



Constructing the World

David J. Chalmers

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David Chalmers develops a picture of reality on which all truths can be derived from a limited class of basic truths. The picture is inspired by Rudolf Carnap's construction of the world in *Der Logische Aufbau Der Welt*. Carnap's *Aufbau* is often seen as a noble failure, but Chalmers argues that a version of the project can succeed. With the right basic elements and the right derivation relation, we can indeed construct the world. The focal point of Chalmers' project is scrutability: the thesis that ideal reasoning from a limited class of basic truths yields all truths about the world. Chalmers first argues for the scrutability thesis and then considers how small the base can be. The result is a framework in "metaphysical epistemology": epistemology in service of a global picture of the world. The scrutability framework has ramifications throughout philosophy. Using it, Chalmers defends a broadly Fregean approach to meaning, argues for an internalist approach to the contents of thought, and rebuts W.V. Quine's arguments against the analytic and the a priori. He also uses scrutability to analyze the unity of science, to defend a sort of conceptual metaphysics, and to mount a structuralist response to skepticism. Based on Chalmers's 2010 John Locke lectures, *Constructing the World* opens up debate on central philosophical issues concerning knowledge, language, mind, and reality.

Constructing the World Details

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From Reader Review Constructing the World for online ebook

Craig says

heavy going, must try and read again.

Benjamin says

Carnap was brilliant. So is Chalmers, who has improved upon Carnap's project. But I think we have another noble failure here. What's worse is that it is a quite long-winded failure. I can appreciate Chalmers' attempts at clarity and detail, but those aren't the only culprits for the longwindedness.

Excepting the prolixity, Chalmers does provide a fruitful examination of the plausibilities of various types of reduction. Further, perhaps the book's best contribution to philosophy is its defense of the a priori. Chalmers has opened the door more for a rationalist project. The superrigid tells us about everything beyond the scientific and phenomenal, says Chalmers. The a priori gets us all the rest of the truths.

But he tries to get us scrutability at the expense of metaphysics. I find the ontological, normative, and mathematical truths to push Chalmers' base beyond one we could call compact. Chalmers' hope to defend a scrutability base devoid of macrophysical truths is especially dubious. Categories such as truths of mathematics and set theory are exemplary of the basic problem of insufficient scrutability that I think Chalmers cannot overcome even with an enriched compact base. To parrot another reviewer, "You can't avoid the consequences of diagonalization by adding premises."

Peter McLoughlin says

David Chalmers is one of my favorite philosopher I don't know if he or Dan Dennett is right about consciousness which they both dispute but I really like Chalmers down to earth style of explaining thorny philosophical issues around theory of mind. His books are very academic however and really not intended for lay readers. I liked that he wants to give old school analytic especially Carnap a shot in the arm. He thinks Carnap's Project in the Aufblau is a worthy one. He disagrees with verificationism but he does respect Carnap's structured approach to epistemology. He tries to recover the a priori / a posteriori distinction from Quine's assault. He wants an old school project of unify epistemology and metaphysics in a structural system. He uses the idea of Scrutability. That is the concept of being able to ask a question that has a definite answer about the world and with sufficient perfect mind could find the answer to. The criteria of Scrutability rather than knowledge avoids some of the attacks that theories of knowledge suffered in later analytic philosophy. It was a tough slog but it was Chalmers tries ease the reading with various excursions to make the concepts easier to understand.

J. says

You can't avoid the consequences of diagonalization by adding premises.

Michael Wallach says

His argument that experience itself is knowable (such as knowing what it is like to be a bat) is too large to assume.
