

Thought's Footing



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著者:Travis, Charles

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Thought's Footing is an enquiry into the relationship between the ways things are and the way we think and talk about them. It is also a study of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Charles Travis develops his account of certain key themes into a unified view of the work as a whole. His methodological starting-point is to see Wittgenstein's work as a response to Frege's. The central question is: how does thought get its footing? How can the thought that things are a certain way be connected to things being that way? Wittgenstein departs from Frege in holding that there are indefinitely many ways of filling out (giving content to) the notion of truth. The truth of a thought or utterance is connected with the consequences of thinking or saying it. That is the point of Wittgenstein's introduction of the notion of a language game. The second key theme is this: a representation of things as being a certain way cannot take the right form for truth-bearing without a background of agreement in judgements: its form must belong to thinkers of a given kind. The third key theme is that the proprietary perceptions of a given sort of thinker as to what would be a case of judging when there is a particular way for things to be is not subject to criticism from outside it. Along the way Travis gives his own distinctive take on such topics as the problem of singular thought, the notion of a proposition, rule-following, sense and nonsense, the possibility of private language, and the representational content of experience. The result is an original and stimulating demonstration of the continuing value of Wittgenstein's work for central debates in philosophy today.

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