

# Positivism vs phenomenologism

Science



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Outline the difference between positivism and phenomenologism. Positivists believe that there is objective truth that can be discovered through the methodical and careful application of deductive scientific methods. They believe that the world is made up of observable cause and effect situations that are external and not influenced by human consciousness. They emphasize the importance of objectivity, arguing that it can best be achieved if the researcher maintain social distance from the subjects. Positivists prefer the use of aggregate data about social facts. They believe that this not only maintains social distance from their subjects, but that the large sample sizes cancel out exceptions to the rules and provide more reliable and valid results. They use deductive methods of prediction and trial because they believe that the ability to predict future behaviors is evidence of truth. In contrast, phenomenologists maintain that humans are thinking, motivated, conscious beings and that their own perceptions of situations and behaviors are important. They maintain that in order to understand behavior, researchers cannot just look at stimulus-response behaviors; they need to know what people are thinking. They point out that since social scientists are part of the very entity they are studying, they are not detached. Since phenomenologists focus on the interpretation of situations, events and behaviors, they feel it is important to gain an intimate understanding and to really engage with the subjects. Some even argue that researchers cannot understand a group unless they are a part of it themselves. They point out that quantitative measures must be used with caution because counting and the use of statistics can create distance that limits understanding. They emphasize inductive approaches, where observation occurs before the

generation of theory and often use participant observation and case studies to collect data.