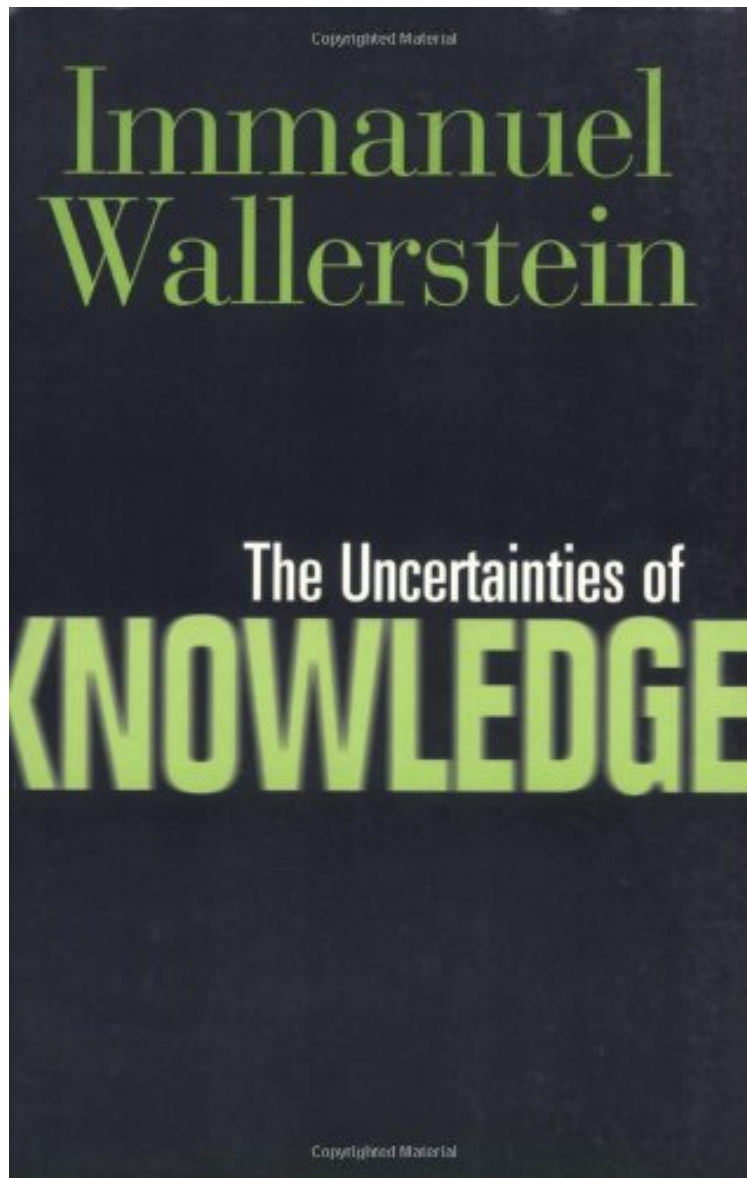


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## Uncertainties Of Knowledge (Politics History Social Chan)

*Immanuel Wallerstein*

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#1622824 in Books 2004-03-26Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.25 x .60 x 5.50l, .56 #File Name:  
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**Immanuel Wallerstein : Uncertainties Of Knowledge (Politics History Social Chan)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Uncertainties Of Knowledge (Politics History Social Chan):

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful. "... always readable, often persuasive, and occasionally profound"By CamberImmanuel Wallerstein is a distinguished sociologist who has been a pioneer and leader in

development of 'world-systems analysis'. In this book, he looks at knowledge somewhat more generally, emphasizing the uncertainties of knowledge and offering ideas for how to deal with such uncertainties. For the most part, I agree with his ideas. His basic message is that our understanding of reality, scientific and otherwise, is unavoidably uncertain and approximate. This makes it hard to both assert and judge expertise in many domains, though we can still develop useful heuristics. Part of the difficulty is that social systems are complex, blending both nomothetic (law-like) long-term trends and idiographic particularities. The result is that social systems must be understood historically (ie, narratively), with each historical social system having a bounded existence which generally ends when the system goes far from equilibrium and experiences a bifurcation which is chaotic, in the sense that the outcome can easily be influenced by many factors which would normally be considered relatively insignificant. This complexity tends to make the future largely unpredictable, especially when the system is near a bifurcation point, as Wallerstein believes to be the case with our current 'capitalist world-economy'. This lack of predictability, combined with the fleeting nature of the present, may turn our focus towards the past (at least for historians), but even here uncertainty is rampant, with all historical work involving interpretation, pragmatically judged on the basis of plausibility and usefulness rather than some ideal of Platonic correctness. The necessity of interpretation leads to the realization from cultural studies that our understanding, including science, is culture-bound and value-laden. As a result, scholarly work is inseparable from moral and political considerations, and our understanding must change with the times rather than counterproductively being locked into rigid theories. In this situation, we are wise to adopt a pluralistic approach, drawing on perspectives from outside the university system and from different cultures around the world. Again, I tend to agree with Wallerstein's ideas, so I liked the book, and I think the review by Michael Mann sums it up nicely: "Wallerstein is always readable, often persuasive, and occasionally profound." My one complaint is that the book is a collection of papers rather than a proper monograph. This isn't disclosed until one reads the acknowledgments, and the result is quite a bit of repetition, along with a lack of genuine integration (somewhat ironic from an author who advocates breaking down boundaries for the sake of scholarly integration). Nevertheless, Wallerstein is an important thinker and this is a worthwhile book, so I recommend it to anyone interested in a scholarly exploration of how we might develop a useful intellectual grasp of a world which is largely uncertain. 21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

The Human Use of Human Knowledge  
By Ralph Beliveau  
Wallerstein argues about how knowledge is constituted. This is essential thinking in a time where we see battles about what a 'theory' is, what history means, and how a 'reality based' perspective is really a more deeply moral position. Wallerstein knows that knowledge is a human attribute. He discusses science as "an essential human adventure, perhaps the great human adventure," as opposed to 'Scientism' which he argues is an ossified claim that "science is disinterested and extra-social, that its truth claims are self-sustaining without reference to more general philosophical assertions, and that science represents the only legitimate mode of knowledge." Deep respect to such a thoughtful scholar and thinker who humbly states that world is really only partially knowable. It reminds me that the people to watch out for are the people who think they are right all the time, a product of 'unshakable faith' rather than their capacity to reason.

In *The Uncertainties of Knowledge*, Immanuel Wallerstein extends his work over the last decade of elucidating the crisis of knowledge in current intellectual thought. Arguing that the current disciplinary divisions of academia - divisions produced by a previous crisis of knowledge - has left us trapped in a paradigm that assumes knowledge is a certainty that can help us explain the social world, Wallerstein offers us a new way of imagining the social sciences, one which allows for uncertainties and for methods of studying our world and its historical place.

"Immanuel Wallerstein tells a fairly clear story in this book." -The American Journal of Sociology "The volume is consistently well written, historically grounded in its own right, and, when taken as a whole, the essays provide new understanding of the thinking that underlies Wallerstein's world-systems analysis." -Choice "Wallerstein is always readable, often persuasive, and occasionally profound." -Michael Mann, The British Journal of Sociology "Wallerstein draws on his historical erudition and formidable theoretical powers to cast light on the ongoing transformation of our society. Even more impressive, he dares to think about the future." -Frances Fox Piven "Immanuel Wallerstein is both a redoubtable world historian and visionary prophet. Such a combination is unusual...[and] makes him a commanding figure, whose rhetorical address, radical ideas, and remarkable erudition challenge ordinary, established patterns of professional discourse." -William H. McNeill, Diplomatic History  
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