BETWEEN LOGIC AND INTUITION

This collection of new essays offers a “state-of-the-art” conspectus of major trends in the philosophy of logic and philosophy of mathematics. A distinguished group of philosophers addresses issues at the center of contemporary debate: semantic and set-theoretic paradoxes, the set/class distinction, foundations of set theory, mathematical intuition and many others. The volume includes Hilary Putnam’s 1995 Alfred Tarski lectures published here for the first time.

The essays are presented to honor the work of Charles Parsons.

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Between Logic and Intuition

Essays in Honor of Charles Parsons

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Preface

We offer this collection in honor of the academic career and work of our teacher, colleague, and friend, Charles Parsons. Parsons is widely known for his original essays on mathematical intuition, the semantic paradoxes, the set-theoretical hierarchy, and Kant. His wide-ranging contributions also include works on the foundations of number theory, modal and intensional logic, mathematical structuralism, substitutional quantification, predicative and constructive mathematics, the theory of objects, philosophical and mathematical methodology, Godel, and Quine. His encyclopedia articles and book reviews have found many appreciative readers over the years. Parsons’ work exhibits a systematic blend of rigor, attention to detail, and historical scholarship. His writings have exerted a considerable influence on the development of the philosophy of logic and the philosophy of mathematics in our time. He has placed a set of issues and concerns at the center of the field, and has presented a series of deep, illuminating, and sometimes provocative views on these issues. Most typically, his work is distinguished by an uncommon sense integrity, circumspection, and drive toward precision and truth.

As a teacher, Parsons has been a model of open-mindedness, breadth, and erudition. He would give a graduate seminar on set theory one year, Kant the next, and Husserl the year after that. His reading groups on the German edition of Kant’s first Critique have become legendary. As his former students at Columbia University, we fondly remember his meticulously formulated lectures, his careful and thorough comments on our work, his dedication to our dissertations, and the feel he developed for our philosophical interests and identity. We still value the sense he inspired in us of the difficulty of philosophical questions, the seriousness, care, and modesty called for in dealing with them, and the importance of going beyond questions to answers, preferably positive, constructive answers.

In planning this volume we wished to honor Parsons with a collection of essays that, in addition to reflecting his influence, would stand on its own as representing major trends in turn-of-the-century philosophy of logic and mathematics. The volume opens with the Alfred Tarski Lectures delivered by Hilary Putnam in 1995 at Berkeley and published here for the first time. Putnam’s
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Lectures are devoted to the semantic and set theoretical paradoxes, and they are followed by a series of papers on the crossroads of logic, ontology, epistemology, and the philosophy of language. The middle section presents a collection of essays on mathematical intuition and related issues, viewed from historical as well as contemporary perspectives. It includes work on the notion of intuition in Kant as well as reflections on Parsons’ account of intuition. The last section is devoted to foundational issues in set theory and number theory, their roots in Cantor and Frege, their epistemology, and the set-class distinction.

Two distinguished scholars who regarded Parsons with great affection and esteem did not live to see this volume. Hao Wang succumbed to an illness shortly after accepting our invitation, and George Boolos, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the project in its first stages, died after a short illness prior to its completion. Boolos’ paper, “Must We Believe in Set Theory?” is one of the jewels of this collection.

It is with great pleasure that we present Charles with this volume. It is a small token of our appreciation of the many ways in which he enriched us through his research, his pursuit of academic excellence, and his devotion to philosophy and logic.

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