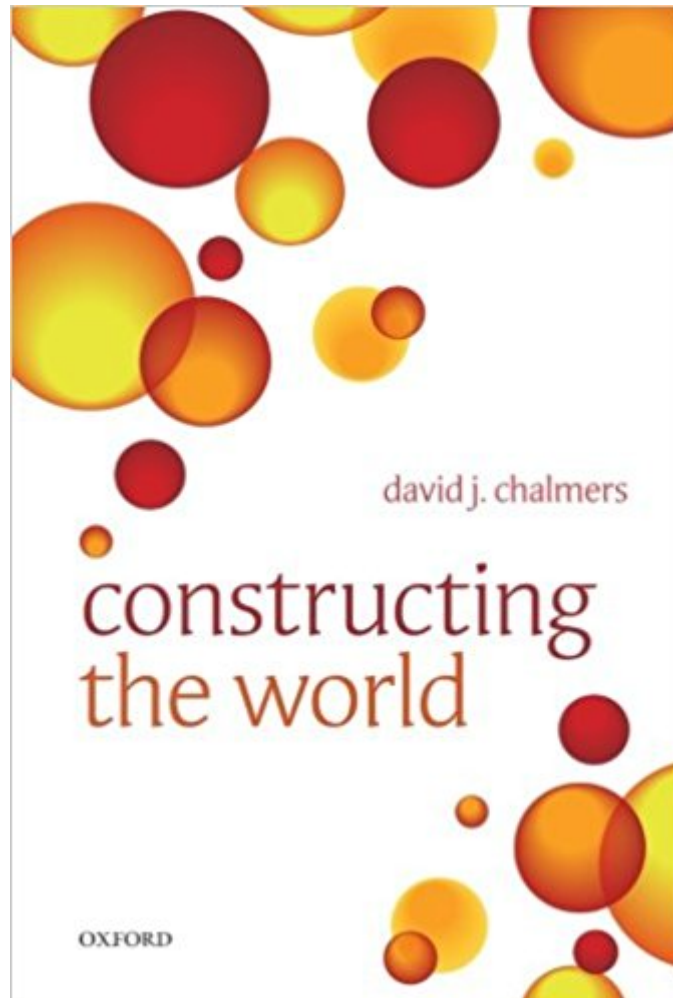




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# Constructing The World



## Synopsis

David J. Chalmers constructs a highly ambitious and original picture of the world, from a few basic elements. He develops and extends Rudolf Carnap's attempt to do the same in *Der Logische Aufbau Der Welt* (1928). Carnap gave a blueprint for describing the entire world using a limited vocabulary, so that all truths about the world could be derived from that description--but his *Aufbau* is often seen as a noble failure. In *Constructing the World*, Chalmers argues that something like the *Aufbau* project can succeed. With the right vocabulary and the right derivation relation, we can indeed construct the world. The focal point of Chalmers's project is scrutability: roughly, 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. All this can be seen as a project in metaphysical epistemology: epistemology in service of a global picture of the world and of our conception thereof. 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 conceptual approach to 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 areas of philosophy including philosophy of language, consciousness, knowledge, and reality. This major work by a leading philosopher will appeal to philosophers in all areas.

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## Customer Reviews

"Constructing the World is a work of major philosophical importance that will be of interest to philosophers of just about every stripe. It is extremely ambitious. And yet even with all the territory it ranges over, the argumentation is consistently careful and rigorous."--Justin Tiehen, Philosophy  
"Chalmers influence in philosophy and consciousness studies is unquestionable." --British Journal for the Philosophy of Science

David J. Chalmers is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Consciousness at the Australian National University, and Professor of Philosophy at New York University. After studying mathematics at Adelaide and Oxford, he completed a PhD in philosophy and cognitive science at Indiana University in 1993. His 1996 book *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* was highly successful with both popular and academic audiences. As director of the Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona from 1999 to 2004, and as a founder of the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness, he has played a major role in developing the interdisciplinary science of consciousness. He is well known for his formulation of the 'hard problem' of consciousness and his arguments against materialism. He has also written on topics as diverse as the nature of meaning, the foundations of artificial intelligence, and philosophical issues in *The Matrix*.

In this book Dr. Chalmers attempts to establish a technique or philosophical tool, a "knowability thesis" which, if he manages it, can be applied to various problems in epistemology, phenomenology, and philosophy of science. This is a long and highly technical (in philosophy's way) work not for the faint of heart. Among other things however this book illustrates just how detailed and precise a modern philosopher must be when attempting to establish a new tool applicable to various disciplines across philosophy. Dr. Chalmers seems to try at least to touch upon every possible facet of objection and counter-proposal to his thesis. Even in this very long book he cannot explore all of these areas in detail, but he does try to account for their presence and note their bearing on his core thesis. While not so much for a reader casually interested in broad philosophical questions, no graduate student in philosophy today should miss this book. If nothing else it is an illustration of the best in modern technical philosophy.

Carnap was brilliant. So is Chalmers, who has improved upon Carnap's project. But I (and my graduate class as a whole) 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 an anonymous commenter I once read, "You can't avoid the consequences of diagonalization by adding premises."

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