



Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary

Catherine Z. Elgin

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In Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary, Catherine Z. Elgin maps a constructivist alternative to the standard Anglo-American conception of philosophy's problematic. Under the standard conception, unless answers to philosophical questions are absolute, they are arbitrary. Unless a philosophy is grounded in determinate, agent-neutral facts, it is right only relative to a perspective that cannot in the end be justified. Elgin charts a course between the two poles, showing how fact and value intertwine, where art and science intersect. Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary cuts a path through philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and philosophy of art, disclosing common problems, resources, and solutions. Elgin highlights the ineliminability of values from the realm of facts, the dependence of facts on category schemes, and the ways human interests, practices, and goals affect the categories we contrive. Individually, the essays in this book contribute to ongoing debates in their respective fields. Collectively, they constitute a sustained critique of an entrenched conception of the resources available to philosophy, and argue for a constructive nominalist alternative. Once free of the conceptual stranglehold of traditional dualisms, Elgin argues, people can contrive a variety of frameworks, tailor-made to suit evolving interests and ends. The results are neither absolute nor arbitrary.



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