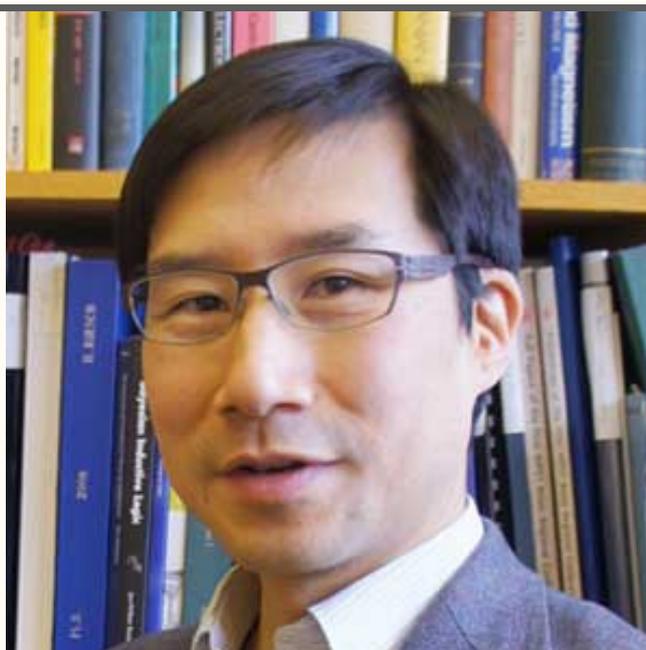


# SCISOC SPOTLIGHT

BY THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

## Prof. Hasok Chang

DEPARTMENT OF  
HISTORY AND  
PHILOSOPHY OF  
SCIENCE



### RESEARCH FOCUS:

HISTORY AND  
PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Currently I have **two major projects**. One is the **early history of batteries**, going back to **Volta's invention** published in 1800. It was really easy to rig up batteries (Volta just used plates of two different types of metals, and pieces of paper soaked in salt water, piled up in alternating layers), but really **difficult to understand how they worked**. This is understandable given that these early scientists **didn't even have the concepts of electrons or ions** as we know them, for about a hundred years after batteries were invented. Even today there are some **intriguing questions remaining** about these early batteries. My other project is more philosophical, trying to introduce **pragmatism seriously into the philosophy of science**. The general goal is to make sense of **how it is that scientific knowledge grows**, without pretending that we are approaching some absolute truth.

## WHY RESEARCH?

I have **always wanted to study science** because I loved learning about nature and wanted to understand everything. So **research was a natural thing** for me to go into. How I ended up with my particular field of work is more complicated. I started out wanting to become a **theoretical physicist**, but during my undergraduate study I realised that the reality of scientific training (problem sets and student practicals) didn't excite me. I found that most of the questions that I wanted to pursue were considered "**philosophical**", and luckily I discovered that there was a field called the **philosophy of science**.



**"Being able to have research as a career is a most wonderful privilege."**

## ONE PIECE OF ADVICE...

Being able to have research as a career is a **most wonderful privilege**. Go into it only if you can find an area of work that you **truly love**, and **enjoy every moment** of it. Don't become a researcher just because you are cleverer and better than others. The only other reason to devote yourself to research is to **solve urgent practical problems** facing humanity. But even then, you'll find that you can't keep up a life of research very well unless the **problems you are tackling really fascinate you**.