



How Is Quantum Field Theory Possible?

Sunny Y. Auyang

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Quantum field theory (QFT) combines quantum mechanics with Einstein's special theory of relativity and underlies elementary particle physics. This book presents a philosophical analysis of QFT. It is the first treatise in which the philosophies of space-time, quantum phenomena, and particle interactions are encompassed in a unified framework. Describing the physics in nontechnical terms, and schematically illustrating complex ideas, the book also serves as an introduction to fundamental physical theories. The philosophical interpretation both upholds the reality of the quantum world and acknowledges the irreducible cognitive elements in its representation. The interpretation is based on an analysis of our ways of thinking as they are embedded in the logical structure of QFT. The author argues that philosophical categories are significant only if they play active and essential roles in our knowledge and hence constitute part of the theories in actual use. Thus she regards physical theories as primary, extracts their categorical structure, and uses it to rethink key philosophical questions. Among the questions this book tries to answer are: What are the quantum properties independent of measurements? How do we refer to individual things in a continuous field? How do theories relate to objects? What are the general conditions of the world and of our ways of thinking that make possible our knowledge of the microscopic realm, which is so intangible and counterintuitive? As a penetrating analysis of vital themes in contemporary science, the book will engage the interest of students and professionals in physics and philosophy alike.

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