

Three Positions toward Reality
Old Fashioned Sunday School
October 18, 2009

	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Postpositivism</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>
Name of reality	Reality exists “out there,” and one can know reality as it is positively perceived through the senses.	Reality exists “out there,” but one cannot know reality positively through the senses because these are subject to distortion, bias, and contextual influence.	There is no reality “out there”; what we perceive as reality is continually constructed within the mental frameworks or theories of meaning, and these are further coconstructed in relational interactions.
Scientific worldview	Newtonian physics – The world operates according to regular mechanical laws of cause and effect (like a clock).	Drawn from both Newtonian physics and chaos theory – How the world operates depends on the level or nature of what is observed (clocks or clouds; inanimate, animate, or human phenomena).	Chaos theory (from quantum physics) – The world operates according to multiple mutual influences among particles and forces (like clouds).
Method of knowing	“Scientific method” – objective, empirical observation, also called experimental design; laboratory settings preferred as most “neutral.”	“Quasi-experimental” designs in which observation of natural occurrences replaces strict manipulation of controls and conditions on data; “naturalistic” rather than laboratory settings preferred for observation; combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Questions move both deductively and inductively.	Dialogical, hermeneutical, or narrative explorations of meaning through shared interactive between observer and observed; participant-observer designs in which observer is immersed in setting; qualitative research only. Questions are generated inductively, from observations to proposals of theory.
Theory of truth	“Correspondence theory” – What is proposed as true must correspond with empirically observed reality. “I see, I know, it is real.” Seeing face-to-face is possible here and now. Confidence is placed in the revelations of received scientific and rational tradition.	← both/and → Perception of truth is always context dependent. “I see (‘in a mirror dimly’). It is real, but ‘my’ perceptions are distorted by inner biases and external influences.”	“Truths” are multiple, fluid, local, particular, changing, and cocreated. “I/we/you see/feel/experience. I know (‘in part’). We change each other as we interact.”