



The Meaning of Truth

William James

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In 1907 William James published a book of his recently delivered lectures called "Pragmatism" in which he detailed the links he found between the pragmatic frame of mind and the philosophical situation of his time. They caused a storm of controversy. Most particularly James's pragmatic musings on "truth" went down, with some, like a lead balloon. With "The Meaning of Truth" James meant to buttress his claims about truth and repel the barbs of his rationalistic enemies. The key essay in the book in many ways is the third "Humanism and Truth". "Humanism" is James's preferred name for pragmatism. Here James lays out his thesis on truth as being a matter of continuity of experience and of useful relations with things. James always resisted the notion, commonly ascribed to many so-called pragmatists and relativists, that they "make it all up". Here James suggests that experience as a control is no mere fancy. James claimed to be constrained in his theorising about truth and constrained by the world that is empirically there all around us. Read this book if you want a statement of James's position on truth or if you want pragmatist insights into the same topic. Or read it for plain intellectual fun. Its arguments are deceptively simple and particularly persuasive.

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