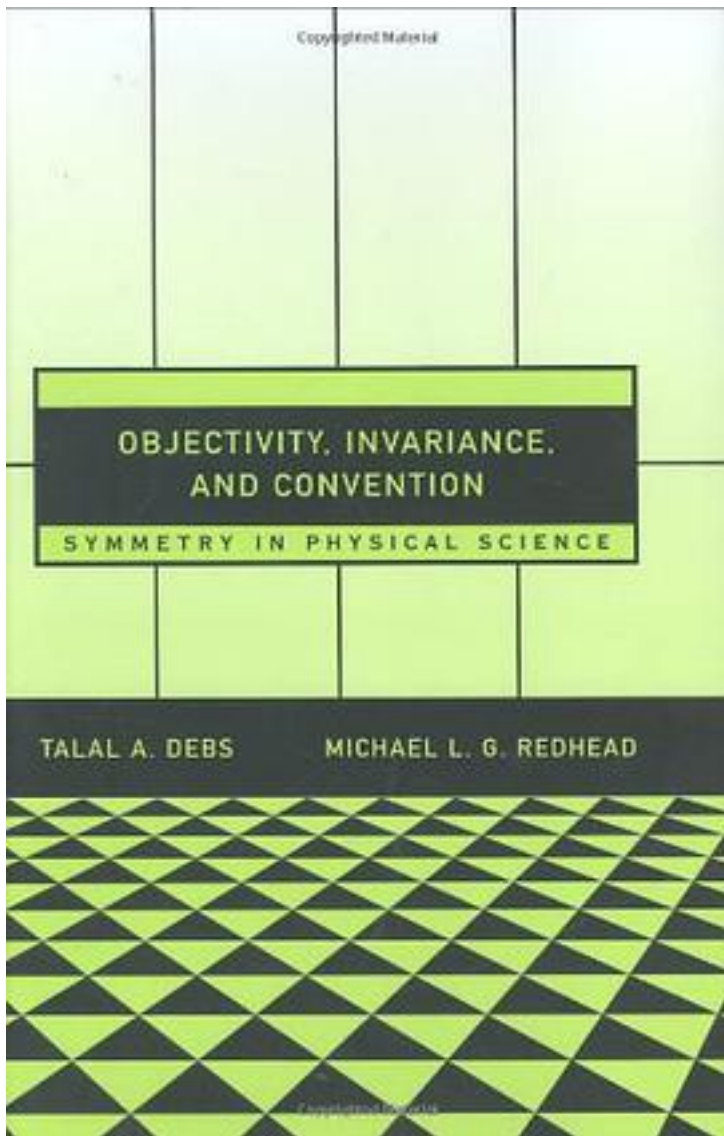


Objectivity, Invariance and Convention



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Most observers agree that modern physical theory attempts to provide objective representations of reality. However, the claim that these representations are based on conventional choices is viewed by many as a denial of their objectivity. As a result, objectivity and conventionality in representation are often framed as polar opposites. Offering a new appraisal of symmetry in modern physics, employing detailed case studies from relativity theory and quantum mechanics, "Objectivity, Invariance, and Convention" contends that the physical sciences, though dependent on convention, may produce objective representations of reality. Talal Debs and Michael Redhead show that both realists and constructivists have recognized important elements of an understanding of science that may not be contradictory. The position - "perspectival invariantism" - introduced in this book highlights the shortcomings of existing approaches to symmetry in physics, and, for the constructivist, demonstrates that a dependence on conventions in representation reaches into the domain of the most technical sciences. For the realist, it stands as evidence against the claim that conventionality must undermine objectivity. We can be committed to the existence of a single real ontology while maintaining a cultural view of science.

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