

Ontology: What Do We Believe Exists?

Positivism	Interpretivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social world is similar to the natural world in terms of the way in which it can be studied. • The self-consciousness of human beings is not a significant factor in our ability to understand social behaviour. • It is possible to establish clear cause and effect relationships when studying social behaviour. • The social world has an objective existence over and above human (subjective) consciousness. In this sense, reliable and valid knowledge is discovered in the same way that natural scientists are able to discover knowledge about the physical world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social world is very different to the natural world. • Human consciousness is highly significant. People act consciously in order to create their social existence. • It is not possible to make cause and effect statements about the social world that are "true for all time". Limited - and very specific - causal statements can be made. • The social world is experienced subjectively and has no objective existence that is independent of people's everyday behaviour. Knowledge about the social world is created, not simply discovered.

Epistemology: What Proof Will We Accept Of Valid Knowledge?

Positivism	Interpretivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the social world is based upon <i>empirical</i> principles (that is, the evidence of our senses). All evidence must be capable of being tested scientifically and being shown to be "not false". • The task of science is to demonstrate causal relationships. That is, to quantify the nature of patterns / regularities that exist in human behaviour. • The main objective of positivism is to discover causal relationships between observable phenomena. Anything that is not directly observable cannot be considered as either valid knowledge or part of a valid explanation of social phenomena. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge about the social world is based upon our ability to experience the world as others experience it. "Reality", in this sense, is created by people experiencing and interpreting the world subjectively. • The task of science is not to try to establish causal relationships / laws (something considered to be almost impossible in the social world). Rather, it is to understand how and why people interpret the world in various ways. • The main objective of interpretivism is to understand the ways in which people create and experience the social world subjectively.