



Challenging Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Politics of Truth

David Detmer

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According to proponents of postmodernism, one of the principal achievements of recent Continental philosophy is the rejection of the idea of "objective truth" in favor of the notion that truth is a social construct, which varies from one culture to another. This claim has given rise to heated reactions among philosophers of the Anglo-American analytic school. Their criticisms usually take the form of wholesale dismissals, which do not address the texts and arguments of postmodernists, and they almost always stem from a politically conservative vantage point, which is hostile to the generally leftist orientation of postmodernists. As a result, philosophical differences are frequently obscured by the conflict arising from differing political agendas.

In this accessible, nontechnical discussion of the controversies surrounding the ideas of truth, philosopher David Detmer faults both the critics of postmodernism for entangling the philosophical discussion of truth with their disapproval of postmodernist political views, and the postmodernist critics of objective truth for the defective logic and incoherence of their critique. Unlike most analytic philosophers, Detmer engages extensively and directly with the texts of postmodernists. He provides substantial discussions of Husserl, Sartre, Rorty, and Chomsky, and also addresses the topics of journalistic objectivity, scientific truth, political correctness, and other timely issues. While sympathetic to Continental philosophy, Detmer nonetheless defends the idea of objective truth and attempts to show that doing so is a matter of considerable political importance.

Detmer's thorough and lucid discussion will appeal to anyone who finds the postmodern rejection of objectivity and truth dubious and who is yet uncomfortable with the highly conservative political rhetoric of the loudest voices in the anti-postmodernist crowd.

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