Why The World Doesn 39 T Seem To Make Sense An Inquiry Into Science Philosophy Amp Perception

#world meaning #science philosophy #human perception #understanding reality #existential questions

Explore the profound reasons why the world often appears illogical or challenging to comprehend. This inquiry meticulously delves into the distinct yet interconnected frameworks of science, philosophy, and human perception, aiming to unravel the mysteries of existence and offer new perspectives on understanding reality and finding meaning.

Why the World Doesn't Seem to Make Sense

Why the World Doesn't Seem to Make Sense is an eminently down-to-earth, practical, and non-technical response to the urgent questions posed by contemporary science and philosophy. This revised and updated edition of How the World Can Be the Way It Is includes new scientific understanding and clarification of some of its more complex ideas. Steve Hagen aims for an intelligent general audience not necessarily familiar with modern or classical physics, philosophy, or formal logic. Hagen takes us on a journey that examines our most basic assumptions about reality and carefully addresses the "paradoxes of the one and the many" that other works only identify. His primary purpose is to help us to perceive the world directly - as it is, not how we conceive it to be. Through this perception each of us can answer profound moral questions, resolve philosophical and ethical dilemmas, and live lives of harmony and joy. Book jacket.

Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science

Drawing on the phenomenological tradition in the philosophy of science and philosophy of nature, Patrick Heelan concludes that perception is a cognitive, world-building act, and is therefore never absolute or finished.

Science Unlimited?

All too often in contemporary discourse, we hear about science overstepping its proper limits—about its brazenness, arrogance, and intellectual imperialism. The problem, critics say, is scientism: the privileging of science over all other ways of knowing. Science, they warn, cannot do or explain everything, no matter what some enthusiasts believe. In Science Unlimited?, noted philosophers of science Maarten Boudry and Massimo Pigliucci gather a diverse group of scientists, science communicators, and philosophers of science to explore the limits of science and this alleged threat of scientism. In

this wide-ranging collection, contributors ask whether the term scientism in fact (or in belief) captures an interesting and important intellectual stance, and whether it is something that should alarm us. Is scientism a well-developed position about the superiority of science over all other modes of human inquiry? Or is it more a form of excessive confidence, an uncritical attitude of glowing admiration? What, if any, are its dangers? Are fears that science will marginalize the humanities and eradicate the human subject—that it will explain away emotion, free will, consciousness, and the mystery of existence—justified? Does science need to be reined in before it drives out all other disciplines and ways of knowing? Both rigorous and balanced, Science Unlimited? interrogates our use of a term that is now all but ubiquitous in a wide variety of contexts and debates. Bringing together scientists and philosophers, both friends and foes of scientism, it is a conversation long overdue.

13 Things That Don't Make Sense

Science starts to get interesting when things don't make sense. Even today there are experimental results that the most brilliant scientists can neither explain nor dismiss. In the past, similar anomalies have revolutionised our world: in the sixteenth century, a set of celestial irregularities led Copernicus to realise that the Earth goes around the sun and not the reverse. In 13 Things That Don't Make Sense Michael Brooks meets thirteen modern-day anomalies that may become tomorrow's breakthroughs. Is ninety six percent of the universe missing? If no study has ever been able to definitively show that the placebo effect works, why has it become a pillar of medical science? Was the 1977 signal from outer space a transmission from an alien civilization? Spanning fields from chemistry to cosmology, psychology to physics, Michael Brooks thrillingly captures the excitement and controversy of the scientific unknown.

PERCEPTION AND THE PHYSICAL WORLD.

To most laypersons and scientists, science and progress appear to go hand in hand, yet philosophers and historians of science have long questioned the inevitability of this pairing. As we take leave of a century acclaimed for scientific advances and progress, Science at Century's End, the eighth volume of the Pittsburgh-Konstanz Series in the Philosophy and History of Science, takes the reader to the heart of this important matter. Subtitled Philosophical Questions on the Progress and Limits of Science, this timely volume contains twenty penetrating essays by prominent philosophers and historians who explore and debate the limits of scientific inquiry and their presumed consequences for science in the 21st century.

Science at Century's End

. . . the topic of 'meaning' is the one topic discussed in philosophy in which there is literally nothing but 'theory' - literally nothing that can be labelled or even ridiculed as the 'common sense view'. Putnam, 'The Meaning of Meaning' This book explores some truths behind the truism that experimentation is a hallmark of scientific activity. Scientists' descriptions of nature result from two sorts of encounter: they interact with each other and with nature. Philosophy of science has, by and large, failed to give an account of either sort of interaction. Philosophers typically imagine that scientists observe, theorize and experiment in order to produce general knowledge of natural laws, knowledge which can be applied to generate new theories and technologies. This view bifurcates the scientist's world into an empirical world of pre-articulate experience and know how and another world of talk, thought and argument. Most received philosophies of science focus so exclusively on the literary world of representations that they cannot begin to address the philosophical problems arising from the interaction of these worlds: empirical access as a source of knowledge, meaning and reference, and of course, realism. This has placed the epistemological burden entirely on the predictive role of experiment because, it is argued, testing predictions is all that could show that scientists' theorizing is constrained by nature. Here a purely literary approach contributes to its own demise. The epistemological significance of experiment turns out to be a theoretical matter: cruciality depends on argument, not experiment.

Experiment and the Making of Meaning

'Why is there a world rather than nothing at all?' remains the most curious and most enduring of all metaphysical mysteries. Moving away from the narrower paths of Christopher Hitchens, Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking, the celebrated essayist Jim Holt now enters this fascinating debate with his broad, lively and deeply informed narrative that traces all our efforts to grasp the origins of the universe. With sly humour and a highly original personal approach Holt takes on the role of cosmological

detective. Suggesting that we might have been too narrow in limiting our suspects to God and the Big Bang, he tracks down, among others, an eccentric Oxford philosopher, a Nobel Laureate physicist, a French Buddhist monk, and John Updike just before he died, to pursue this cosmic puzzle from every angle. As he pieces together a solution - while offering useful insights into time, consciousness, and eternity - he sheds fascinating new light on the meaning of existence. A New York Times bestseller on first publication, this new paperback edition provides a much-needed new take on history's greatest conundrum, in the vein of previous bestsellers like Michael Brooks' 13 Things that Don't Make Sense.

Why Does the World Exist?

Paul Feyeraband famously asked, what's so great about science? One answer is that it has been surprisingly successful in getting things right about the natural world, more successful than non-scientific or pre-scientific systems, religion or philosophy. Science has been able to formulate theories that have successfully predicted novel observations. It has produced theories about parts of reality that were not observable or accessible at the time those theories were first advanced, but the claims about those inaccessible areas have since turned out to be true. And science has, on occasion, advanced on more or less a priori grounds theories that subsequently turned out to be highly empirically successful. In this book the philosopher of science, John Wright delves deep into science's methodology to offer an explanation for this remarkable success story.

Explaining Science's Success

Are we in imminent danger of extinction? Yes, we probably are, argues John Leslie in his chilling account of the dangers facing the human race as we approach the second millenium. The End of the World is a sobering assessment of the many disasters that scientists have predicted and speculated on as leading to apocalypse. In the first comprehensive survey, potential catastrophes - ranging from deadly diseases to high-energy physics experiments - are explored to help us understand the risks. One of the greatest threats facing humankind, however, is the insurmountable fact that we are a relatively young species, a risk which is at the heart of the 'Doomsday Argument'. This argument, if correct, makes the dangers we face more serious than we could have ever imagined. This more than anything makes the arrogance and ignorance of politicians, and indeed philosophers, so disturbing as they continue to ignore the manifest dangers facing future generations.

The End of the World

The brilliant mathematician explores the problems of substance, space, and time; criticizes Einstein's method of interpreting results; and offers an alternative theory of the four-dimensional space-time manifold. 1920 edition.

The Concept of Nature

In this book Gerald Vision argues for a new causal theory, one that engages provocatively with direct realism and makes no use of a now discredited subjectivism.

Problems of Vision

The "science wars" have been raging for decades, raising many questions about the power of science. Some critics claim that science, including social science, is "merely a social construction" that fallible humans have created with words and other symbols. If this is true, is science as formidable a source of knowledge as most scientists claim? Baldwin explains why the edifice of science has robust properties that make it one of the most useful forms of knowledge that humans have ever created, although it is not perfect. He trenchantly examines all sides of the debate and uses the philosophy of pragmatism to reveal the special characteristics that make science work as well as it does. Ending the Science Wars shows how science is far better grounded than its critics claim. The book not only helps resolve many current debates about science, it is a major contribution for explaining science in terms of a powerful philosophical system. This makes the book valuable to scientists in all fields of research-and intellectually challenging for science's critics.

Ending the Science Wars

Throughout the history of the Western world, science has possessed an extraordinary amount of authority and prestige. And while its pedestal has been jostled by numerous evolutions and revolutions,

science has always managed to maintain its stronghold as the knowing enterprise that explains how the natural world works: we treat such legendary scientists as Galileo, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein with admiration and reverence because they offer profound and sustaining insight into the meaning of the universe. In The Intelligibility of Nature, Peter Dear considers how science as such has evolved and how it has marshaled itself to make sense of the world. His intellectual journey begins with a crucial observation: that the enterprise of science is, and has been, directed toward two distinct but frequently conflated ends—doing and knowing. The ancient Greeks developed this distinction of value between craft on the one hand and understanding on the other, and according to Dear, that distinction has survived to shape attitudes toward science ever since. Teasing out this tension between doing and knowing during key episodes in the history of science—mechanical philosophy and Newtonian gravitation, elective affinities and the chemical revolution, enlightened natural history and taxonomy, evolutionary biology, the dynamical theory of electromagnetism, and quantum theory—Dear reveals how the two principles became formalized into a single enterprise, science, that would be carried out by a new kind of person, the scientist. Finely nuanced and elegantly conceived, The Intelligibility of Nature will be essential reading for aficionados and historians of science alike.

The Intelligibility of Nature

The incredible achievements of modern scientific theories lead most of us to embrace scientific realism: the view that our best theories offer us at least roughly accurate descriptions of otherwise inaccessible parts of the world like genes, atoms, and the big bang. In Exceeding Our Grasp, Stanford argues that careful attention to the history of scientific investigation invites a challenge to this view that is not well represented in contemporary debates about the nature of the scientific enterprise. The historical record of scientific inquiry, Stanford suggests, is characterized by what he calls the problem of unconceived alternatives. Past scientists have routinely failed even to conceive of alternatives to their own theories and lines of theoretical investigation, alternatives that were both well-confirmed by the evidence available at the time and sufficiently serious as to be ultimately accepted by later scientific communities. Stanford supports this claim with a detailed investigation of the mid-to-late 19th century theories of inheritance and generation proposed in turn by Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, and August Weismann. He goes on to argue that this historical pattern strongly suggests that there are equally well-confirmed and scientifically serious alternatives to our own best theories that remain currently unconceived. Moreover, this challenge is more serious than those rooted in either the so-called pessimistic induction or the underdetermination of theories by evidence, in part because existing realist responses to these latter challenges offer no relief from the problem of unconceived alternatives itself. Stanford concludes by investigating what positive account of the spectacularly successful edifice of modern theoretical science remains open to us if we accept that our best scientific theories are powerful conceptual tools for accomplishing our practical goals, but abandon the view that the descriptions of the world around us that they offer are therefore even probably or approximately true.

Exceeding Our Grasp

vements be followed even at short distances without having material contact, by means of the air, with the object; sight indeed appears to have to do with Space- and sound with Time-perception. In examining Nature by means of our senses we find we are so hemmed in by what we have always taken for granted and so bound down by modes of reasoning derived from what we have seen, heard, or felt in our daily life, that we are sadly hampered in our search after the truth. It is difficult to sweep the erroneous concepts aside and make a fresh start. In fact the great difficulty in studying the Reality underlying Nature is analogous to our inability to isolate and study the different sounds themselves which fall upon the ear, if our own language is being uttered, without being forced to consider the meaning we have always attached to those sounds. Let us now go back to the contention that it is not we who are looking out upon Nature but that our senses are being bombarded from without; we are living in a world

Science and the Infinite

The Ten Assumptions of Science presents the logically coherent set of assumptions destined to define 21st century scientific philosophy. Glenn Borchardt first explains why assumptions and not absolutes are necessary for scientific thinking. By exploring the opposition between deterministic and indeterministic views, he clearly shows how critical choices among underlying assumptions either clarify or muddle scientific analysis. He shows how customary mixtures of deterministic and indeterministic

assumptions are responsible for the current confusion in modern physics. According to Dr. Borchardt, only rare physicists and philosophers have an inkling of the nature of time, space, energy, and matter. The need for reassessing our fundamental assumptions is indicated by the present sorry state of cosmology. Otherwise intelligent scientists promulgate the idea that the universe expanded from a tiny "singularity" smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. At the very least, adherence to Borchardt's assumptions will contribute to the rejection of the "Big Bang Theory," which has surpassed the flat Earth theory as the greatest embarrassment to serious thinkers everywhere. Although the book makes an excellent supplement to college courses in scientific philosophy, it is an astounding eye-opener for the educated reader with an interest in science and philosophy.

The Ten Assumptions of Science

This book explores the image of science in the modern world.

Uncertain Knowledge

Robin Dunbar asks whether science really is unique to Western culture, even to humankind. He suggests that our "trouble with science" may lie in the fact that evolution has left our minds better able to cope with day-to-day social interaction than with the complexities of the external world.

The Trouble with Science

Science first began as a branch of philosophy, but it has since grown up and moved out of the family home, and its successes have put its parent in the shade. Thanks to scientific knowledge we have walked on the Moon, cured once-fatal illnesses, and even identified the very building blocks of life and the universe. But it is these very successes that underline the need for philosophy. How much should we trust the pronouncements of scientists that we read in the media? What are the ethical implications of our delving into the foundations of our DNA, reproductive treatments, or artificially prolonging life? And are there limits to what science can tell us about the world we think we know? In straightforward and accessible terms, 50 Philosophy of Science Ideas You Really Need to Know explains the key philosophical questions that continue to lie at the heart of the nature and practice of science today. The ideas explored include: Appearance and reality; Knowledge; Anti-realism; Metaphysics; Science and gender; Phenomenology and science.

50 Philosophy of Science Ideas You Really Need to Know

Peter Caws provides a fresh and often iconoclastic treatment of some of the most vexing problems in the philosophy of science: explanation, induction, causality, evolution, discovery, artificial intelligence, and the social implications of technological rationality. Caws's work has been shaped equally by the insights of Continental philosophy and a concern with scientific practice. In these twenty-eight essays spanning more than a quarter of a century, he ranges from discussions of the work of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, to relations between science and surrealism, to the concept of intentionality, to the limits of quantitative description. A lively mix of history, theory, speculation, and analysis, Yorick's World presents a vision of science that includes human history and social life. It will interest professional philosophers and scientists, and at the same time its directness will make it readily accessible to nontechnical readers.

Yorick's World

This accessible and engaging text explores the relationship between philosophy, science and physical geography. It addresses an imbalance that exists in opinion, teaching and to a lesser extent research, between a philosophically enriched human geography and a perceived philosophically empty physical geography. The text challenges the myth that there is a single self-evident scientific method that can, and is, applied in a straightforward manner by physical geographers. It demonstrates the variety of alternative philosophical perspectives and emphasizes the difference that the real world geographical context and the geographer make to the study of environmental phenomenon. This includes a consideration of the dynamic relationship between human and physical geography. Finally, the text demonstrates the relevance of philosophy for both an understanding of published material and for the design and implementation of studies in physical geography. This edition has been fully updated with two new chapters on field studies and modelling, as well as greater discussion of ethical issues and forms of explanation. The book explores key themes such as reconstructing environmental change,

species interactions and fluvial geomorphology, and is complimented throughout with case studies to illustrate concepts.

Science, Philosophy and Physical Geography

The realities of mankind's cognitive situation are such that our knowledge of the world's ways is bound to be imperfect. None the less, the theory of unknowability--agnoseology as some have called it--is a rather underdeveloped branch of philosophy. In this philosophically rich and groundbreaking work, Nicholas Rescher aims to remedy this. As the heart of the discussion is an examination of what Rescher identifies as the four prime reasons for the impracticability of cognitive access to certain facts about the world: developmental inpredictability, verificational surdity, ontological detail, and predicative vagrancy. Rescher provides a detailed and illuminating account of the role of each of these factors in limiting human knowledge, giving us an overall picture of the practical and theoretical limits to our capacity to know our world.

Unknowability

This two-volume 1993 collection of his essays written over a period of forty years explores the interrelations between science and philosophy.

Treatise on Basic Philosophy: Volume 6

Many books explain what is known about the universe. This book investigates what cannot be known. Rather than exploring the amazing facts that science, mathematics, and reason have revealed to us, this work studies what science, mathematics, and reason tell us cannot be revealed. In The Outer Limits of Reason, Noson Yanofsky considers what cannot be predicted, described, or known, and what will never be understood. He discusses the limitations of computers, physics, logic, and our own thought processes. Yanofsky describes simple tasks that would take computers trillions of centuries to complete and other problems that computers can never solve; perfectly formed English sentences that make no sense; different levels of infinity; the bizarre world of the quantum; the relevance of relativity theory; the causes of chaos theory; math problems that cannot be solved by normal means; and statements that are true but cannot be proven. He explains the limitations of our intuitions about the world -- our ideas about space, time, and motion, and the complex relationship between the knower and the known. Moving from the concrete to the abstract, from problems of everyday language to straightforward philosophical questions to the formalities of physics and mathematics, Yanofsky demonstrates a myriad of unsolvable problems and paradoxes. Exploring the various limitations of our knowledge, he shows that many of these limitations have a similar pattern and that by investigating these patterns, we can better understand the structure and limitations of reason itself. Yanofsky even attempts to look beyond the borders of reason to see what, if anything, is out there.

The Search for a Naturalistic World View: Volume 1

When first published in 1959, this book revolutionized contemporary thinking about science and knowledge. It remains one of the most widely read books about science to come out of the 20th century.

The Outer Limits of Reason

Making Sense of the World offers original work on the nature of understanding by a range of distinguished philosophers. Although some of the essays are by scholars well known for their work on understanding, many of the essays bring entirely new figures to the discussion. The main purpose of the volume is twofold: to advance debates in epistemology and the philosophy of science, where work on understanding has recently flourished, and to jumpstart new questions and debates about understanding in other areas of philosophy, such as aesthetics, ethics, and the philosophy of religion.

The Logic of Scientific Discovery

How is it possible for the world as we experience it to exist embedded in the physical universe? How can there be sensory qualities, consciousness, freedom, science and art, friendship, love, justice--all that which gives meaning and value to life--if the world really is more or less as modern science tells us it is? This is the problem that is tackled by this book. The solution proposed is that physics describes only a selected aspect of all that exists--that aspect which determines the way events unfold. Sensory qualities, inner experiences, consciousness, meaning and value, all these exist but lie beyond the scope

of physics, and of that part of science that can be reduced to physics. Furthermore, these human features of the world are to be explained and understood, not scientifically, but "personalistically," a kind of understanding distinct from, and not reducible to, science. This view that the world is riddled with what may be called "double comprehensibility" leads to a proposed solution to the philosophical mind/body problem, and to the problem of free will; it leads to a reinterpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution, and to an account of the evolution of consciousness and free will. After a discussion of the location of consciousness in the brain, the book concludes with a proposal as to how academic inquiry might be changed so that it becomes a kind of inquiry rationally designed to help humanity create a more civilized human world in the physical universe.

Making Sense of the World

This book presents a clear and critical view of the orthodox logical empiricist tradition, pointing the way to significant developments for the understanding of science both as research and as culture. It summarizes the present confused and highly polarized status of the orthodox philosophy of science. It exhibits clearly the fundamental metaphysical and global presuppositions and confusions that have led to this status. It provides a positive point of view from which progress can be made toward understanding science as research done by real scientists rather than science as exemplifying some prior epistemological program created by philosophers. And it leads directly to an understanding of science as a dynamic force within our society with consequences for the environment and public policy.

The Human World in the Physical Universe

Each of the contributors examine scientific realism by questioning or rejecting how it was traditionally discussed.

A Realistic Theory of Science

Many of us allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the small worries and vexations of everyday life, clothing them with a reality quite disproportionate to their importance; we are too apt to look at them, as it were, through a powerful microscope, piling power upon power of magnification, until we have made mountains out of mole-hills, whereas if we treated them at their true value we should look at them through a telescope, in the reverse direction, when they would appear not only trivial, but would be seen to be too remote to have any material effect on our lives.Show Excerpt vements be followed even at short distances without having material contact, by means of the air, with the object; sight indeed appears to have to do with Space- and sound with Time-perception. In examining Nature by means of our senses we find we are so hemmed in by what we have always taken for granted and so bound down by modes of reasoning derived from what we have seen, heard, or felt in our daily life, that we are sadly hampered in our search after the truth. It is difficult to sweep the erroneous concepts aside and make a fresh start. In fact the great difficulty in studying the Reality underlying Nature is analogous to our inability to isolate and study the different sounds themselves which fall upon the ear, if our own language is being uttered, without being forced to consider the meaning we have always attached to those sounds. Let us now go back to the contention that it is not we who are looking out upon Nature but that our senses are being bombarded from without; we are living in a world

Reduction, Time and Reality

In the past thirty years, two fundamental issues have emerged in the philosophy of science. One concerns the appropriate attitude we should take towards scientific theories--whether we should regard them as true or merely empirically adequate, for example. The other concerns the nature of scientific theories and models and how these might best be represented. In this ambitious book, da Costa and French bring these two issues together by arguing that theories and models should be regarded as partially rather than wholly true. They adopt a framework that sheds new light on issues to do with belief, theory acceptance, and the realism-antirealism debate. The new machinery of "partial structures" that they develop offers a new perspective from which to view the nature of scientific models and their heuristic development. Their conclusions will be of wide interest to philosophers and historians of science.

Science and the Infinite

In A Scientist Speaks Out — A Personal Perspective on Science, Society, and Change, Nobel Laureate (Chemistry, 1951) Glenn T Seaborg shares some of his thoughts and reflections on his broad interests, from the formulation of national science policy to the promise of youth. During a distinguished career in science and public service that spanned more than 50 years, he published over 500 works and maintained a public speaking schedule that included about 700 speeches on a wide variety of topics. This volume is a collection of nearly forty of his more popular speeches and articles, directed at a mostly non-scientific and non-technical audience. Since this volume is a compendium of reprints, readers will be able to share some of Seaborg's thoughts, as he originally penned them. Contents:The Future Through ScienceLearning in the World of ChangeA Scientific Society — The BeginningsScience, the Humanities, and the Federal Government — Partners in ProgressTime, Leisure, and the Computer: The Crisis of Modern TechnologyThe Positive Power of ScienceA Scientific Safari to AfricaA Journey to ChinaPreparing for the 21st CenturyThe Crisis in Pre-College Science and Math Educationand other speeches Readership: General. keywords: “Engrossing and highly readable, the articles concentrate on science education, the public understanding of science, and the future of science and technology, and also include forays into international co-operation, the 'legacy of Alfred Nobel', and personal accounts of visits to China, Africa and the Soviet Union.” Physics World

Science and Partial Truth

Essay from the year 2020 in the subject Philosophy - Theoretical (Realisation, Science, Logic, Language), grade: 100, American Public University System, language: English, abstract: Whether or not humans have the capacity to objectively comprehend the cosmos is a discomforting topic; however, it is an important cosmological question that needs answered if scientists want to build the most accurate and honest concept of the universe. This paper examines this question and attempts to gain a better understanding of the perceptive capabilities of humans and their relation to external reality. Using an interdisciplinary literature review approach, the research highlights various branches of science in order to examine the limits of human perception and cognition. The scientists consulted include Eagleman, who presents the concept that experienced reality is a construct created by the brain; Hoffman, with his insistence that evolution shaped people to perceive and seek fitness points rather than truth; and multiple physicists including Barbour, Greene, Planck, and Tyson, each of whom tackle the subject of cosmology from a unique perspective. Although it cannot be declared with complete certainty, the chances of humans perceiving external reality as it truly exists are extremely low. As with other lifeforms, Homo sapiens evolved to adapt to their environment and lifestyle according to their surrounding resources, and, as such, their perception is designed for survival rather than absolute truth. The physicists disagree in some fashions, such as in the argument of the existence of time and where physics is heading in the future. However, they each agree on one point—we do not, and may never, know the true nature of the cosmos.

A Scientist Speaks Out

Essay from the year 2004 in the subject Politics - International Politics - General and Theories, grade: 2+ (B+), University of Kent (Brussels School of International Studies), language: English, abstract: 85 years after its formal establishment , the discipline of International Relations is currently engaged in what is known as the ‘Third Debate’. At the heart of this debate is the question “to what extend can society be studied in the same way as nature?” Positivists hold that the social world is not fundamentally different form the natural world and that, as a result, the same epistemology applies. Positivists aim to explain the social world and believe that causal laws and generalisations can be found through observation. Post-positivists argue that the social and the natural world are not alike and that scientific explanation is neither a valid nor an adequate form of inquiry for the social sciences. According to this view, the social world primarily consists of ideas and concepts that cannot be translated into scientific terms but need to be interpreted. Hence, the aim of post-positivists is understanding social phenomena. The two positions are commonly perceived as mutually exclusive and the advocates of the two camps are hardly willing to engage in a constructive debate. “This Third Debate will not be much of a ‘debate’ if its protagonists are not speaking to each other, but that is where things largely stand.” Nevertheless, Wendt, among others, has argued that social science in general and International Relations in particular might benefit less from siding with either positivism or post-positivism, but more from combining the two, and that it is indeed possible to build a bridge between the two philosophies of science. Such a combination would acknowledge the ontology of social science to be post-positivist, that is idea-based, while at the same time proposing to adopt a positivist epistemology , although pure scientific explanation and empiricism are not seen as appropriate methods.

The Nature of the World

Meanwhile, the very idea of scientific rationality is under fire from Neo-Luddites, animal-rights activists, religious fundamentalists, and New Agers alike.

Perception versus Reality. The Human Inability to See the Truth

Traditional philosophical accounts of the scientific enterprise represent it as a paradigm of institution-alized rationality. The scientist is held to possess a special method which he disinterestedly applied, generating an accumulation of scientific knowledge about the world, and the evolution of science is seen as being determined by the rational deliberations of scientists and not by psychological or sociological factors. More recently, various philosophers, historians and sociologists of science have held that this rational model is no longer tenable. Some have claimed that there is no such thing as a scientific method or scientific progress, and that theories are incommensurable and so there is no possibility of choice between alternative theories. The more extreme non-rationalists seek to explain scientific change exclusively in terms of psychological and sociological factors. In this book, the author explores the controversy between the two approaches and presents a strongly critical and independent view of both rationalists like Popper and Lakatos and non-rationalists such as Kuhn and Feyerabend. He goes on to develop his own account of the scientific enterprise--temperate rationalism, a vindication of the rationalist approach to science and of a realist construal of theories.--

The Open World

Explaining and Understanding in the Social Sciences: Is it Beneficial for our Understanding of IR to Combine Positivist and Post-Positivist Philosophies of Science?