinong had noneist common sense on his side, not Russell and Quine; but I still hear the view that it is just plain obvious that *some* means *some existent* expressed by older member of the Anglo philosophical profession. I sense that something of a sea change is under way, though. Many of the younger philosophers I meet are not scared to take on board the view that some objects do not exist, and even to endorse it. Thus, it seems to me that philosophy crossed the boundary into the dark side in the first part of the 20th century, and is now crossing the boundary back.[5]

[5]For more reflections on the matter, see Priest (2008).

When I met Richard Sylvan I was an orthodox Quinean about these matters. Richard's noneist views struck me as outrageous. However, over the years in which we argued about these things, I came to agree that all my arguments were pretty hopeless. In due course I became a noneist.

It was only later that I discovered that the orthodox history was all wrong. In my early sojourn in St Andrews, Steve Read ran a reading group of Desmond Henry's *Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*. This opened my eyes to the richness of Medieval logic. I knew nothing about it before that. Since then, I have had a lively interest in the topic. Indeed, Steve and I have frequently written together on aspects of it. It was he who, many years later, when I was back at St Andrews as an Arché Professorial Fellow, taught me what medieval logicians had to say about existence. I also went back and read Frege and Russell more carefully, to fill in that part of the picture. I was in for still another shock later. For a logician 'there is' is a paradigm quantifier. I learned only a few years ago from linguists that it is not a quantifier—quantifiers are things like, *all*, *some*, *many*, *most*—and that there is currently no agreement amongst linguists about how, exactly, to understand constructions with the dummy subject *there*.

Even when I had come to accept that noneism is a perfectly coherent and common sense view, I did not immediately accept it. One still needed an account of what properties non-existent objects have. An answer to this question is provided by some version of the Characterisation Principle (CP): an object which is characterised as being so and so is, indeed, so and so. Natural as this principle seems, no one (other than a trivialist) can accept it, since it delivers a two line argument to any conclusion. The CP has to be restricted in some way, and I found all the suggestions as to how to do this (including Richard's) unsatisfactory.

I finally became a noneist when I found a solution that satisfied me. A characterised object has the properties it is characterised as having, not necessarily at this world (though it may), but at some possible or impossible world. The view has now come to be called *Modal Meinongianism*, for obvious reasons. This has a pleasing alliteration, but I don't entirely care for it, since it ignores the entire history of logic leading up to Meinong. Better, I think, would be something like *worldly noneism*. Whatever one calls it, Richard had unfortunately died before I came up with the idea, so I never had the pleasure of discussing it with him. But it resulted in the book *Towards Non-Being*. This book is part of the move that philosophy is making to cross the boundary back to its healthy earlier view.

6 From Analytic Philosophy to Continental Philosophy

The next boundary I want to discuss is that between so called 'analytic philosophy' and 'continental philosophy'. Characterising each side of this boundary is fraught. The standard labelling is hopeless. Philosophical analysis was a methodology deployed by some philosophers in England, and maybe Austro-Germany, in the first part of the 20th century; but it hardly characterises most of what goes on on the analytic side of the divide nowadays. 'Continental philosophy' is even worse. Even if we understand ourselves to be talking about the continent of Europe, Britain is part of this (and will be even if/when the UK cuts its throat and leaves the EU). Worse again, many of the founders of this side of the divide were German or Austrian (Frege, Wittgenstein, Carnap). However, I don't have a terminology to suggest that is not equally misleading, so I will stick with this.

Whatever, one calls the two sides, it is clear that there are various differences which mark them roughly. There are characteristic differences of style of writing and expression. The two sides tend to publish in different journals. There are differences between the philosophers that each side tends to refer to—and even talk to: there is not much communication across the divide. Indeed, philosophers on each side of the divide are often somewhat rude about the philosophers on the other side.

The genesis of the divide may be located around the turn of the 20th Century with the works of Frege and Husserl. Not that these two philosophers would have seen each other as belonging to different traditions. The initial concern of both was the philosophy of mathematics; both were driven to problems in the philosopher of language; both engaged with the thought of the other and criticised it (not a sufficient condition to locate two philosophers in different traditions!). The difference between the two was in the tools that each forged to attack their problems. Frege invented modern formal logic; Husserl invented phenomenology. It was drawing on these two tools that, at last initially, characterised the differences between the two sides of the divide, though other factors were soon added. Positivism was added to the analytic side; existentialism was added to the continental side. Later differences also emerged. Thus, we had naturalism on the analytic side, and structuralism and post-structuralism on the continental side.

The closer one looks at the divide, the less substantial it becomes, how-

ever. It is not just that they have a shared beginning. The problems that each side attacks are often similar: there is a common interest in questions of epistemology, the philosophy of language, political philosophy. Indeed, there are even philosophers who play similar roles on each side of the divide: Kuhn and Foucault argue that science is characterised by ruptures in traditions; Quine and Derrida argue meaning is indeterminate; and so on. Doubtless the philosophers on each side of the divide tend to express themselves in different ways. But philosophy can be written in many ways. Compare Plato, Aristotle, Kant—philosophers who would be claimed by both sides. Not to mention the earlier and later Wittgenstein—whichever side of the divide one locates him on. Doubtless, there are also turf wars and institutional struggles; but these are features of most university philosophy departments everywhere.

It is a happy fact, then, that a number of philosophers on each side of the boundary are starting to engage with the work of the other side. Thus, philosophers such as Bob Brandom, Adrian Moore, and Markus Gabriel draw happily from both sides of the tradition. I have no doubt that there is good philosophy and bad philosophy on each side of the divide. And doubtless there are characteristic failings on both sides. Analytic writing can be nit-picking and boring. Continental writing can be rambling and pretentious. But there are great philosophers on both sides of the divide; and we have something to learn from great philosophers of any tradition.[6]

Being a logician, my early years of philosophy were very much influenced by Frege, Russell, Carnap, and Quine. And my work often makes use of the tools of formal logic. So I suppose that it would be natural to think of me as an analytic philosopher. But I read a number of "continental" writers early in my professional life: Sartre (my wife was studying French literature), Foucault (I was teaching the philosophy of science), Hegel (in connection with dialetheism). Others came later. When I was writing *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, John Frow (then Professor of English at the University of Queensland) suggested that I should read Derrida. I struggled with his writing, but finally made some sense of it. Later I discovered Heidegger, and I came to the conclusion that so much of Derrida is simply a post-structuralist embroidering of Heidegger, expressed with a written style that is willfully obscure. Later again, I discovered Nietzsche, one of the few philosophers one can read just for the pleasure of his style.

Of course I have continued to read on the other side of the divide too. I

[6]For further reflections on these matters, see Priest (2003).

really don't set much store by the divide at all; and in my work I have drawn on insights from both sides, as in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*—as well, of course, on insights from the many great philosophers in history who predate the analytic/continental divide.

I certainly hope that in doing so, my work is helping to bridge the boundary between the two traditions, and, ultimately, render it irrelevant to philosophy.

7 From Western Philosophy to Eastern Philosophy

The distinction between analytic and continental philosophy pales into insignificance compared with that between Eastern and Western philosophy—or better, between Eastern and Western philosophies: there are many different kinds of each. From the perspective of the East, the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy appears as just a family tiff.

The Eastern philosophical traditions are as venerable as any in the West. They are just as sophisticated, and just as deep. Whether there was any communication across the Silk Route in the period of Classical Greek, Indian, and Chinese philosophy, we will probably never know; but it is fair to say that the Eastern and Western traditions have developed largely independently of each other. (Arabic philosophy, note, is a Western philosophy. Religiously, it comes out of the same matrix as Judaism and Christianity; and its philosophical heritage is that of Ancient Greece.)

To the extent that the Asian traditions have registered much in the West, they have been the property of people working in departments of philology and comparative religions. Needless to say, the people in these traditions have not tended to engage in the Eastern texts as would a philosopher. Moreover, the translations and commentaries made have not been as philosophically acute as one might have wished. To translate is to interpret, and it takes someone with philosophical skills to make a good translation of a philosophical text.

There have been a few Western philosophers who had some limited—and pretty inaccurate—knowledge of some of the Asian traditions. Hegel and Schopenhauer come to mind. But it is fair to say that most Western philosophers have known little about the Eastern traditions—and cared even less.

In fact, as recently as a few decades ago, it was common to hear Western philosophers to say that these traditions were not philosophy at all, but mere religion, mysticism, wise-man pronouncements. Clearly, people who held such views had never looked carefully at the texts. If one does so, it is clear that they engage in philosophical issues and debates. Indeed, many of the issues engaged with are ones very familiar to Western philosophers. Where this is so, what is said about them is sometimes similar to Western views; sometimes not.

Happily, one rarely hears this view expressed nowadays, though it is still common enough to hear it said that the Asian philosophical traditions are fringe philosophy, like feminist philosophy and aesthetics, not part of "core philosophy" at all. (Let me hasten to add that I am most certainly not endorsing this view of feminist philosophy and aesthetics. I am merely reporting what I hear.) It beggars belief that one can write off half of the world's philosophy in this way.

But there is clearly a sea-change under way. Western philosophers are coming to engage with these traditions, writing and thinking about them, and teaching them. It will be a gradual process. As more Western philosophers know about these matters, the more they will be taught, the more Western philosophers will know about these matters, and so on. I expect to see these traditions as an integral part of the Western philosophical curriculum a few decades hence.

I note that philosophers from Asian countries have been engaging in the Western traditions for at least a century now: Nishida and Nishitani in Japan; Aurobindo and Bhattacharya in India; to say nothing of the influence of Marxist philosophy on thinkers is all the Asian countries.

Of course, to understand the texts from these traditions in a sophisticated way, one needs a pertinent knowledge of the languages in which they are written, the societies in which they are embedded, and so on. Such is equally true, of course of Ancient Greek, Arabic, or Medieval Christian philosophy. Fortunately, translations of the Asian texts are now being made by good philosophers with the appropriate linguistic skills. And of course, the fact that one does not have these skills does not stop one from engaging in the philosophical content of the texts, any more than one has to have Ancient Greek to discuss the philosophical content of Ancient Greek philosophical texts. One just has to be aware of one's limitations, and respect the skills of the scholars who do have these skills. (Think how many languages philosophy is written in: English, French, German, Latin, Ancient Greek, Arabic,

Classical Chinese, Sanskrit—to name but a few. If one could engage only in those texts for which one could speak the language, one's philosophical compass would be deeply impoverished.)[7]

In my first couple of decades as a professional philosopher, I did not have an antagonistic attitude to the Asian philosophical traditions. I had no attitude at all: they were just not on my radar. But in the 1990s I met Jay Garfield. I had just finished *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, and he had just finished his translation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. We discovered a number of mutual interests. Indeed, Jay has since become a third philosopher with whom I have co-authored many things.

When I met Jay I was shocked to learn of my ignorance in the Asian philosophical traditions; and since then, I have made a point of trying to educate myself: reading, teaching, travelling to India and Japan to study. And I have come to draw on Asian traditions—especially the Buddhist ones—more and more in my work, as, for example, in *One* (a book which also provided a new opportunity to deploy the techniques of non-classical logic: non-transitive identity). As with the analytic/continental divide, I have certainly not stopped drawing on the Western traditions. And though I am by no means a scholar of either Eastern or Western philosophy, I hope that my work now draws on some of the best of both. I also hope that my philosophical writings which do so are helping Western philosophy to cross the East/West boundary.

8 From Logic and Metaphysics to Political Philosophy

There is, of course, much more to be said about all the developments in philosophy which I have briefly discussed. There are also many other significant developments in Western philosophy in the last 100 years which I have not discussed at all. That, however, will do for the present context.

Let me end by returning to the issue of personal boundaries. I started by crossing the divide between mathematics and philosophy. And I think it fair to say that most of my philosophical work has been in logic and metaphysics, with bits of the history of philosophy (East and West) thrown in. In the last couple of chapters of *One*, I ventured into the realm of Buddhist ethics,

[7]For further reflections on these matters, see Priest (2011).

though; and as the very end of the book shows, issues of political philosophy surfaced. I have always had an interest in politics and its philosophy. When I was at the University of Western Australia, Val Kerruish (a lecturer in the Law Faculty), set up a reading group on Marx, and over the next several years we read a great deal of his work (all three volumes of *Capital*, *Grundrisse*, and many of the earlier works). I was struck by the acuity of Marx' analysis of capitalism. I have never written anything much about political philosophy, however. That is the aim of the book I am now working on—though whether I will be able to say anything satisfactory about the topic, remains to be seen. However, crossing into political philosophy is the next personal philosophical boundary I wish to cross.

References

[1] Priest, G. (2003), 'Where is Philosophy at the Start of the Twenty-First Century?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103: 85-96.

[2] Priest, G. (2007), 'Paraconsistency and Dialetheism', pp. 129-204, Vol. 8, of D. Gabbay and J. Woods (eds.), *Handbook of the History of Logic*, Amsterdam: North Holland.

[3] Priest, G. (2008), 'The Closing of the Mind: How the Particular Quantifier Became Existentially Loaded Behind our Backs', *Review of Symbolic Logic* 1: 42-55. Reprinted as ch. 16 of the 2nd edn of *Towards Non-Being*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[4] Priest, G. (2011), 'Why Asian Philosophy?', ch. 18 of G. Oppy and N. Trakakis (eds.), *The Antipodean Philosopher*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

[5] Priest, G. (2014), 'Revising Logic', ch. 12 of P. Rush (ed.), T*he Metaphysics of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.