

# The Concept of Truth

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# Preface

This book is the second I have written on the topic of truth. In my *Truth and Historicity* (Oxford: 1992), I sought to throw light on our contemporary intellectual predicament by examining the different conceptions of truth held by philosophers from its beginning in ancient Greece to the present. That was a historically structured book, tracing the intellectual tensions which led from the early Greek idea that truth is timeless, unchanging, and free from all relativism, up to the seventeenth-century crisis which led to the collapse of that idea, and then on through the emergence of historical consciousness to the existentialist, sociological and linguistic approaches of our own time. My thesis was that the current mood of sceptical relativism arises from the way those differing past conceptions continue to resound in our present-day use of the word, while the growing awareness of our historicity has rendered truth in those senses unattainable.

This book builds on the former, without presupposing acquaintance with it. In the final chapter of *Truth and Historicity* I sketched an action-based conception of truth. This, I suggested, would offer a constructive way of responding to sceptical relativism while taking account of our historicity. But it was only a sketch. This book seeks to develop that idea systematically. In working out how to flesh it out I have learnt much from Mark Bickhard, of Lehigh University. Since our first meeting in 1999, I have come to appreciate his radical rethinking of the metaphysical underpinnings of how we understand ourselves. His influence pervades especially Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

This project has been sustained by the unflagging support of my wife Petra, who has read and re-read numerous drafts and offered incisive comments upon them. Without her encouragement, criticism, and advice, this would have been a poorer and less accessible work.

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