



R = REALITY

FIGURE I

BASIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONS

(1956:109) that modern philosophy was profoundly anti-metaphysical in spirit. anti-metaphysical character may be summed up in the caveat: There may be no structure.

Because scientific statements were thought to have an exact correspondence with reality, human knowledge was seen as cumulative. Proven knowledge was taken to be true, and truth as unchanging. Science was compared to building a house on foundations on which new knowledge, like bricks, was added. Once incorporated in the walls, knowledge could not be changed without threatening the whole structure.

Finally, human knowledge within this epistemological paradigm was seen as potentially exhaustive. Since reality is what we perceive it to be, in time and with sufficient research, we can know all there is to know about the world. As Nagel observes (1971:157-158)

For most of us there "is" an "external" world, and however much we may affect or interact with it by our explorations, our use, our enjoyments, and sufferings that depend upon it, we think of it not only as somehow existing in its own right but also that its "real" description is somehow exhausted by the categories and calculations of physical science.

The goal, therefore, was a unified and closed body of knowledge—a single theoretical statement in which there were no logical contradictions or anomalies. This Laplacean idea of universal knowledge was one of the most important assumptions of scientific empiricism. The human mind was capable of acquiring all knowledge. There was no place for a sense of mystery in the universe. As Coulson points out (1955), most people in the west not only trust science in the areas of its discoveries, but also have an implicit faith that given enough time and effort it will solve the problems that remain unsolved.

The emergence of competing theories within naive realism led to direct confrontations. The question was not which of the theories was better or more accurate in its description of reality, but which of them was true. Because proponents of each claimed to have the truth, they were compelled to judge the others as false. The