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Truth and the absence of fact. (English. English summary)

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This volume is a collection of thirteen papers published by the author from 1972 until 2000. The collection is arranged in three main parts: (1) Truth, meaning, and propositional attitudes (Chapters 1–5); (2) Indeterminacy and factual defectiveness (Chapters 6–10); and (3) Objectivity (Chapters 11–13). For the most part the papers appear in the book as originally written, except for a few small changes in wording. However, the author has added postscripts to most of them, and in some cases (Chapters 1, 2 and 4) these postscripts are rather substantial. The appendices to Chapters 7 and 13 are reprinted, and a useful index and a list of bibliographic references are also included.

From the preface: “The earliest papers in this volume were written nearly thirty years ago, and my views have undergone important changes. This is most obvious in the case of truth (Part 1 of this volume), where my views evolved from a fairly substantial ‘correspondence theory of truth’ to a much more minimal or ‘deflationary’ conception. Chapters 1 and 2 are from the correspondence theory phase, and Chapters 4 and 5 from the minimalist phase; Chapter 3 is transitional. As Chapter 4 makes clear, the shift as to the nature of truth can equally be viewed as a shift as to the nature of truth ‘conditions’, which in turn can be viewed as a shift as to the nature of meaning or content.”

Chapter 6 on meaning attribution is totally new and appears in this volume for the first time. The author presents in it “a reformulation of the deflationary view of truth that I believe many philosophers will find more congenial”.

The second set of papers (Chapters 6–10) argue that a place must be made in semantics for the idea that there are questions about which there is no fact of the matter, and address the difficulties involved in making sense of this, both within a correspondence theory of truth and meaning, and within a deflationary theory.

In the third part there are two papers on objectivity in mathematics: “Mathematical objectivity and mathematical objects” (Chapter 11) and “Which undecidable mathematical sentences have determinate truth values?” (Chapter 12). Since the first one was written as a survey article on metaphysical issues in the philosophy of mathematics it is especially clear: “Its theme is that the most objectionable feature of traditional Platonism isn’t its assumption of mathematical objects but its assumption that mathematics has a certain kind of objectivity.”

{Reviewer’s note: A sound knowledge of the recent literature on truth and referential indeterminacy is required to derive the maximum benefit from this volume, which is an important collection of papers from an influential contemporary philosopher.}

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