

What is naive realism?

<https://www.quora.com/Naive-Realism/What-is-naive-realism/answer/John-Ringland>

<http://anandavala.info/article/What-is-naive-realism.pdf>

Naïve realism (also called common-sense realism) is an unconscious cognitive habit operating in each moment of awareness that leads us to assume a certain epistemological position, i.e. an assumption about the validity of certain claims to knowledge. In rare instances it is a consciously held philosophical belief, then it is called direct realism.

The term 'naïve' isn't used in the pejorative sense of "simple minded" or 'stupid', it is instead used in a technical sense of “not having previously been exposed to something” (see [Definition](#)). In this case, not previously exposed to philosophical enquiry or scientific evidence regarding the epistemological validity of the knowledge claims that are being made. Thus it is a naturally occurring and unconsciously assumed epistemological position that is not consciously held but rather it is experienced as "simply the way things are".

Specifically, naïve realism leads us to overlook the role of subjective experience in the apprehension of that which is experienced and to unquestioningly assume that the phenomenal content of our subjective experiences are in fact objective external objects. Thus when we see a chair in front of us we simply assume that this is because there is a chair in front of us.

"Naive realism holds that the view of the world that we derive from our senses is to be taken at face value: there are objects out there in the world, and those objects have the properties that they appear to us to have." [Theory of Knowledge - naive realism](#)

We do not question the quantum indeterminacy of observables, the operation of our sensory and neurological sub-systems, the subconscious pre-processing of stimuli, the influence of cognitive biases, the perceptual forms that arise in the conscious mind, nor the conceptual categories that we habitually associate with those forms.

Naïve realism is biologically useful because an animal's perceptions of food, danger, mates, etc can be interpreted with sufficient accuracy and quickly responded to, thus this habit is deeply engrained in our minds. However when exploring subtle issues of epistemology, philosophy, metaphysics, physics, etc it can be a significant obstacle to clear, sceptical, rational thought about many topics. This obstacle goes completely unnoticed and when the unconscious beliefs are challenged by certain ideas this results in cognitive dissonance and instinctual aversion to the 'offending' ideas. For many details on this response within the context of science see [Do we have a collective paradigm? Else, is it fragmented?](#)

Naïve realism doesn't just apply to what we perceive through out bare senses, but also through augmented senses, such as using a telescope or microscope or particle accelerator or other sophisticated experimental apparatus. By unconsciously ascribing objective reality to phenomenal appearances naïve realism leads us to think of things primarily in terms of their phenomenal appearances and to come to assume that all 'real' things are determined by their phenomenal appearances. This is sometimes called classical objectivism. If something cannot be experienced via its phenomenal appearances then it is considered abstract and is assumed to be unreal. It is this aspect that is challenged by the realist interpretation of quantum mechanics, for example, see [Will](#)

[we ever be able to truly understand Quantum Mechanics?](#)

Throughout history and throughout each of our lives there has been an unconscious accumulation of habits and beliefs arising from unquestioned assumptions about the contents of subjective awareness. Thus the mind conforms to a self-reproducing closed loop of hidden assumptions, which keeps most cultural discourses unwittingly bound within a naïve realist framework.

Note that naïve realism operates at the foundations of empirical science because:

“Empiricists claim that sense experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge” ([Rationalism vs. Empiricism](#))

However not all of science is empiricist, most notably quantum mechanics. See [Can it ever be said that Scientific realism takes off from the springboard of commonsense or naive realism?](#)

When naïve realism has been questioned by philosophical enquiry it has been shown to be inconsistent. Furthermore, cognitive science shows it to be unfounded. Finally, quantum mechanics shows it to be utterly false. See [The Big Philosophical Questions: Now that naive realism has been disproven by quantum mechanics, how will this impact our collective paradigm?](#)

However due to the unconscious and endemic nature of naïve realism it persists throughout science unabated, which has led some to study the process of cognitive repression within the scientific community. See [Despite having evidence that contradicts someone's belief, why can't they come to believe something new?](#) where there is an extended quote regarding this cognitive repression in modern physics.

Naïve realism permeates our perceptions, beliefs, languages, cultural discourses, philosophies and scientific theories. It takes great insight, courage, effort, persistence, clarity, subtlety and caution to coherently and consistently think outside of that closed loop. Even for those who sincerely attempt this it is very easy to unwittingly slip back in to such an engrained habit. It will take some time before the scientific community is able to go beyond naïve realism, see [Has science become too dogmatic?](#)

Because naïve realism ignores the role of experience in the apprehension of that which is experienced and assumes objective existence for the objects that are portrayed by experience, this leads to many conceptual difficulties and paradoxes. Especially when we later come to enquire into the nature of experience itself (and consciousness) and we try to understand it in terms of the phenomenal content of experience that we have previously assumed to be objective external objects.

Because quantum mechanics avoids succumbing to naive realism it finds that the role of the observer is central to the theory, whereas in all empirical sciences the observer has no role. For this reason quantum mechanics is favoured by some as a science that can escape the closed loop of naïve realist assumptions and provide pathways towards an understanding of consciousness whereas empirical science cannot. See [What is consciousness?](#)