Realism Research Philosophy

Realism research philosophy relies on the idea of independence of reality from the human mind. As a branch of epistemology, this philosophy is based on the assumption of a scientific approach to the development of knowledge. Realism can be divided into two groups: direct and critical.

Direct Realism and Critical Realism

Direct realism can be described as "what you see is what you get"[1]. In other words, direct realism portrays the world through personal human senses. **Critical realism,** on the other hand, argues that humans do experience the sensations and images of the real world. According to critical realism, sensations and images of the real world can be deceptive and they usually do not portray the real world[2].

An example of an optical illusion below can be used to illustrate the difference between direct and critical realism. Squares A and B appear to be different colours because of neighbouring contrasting squares, but actually they are the same colour. Direct realists would state that squares A and B have different colours, because this is what they see.

Critical realists, on the other hand, recognise that our senses and other factors may get in the way between us as researchers and researched reality. Therefore, direct realists my notice that squares A and B are actuallty the same colour.

Direct realists accept the world as relatively unchanging. They concentrate on only one level only be it individual, group or an organization. Critical realists, on the other hand appreciate the importance of multi-level study. Specifically, as a researcher following critical realism research philosophy you have to appreciate the influence and interrelationship between the individual , the group and the organization.

There is a consensus among researchers that critical realist is more popular and appropriate than direct realist approach due to its ability to capture the fuller picture when studying a phenomenon. Accordingly, if you have chosen realism as your research philosophy you are advised to assume the role of critical realist, rather than direct realist.

[1] Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited

[2] Novikov, A.M. &Novikov, D.A. (2013) "Research Methodology: From Philosophy of Science to Research Design" CRC Press