
Ren tong ci xin, xin tong ci li. *There are sages from the East; there are sages from the West: all of them have the same kind of mind-heart; all their minds have the same kind of intuition.*

Lu Jiuyuang, 1139–1193

It is only after profounder acquaintance with the other sciences that logic ceases to be for subjective spirit a merely abstract universal and reveals itself as the universal which embraces within itself the wealth of the particular.

Hegel, *Greater Logic*

Preface

In this book I propose to discuss Kurt Gödel's philosophical views within the context of my own conception of the mansion of philosophy and its many rooms. Beginning with the actual discussions between Gödel and me, I have broadened the meaning of *conversations* to include the interplay between my continual reflections and the available relevant material by and about Gödel. In this way, I hope to attain a coherent understanding of his life and thought within the framework of my own evolving perspective, reconstituting and completing the actual discussions between us so as to bring out their implications. It is therefore obvious that this project has become an integral part of my own ongoing pursuit of a comprehensive view of things.

This book is a continuation of my *Reflections on Kurt Gödel*, which I completed in June of 1986 and published in 1987. Among other things, it attempts to present a more transparent survey of Gödel's life and work than is given in the earlier book. My original purpose was to bring out in a generally understandable form my fragmentary and chaotic records of our wide-ranging conversations. This turned out to be a much more formidable task than I had anticipated. As the effort continued and as time went on, I felt increasingly that I was trying to reconstitute an immense puzzle from the distorted images of a few scattered pieces. To borrow some light, I consulted Gödel's own writings; but unfortunately much of the unpublished notes he made remain concealed behind his Gabelsberger shorthand. To understand his comments on Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Einstein, I have also tried to study some of their relevant work.

Earlier, in my *From Mathematics to Philosophy*, I had made use of discussions I had with Gödel between 1967 and 1972; I completed that work in June of 1972 and published it in January of 1974. In particular, I included there, without comments, about ten pages of Gödel's own summary of what he wanted to see published. The present book contains elaborations of these pages too.

All along I have thought of my study of Gödel's ideas as a way to arrive at and communicate what I take to be the most reasonable of his views on the issues he studied, rather than an attempt to depict faithfully

the body of his philosophical thought. His total thought, inevitably, like that of every great thinker, is difficult to bring into focus, if taken as a whole, and contains parts of varying degrees of clarity. In the process of trying to resolve various ambiguities in my notes, I have selected, interpreted, and extrapolated from some of his observations along paths that are congenial to me. Moreover, I have tried to find an inclusive framework within which the salient features of alternative philosophies—such as his and Wittgenstein’s—can be seen as complementary rather than as contradictory to each other. By doing these things, I have been led beyond the scope of the planned book and find it hard to locate a suitable boundary between what should be included and what should be excluded here. This has added an obstacle to the completion of the project.

Worse still for this limited goal, I began to realize more and more my own ignorance and prejudices, both generally and in regard to the literature relevant to the specific issues considered; but these deficiencies can be corrected only gradually. At the same time, I began to sense that there are ways of looking at philosophy superior to what I had been accustomed to. This feeling of facing new vistas is exhilarating, but it also accentuates the familiar tension between a desire to conclude a piece of work and a natural urge to enter the promised land of better views. For all these reasons, I had to decide more or less arbitrarily where and when this book was to stop.

Since I am trying to preserve in this book a fairly complete record of what Gödel said in our discussions, it would be awkward to include also my own extended reflections on the central topics of Platonism in mathematics, the nature of logic, and the contrast of minds with computers. I am, therefore, planning to put that material in a separate book, to be entitled *The Formal and the Intuitive: From Computation to Wisdom*.

Another complication is my belief that many of the topics considered here are intrinsically of more than isolated interest. But to communicate this belief successfully requires a gift for presenting the material in such a way that the common reader will not be put off by preconceived ideas about what he or she can understand. Even though I have spent much energy in organizing the material to motivate the more specialized considerations so that the reader can see them as a natural refinement of our shared concerns, I am not sure how far I have succeeded.

In 1946 Gödel’s mother Marianne heard that Gödel and Einstein were close friends. She began to ask about Einstein in her letters and wanted to know more about him. In December of 1950 Gödel recommended to her Philipp Frank’s biography *Einstein: His Life and Times* (1947, the original German manuscript was published only in 1950); Marianne obtained the German version of this book and found it difficult. In January of 1951 Gödel wrote to her: “Is the book about Einstein really so hard to under-