

BOOK REVIEWS

How Experiments End

To cite this article: Trevor Pinch 1988 *Phys. Bull.* **39** 282

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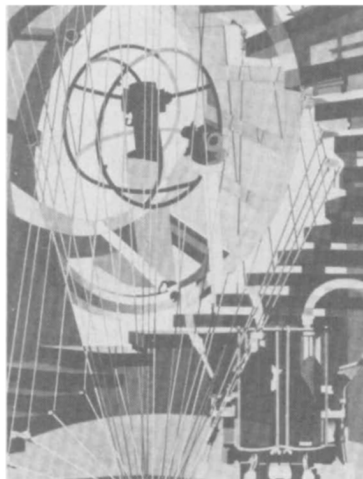
Wrestling with reality

How Experiments End Peter Galison
1987 London: University of Chicago Press xii + 330 pp price £31.95 (£11.95 paperback) ISBN 0 226 27914 6 Hdbk, 0 226 27915 4 Pbk

Working physicists are often perplexed by the history of science. The great men and their great theories portrayed there seem remote from the problems of daily laboratory life: teamwork, trying to get a difficult experiment to go, toying with yet another computer simulation, and wrestling with a never-ending stream of fiscal and administrative problems.

The impact of Kuhn's work partly lay in the long overdue recognition given to the scientific lumpen proletariat. Peter Galison continues this tradition by studying the often neglected activities of experimenters in modern physics. What makes for a decisive experimental demonstration and the part played by theory are examined in fascinating detail through episodes such as Einstein's gyromagnetic experiments (Einstein in this case got it wrong), the discovery of cosmic-ray muons and the neutral current. Galison rejects both the radical

HOW EXPERIMENTS END Peter Galison



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago and London

relativist sociology of science and the old-fashioned realist account. This is an important book.

Trevor Pinch researches in the sociology of science at the University of York

The number one

The Beginnings of the Nobel Institution: The Science Prizes 1901-1915 Elisabeth Crawford 1987 (first published 1984) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ix + 281 pp price £25 (£9.95 paperback) ISBN 0 521 26584 3 Hdbk, 0 521 34747 5 Pbk

The Nobel prize has a glamour unmatched by any of the other international prizes, even those that give away more money. Elisabeth Crawford, in this well documented study, traces the background to the prizes in physics and chemistry for the first 14 years up to the first world war. She also discusses the influence of particular individuals on the choice of prizewinner (it used to be said that being a pupil of a Nobel prizewinner was an important factor in determining your chances of being a recipient).

This account of one aspect of the scientific world of 80 years ago is of considerable interest to present-day scientists, who still consider a Nobel prize the highest achievement in their profession.

Louis Cohen is Executive Secretary of The Institute of Physics



Not on ...

No Way - The Nature of the Impossible Philip J Davis and David Park 1987 Oxford: W H Freeman xvi + 325 pp price £17.95 ISBN 0 7167 1813 8



No Way - The Nature of the Impossible is an interesting idea which does not succeed. The hope is that by analysing conceptions of the impossible, ways can be found to 'transcend' it. The 'impossible' is looked at in a series of essays (a fairly limited medium of expression) covering a broad spectrum from mountaineering to philosophy, passing over

the natural and social sciences and the arts *en route*.

Although many of the individual contributions are entertaining and of interest, no coherent theme emerges. What the editors and almost all the authors (with the exception of Richard Lano, writing on education) fail to appreciate is that the dominant ideology or paradigm only allows the formulation of questions consistent with the existing intellectual and social consensus. It is the questions we do not ask because we *cannot* ask them that constrain us and our 'possibilities'. Of course, the practical possibility of various technical questions can be discussed from within

PHILIP J. DAVIS / DAVID PARK

The Hydra of Mathematical Impossibility is slain by the Hercules of context extension from *No Way - The Nature of the Impossible*

