Chapter 1
Introduction to Graham Priest on Dialetheism and Paraconsistency

Thomas Macaulay Ferguson and Can Başkent

Abstract   We provide a short introduction to the volume "Graham Priest on Dialetheism and Paraconsistency."

During a time in which the humanities and sciences have progressed steadily toward hyperspecialization, Graham Priest's philosophical output over nearly half a century is exceptional in its breadth (to say nothing of its depth). Across his papers, books, and lectures, Priest has brought an outsider's eye to philosophy—Priest was trained as a mathematician and his knowledge of philosophy is proudly self-taught—which has been a characterizing feature of his work. This outsider's eye is a catalyst for both Priest's willingness to serve as an iconoclast to the idols of Western analytic philosophy and his talent for fostering the kind of synthetic dialogue necessary for alternatives to these idols.

As Priest's short intellectual autobiography in this volume illustrates, his research has touched on seemingly everything; his mark can be found in myriad fields, including political and legal philosophy, Eastern philosophy, game theory, artificial intelligence, and continental philosophy. Of all the fronts in Priest's insurgent career, he is arguably best known for his role as an logician. Although we have little doubt that similar volumes could be devoted to Priest qua metaphysician or philosopher of language, it is this role on which this volume focuses.

T. M. Ferguson (✉)
Saul Kripke Center, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: tferguson@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Cycorp, Austin, TX, USA

C. Başkent
Department of Computer Science, University of Bath, Bath, UK
e-mail: can@canbaskent.net

1

In his role as an logician, Priest is known for championing the position of dialetheism—the thesis that true contradictions are a part of the fabric of the world—and the techniques of paraconsistency—the property of a consequence relation according to which the hypothesis of a contradiction does not entail everything.

Paraconsistency had lain implicitly in the fabric of several projects in philosophical logic before Priest took up its development. For example, in the communities of relevance (or relevant) logic, the core motivational thesis is that valid entailments require that a hypothesis must be relevant to its consequences. Paraconsistency is a necessary companion of this thesis; the irrelevance between, say, a contradiction in the language of mathematics and an arbitrary statement in the language of biology means that no entailment relation holds between "$0=1$ and not-$0=1$" and "frogs have wings." Paraconsistency likewise accompanies other projects, including connexive logic or discussive logic.

Priest further radicalized the notion of paraconsistency by arguing for the position of dialetheism. Moving from the model-theoretic vantage point from which there exist inconsistent but nontrivial models to the thesis that reality itself includes inconsistencies was indeed a radical move (the preface to the second edition of Priest's *In Contradiction* includes an involved discussion of the trials Priest faced in publishing this landmark work). In the Western tradition, the consistency of the world had been taken nearly as an axiom since Aristotle. To take a relatively inoffensive tool of the nonclassical logician and lend it the gravity of a metaphysical thesis running counter to philosophy's first principles was a risky move; to this day, the central claim of dialetheism is as likely as not to be at the receiving end of the "incredulous stare." But throughout it all, Priest has continued the work of producing calm, clear, and compelling argumentation in its favor.

We believe that the papers of this volume serve as a further demonstration of the breadth and reach of Priest's endeavors in logic. The dimensions along which their contents range—from sympathetic to critical, from philosophical to technical, from analytic to continental—are wide ranging. Each piece seizes on some facet of Priest's work in logic and offers new contributions to his legacy; while there are undoubtedly gaps—it would take multiple volumes to touch on everything that Priest has worked on—it is our opinion that the work included in this volume provides a great representation of the arc of Priest's work and shows that the debates ignited by Priest's work are as compelling today as they've ever been.