

Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Reviewed by

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This book deals with a most appealing problem: what happens at the boundaries of human thinking. The history of philosophy displays many cases in which thought seems to have been pushed to its outermost limits, and the argument of the book is that contradictions are usually a symptom of the fact that the limits of our mental and linguistic capacities are not too distant. As the author acknowledges in the "Preface" (p. xiv), the book originated in some discussions about the relative merits of the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, with the argument later on progressively becoming extended to virtually the whole history of Western philosophy. Yet this work is not just a historical analysis of contradictions, paradoxes and antinomies; it has a most serious substantive thesis: it defends the idea that contradictions at the limits of thought can be true.

*Beyond the Limits of Thought* is divided into 14 chapters and also includes an introduction, in which the structure and purpose of the book are presented, and a few pages of conclusion in which the author summarizes his main ideas. The book ends, in a mixture of Hegelian and Wittgensteinian spirit, with the following words: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one has just contradicted oneself" (p. 256). Its fourteen chapters are classified into four parts. In the first part, "The Limits of Thought in Pre-Kantian Philosophy," Priest discusses some paradoxes related to time, space and God. In the second part, "The Limits of Thought in Kant and Hegel," the Kantian antinomies and Hegelian dialectic are displayed. Priest maintains that Kant and Hegel were the first thinkers who completely understood the situation at the limits of thought, and that Hegel was the only important philosopher who accepted that there are real contradictions. The third part, "Limits and the Paradoxes of Self-reference," deals with set-theoretical paradoxes (Cantor, Russell, Burali-Forti), and the fourth, "Language and Its Limits," treats the semantical difficulties generated by the philosophy of language in the last one hundred years; here he comments on aspects of the views held by Frege, Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson and Derrida.