

The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. Overlaid on this are several faint, light blue geometric elements: concentric circles, arcs, and a large circular scale with degree markings (40, 150, 160, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260) and arrows indicating a clockwise direction. The main title is centered in a bold, white, serif font.

ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

Prepared: Management

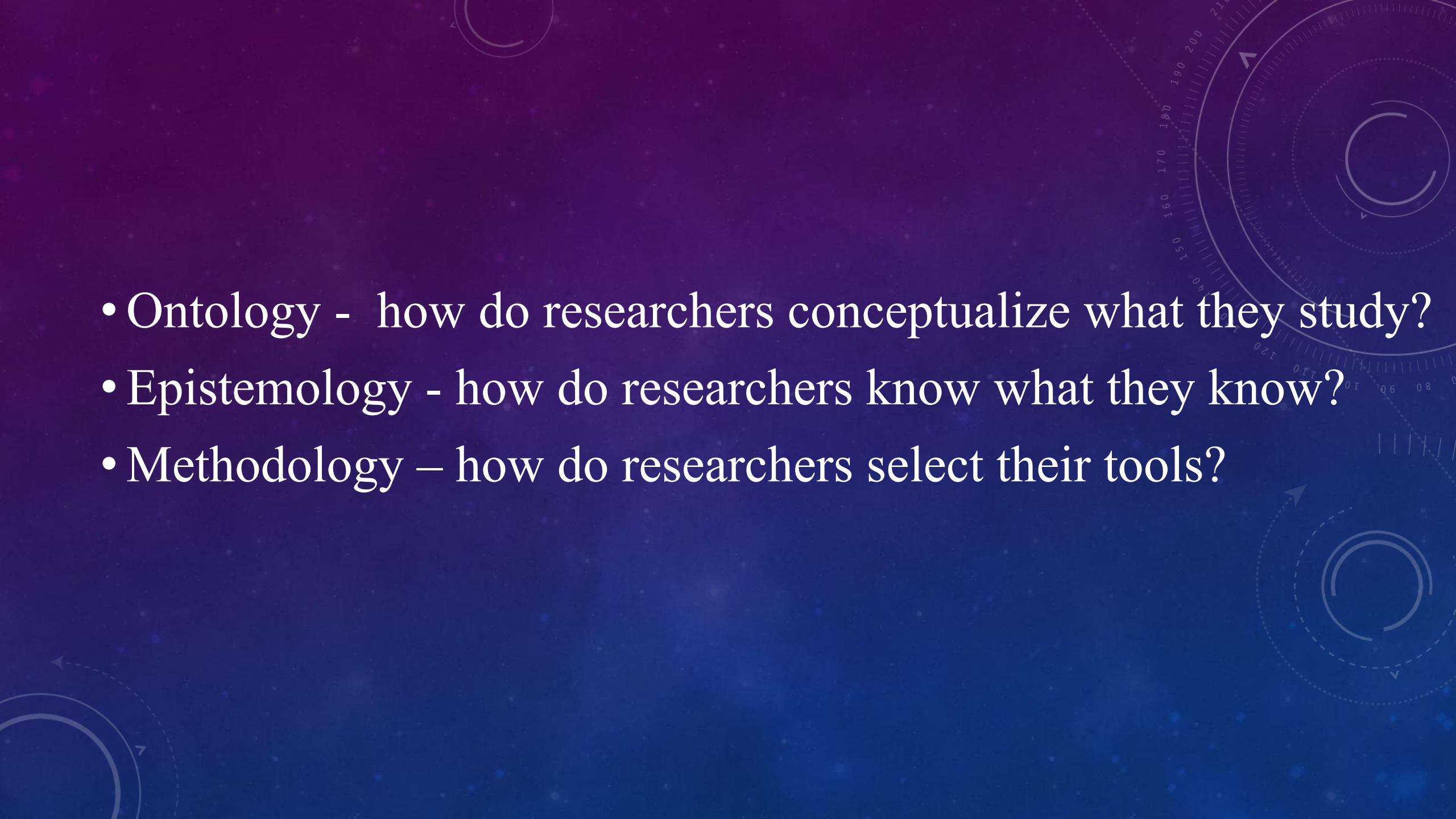
- **ONTOLOGY** - REFERS TO THE SET OF PHENOMENA THAT ARE SAID TO EXIST, OR KNOWN, BY A TYPE OF THEORY.

EPISTEMOLOGY - IN PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE EPISTEMOLOGY MEANS THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE. HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW? WHAT CONSTITUTES VALID KNOWLEDGE AND HOW TO OBTAIN IT?

METHODOLOGY - FOCUSES ON THE SPECIFIC WAYS IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE IS CONSTRUCTED.

EPISTEMOLOGY, ONTOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY ARE STRONGLY LINKED.

THE FIRST INVOLVES THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND HOW WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW, THE SECOND INVOLVES WHAT WE SEE AND OBSERVE IN THE WORLD, THE THIRD INVOLVES THE PRACTICE OF BUILDING AND DEMONSTRATING THAT KNOWLEDGE AND WHAT WE SEE IN THE WORLD.

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- Ontology - how do researchers conceptualize what they study?
 - Epistemology - how do researchers know what they know?
 - Methodology – how do researchers select their tools?

ONTOLOGY REFERS TO THE CHARACTER OF THE WORLD AS IT ACTUALLY IS. ACCORDINGLY, IT REFERS TO THE FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS SCHOLARS MAKE ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WORLD AND ESPECIALLY ABOUT THE NATURE OF CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THAT WORLD.

IF A **METHODOLOGY** CONSISTS OF TECHNIQUES FOR MAKING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CAUSAL RELATIONS, THEN ONTOLOGY CONSISTS OF PREMISES ABOUT THE DEEP CAUSAL STRUCTURES OF THE WORLD FROM WHICH ANALYSIS BEGINS AND WITHOUT WHICH THEORIES ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORLD WOULD NOT MAKE SENSE.

AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, **ONTOLOGY** IS HOW WE IMAGINE THE SOCIAL WORLD TO BE

- **Ontology** is ultimately crucial to **methodology** because the appropriateness of a particular set of methods for a given problem turns on assumptions about the nature of the causal relations they are meant to discover
- To be valid, the **methodologies** used in a field must be congruent with its prevailing ontologies

Which one comes first?

- The sequence which is echoed in numerous contemporary guides to run from **ontology** (concerning being, and what exists in the world) to **epistemology** (concerning knowing, and how observers formulate and evaluate statements about the world) and only then to **methodology**.

HOWEVER, IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT IF ANY WARRANT WE COULD PROVIDE FOR MOST ONTOLOGICAL CLAIMS IF ONTOLOGY IN THIS SENSE WERE TO ALWAYS "COME FIRST."

- IF SOMEONE MAKES AN ONTOLOGICAL CLAIM ABOUT SOMETHING EXISTING IN THE WORLD, THEN WE ARE FACED WITH AN INTRIGUING EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF HOW POSSIBLY TO KNOW WHETHER THAT CLAIM IS TRUE, AND THE EQUALLY INTRIGUING PROBLEM OF SELECTING THE PROPER METHODS TO USE IN EVALUATING THE CLAIM.
- BUT IF EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHOD ARE SUPPOSED TO BE FITTED TO ONTOLOGY, THEN WE ARE STUCK WITH TECHNIQUES AND STANDARDS DESIGNED TO RESPOND TO THE SPECIFICITY OF THE OBJECT UNDER INVESTIGATION JACKSON 2011, PP. 28-29).

JACKSON (P. 29) - BUT IS THERE ONLY ONE TYPE OF ONTOLOGY?

NO

CONCRETE ONTOLOGY - ON ONE HAND, ONTOLOGY CAN REFER TO A CATALOG OF OBJECTS, PROCESSES, AND FACTORS THAT A GIVEN LINE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH EXPECTS TO EXIST: ONTOLOGY CONCERNED WITH WHAT EXISTS, OR WITH THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES ON WHICH SUCH EXISTENCE MIGHT BE DETERMINED?

PHILOSOPHICAL ONTOLOGY - ON THE OTHER HAND, ONTOLOGY CAN REFER TO THE CONCEPTUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS ON WHICH CLAIMS ABOUT THE WORLD ARE FORMULATED IN THE FIRST PLACE: ONTOLOGY CONCERNED WITH HOW WE AS RESEARCHERS ARE ABLE TO PRODUCE KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

- THE VIRTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF **PHILOSOPHICAL ONTOLOGY** FROM IR DEBATES - AND ITS READY REPLACEMENT BY SETS OF SUBSTANTIVE CONSIDERATIONS - **CONCRETE ONTOLOGY** - CARRIES WITH IT A COST FOR IR SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH.

CHIEF AMONG THESE IS THAT EVERY SUBSTANTIVE DISAGREEMENT IS TRANSFORMED INTO AN **EMPIRICAL DISPUTE**, BUT WITHOUT ANY CLEAR GUIDELINES FOR HOW SUCH DISPUTES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE RESOLVED.

THAT SUCH EMPIRICAL DISPUTES ARE DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE IS EVIDENCED BY A QUICK GLANCE AT THE ONGOING DEBATES SURROUNDING THE QUESTION OF WHETHER "**IDEAS**" OR "**MATERIAL FACTORS**" WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT CAUSE OF THE END OF THE COLD WAR (JACKSON, PP. 30).

Philosophical Ontology - Mind-world dualism

- To coherently argue that knowledge-production is separate from and subordinate to the way that the world is, it is necessary to argue that the **world exists independently** of our knowledge of it, and that the world-places limits on how we may produce knowledge of it.
- This **mind-world dualism** is the **philosophical ontology** that makes meaningful the proposition that we can empirically evaluate scientific ontologies, because if there is a world existing "**out there**" in a mind-independent way, we can in principle compare any given scientific ontology to that world and see if it matches in some sense.

Philosophical Ontology 02-Mind-world monism

- **Mind-world monism** maintains that the researcher is a part of the world in such a way that speaking of "the world" as divorced from the activities of making sense of the world is literally nonsensical.
- "World" is endogenous to social practices of knowledge-production, including (but not limited to) scholarly practices, and hence scholarly knowledge-production is **not a simple description** or recording of already existing stable worldly objects.
- In methodological terms, **mind-world monism** suggests that strategies of falsification or strategies of producing a scientific ontology rich enough to capture the actual constituents of a mind-independent world are nonsensical.
- They rest on a presumption that blinds them to the ways in which the production of knowledge is itself also and **simultaneously productive** of the world (Jackson, pp. 36 and 114).

Phenomenalism

- The reliance on empirical observation and directly apprehend able data - classic empiricism.
- Knowledge, to the contrary, is a matter of organising past experiences so as to forge useful tools for the investigation of future, as-yet-unknown situations.

Transfactualism

- The possibility of knowing things unobservables since it holds out the possibility of going beyond the facts to grasp the deeper processes and factors that generate those facts.
- Valid knowledge-claims should reach beyond experiences to grasp the deeper generative causal properties that give rise to those experiences.

JACKSON CREATES A **TAXONOMY** OF THE VARIOUS OPTIONS, EACH ONE ASSOCIATED WITH VARIOUS PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS, ONTOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROPOSALS WITHIN FOUR MAIN CATEGORIES: **NEOPOSITIVISM, CRITICAL REALISM, ANALYTICS** AND **REFLEXIVITY**.

		<i>Relationship between knowledge and observation</i>	
		<i>phenomenalism</i>	<i>transfactualism</i>
<i>Relationship between the knower and the known</i>	mind–world dualism	neopositivism	critical realism
	mind–world monism	analyticism	reflexivity

Pluralistic philosophical context

- There are a **variety of claims** about how IR is connected to the world, and thus there is a **variety of philosophical** ontologies, each of which holds different implications for how we should go about producing factual knowledge about world politics
- Jackson's most important conclusion is that **no single** methodology or philosophical understanding of the scientific method ought to **dominate the field**.
- The goals of the particular IR study in question and the context of the research need to be considered when deciding on the appropriate approach.

