

CRITIQUE OF METHOD IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

NYOMAN DEWI PEBRYANI

Introduction

Science as a knowledge has two main parts, those are social science and natural science. Natural science has precise measurement of an object while social science as a science of person or group or collective behavior is uneasy to measure, thus it made many outsiders felt doubt in social scientism. Sayer through the book of '*Method in Social Science*' attempts to reveal hesitation from outsiders by showing some reflection in social science knowledge, since these two main sciences has interdependencies within each other. In this paper, author will examine the content of the book concerning method in social science.

Critique of *Method in Social Science*

The philosopher has discussed issues regarding with science in a lengthy period of time. According to Sayer, "The status of Social Science is seriously in doubt. Outsiders' attitudes toward it are often suspicious or even hostile" (Pg.1). At the beginning philosophers believe that science was systematic logical reasoning, it was supported by Positivism as the dominant paradigm elucidated if science is restricted to be what can be measured. Exhaustion with the stringently empirical nature of positivist philosophy, made philosophers developed new ways of thinking that mentioned as Post-positivism. Post-positivism provides more space in accepting the phenomenon that can be explained and determined in a reasonable manner by combining empirical observations with logical reasoning. It is the point of revival of science in a new perspective, which today there are two main sciences, natural science and social

science. Natural science is the science that naturally occurs and can be classified into physical science, life science, and others. While social science is a study in relation with people and behavior.

The purpose of the knowledge is to develop scientific knowledge by using scientific method. According to Sayer “The problem of Scientism. We tend to assume that natural science is the highest form of knowledge. Other types of knowledge are often viewed as lower, less rigorous, or defective” (pg.16). To be scientific in knowledge, there is a process of logic in theory and evidence in observation and both factors are interrelated. A theory provide meaning to what we observe and observation help to refine the theory. Science can be classified based into their purposes as basic science and applied science. Basic sciences or pure sciences are mathematic, biology, chemistry, physic, while applied science or practical science are science that apply scientific knowledge from basic sciences. For instance, architecture is an applied science that applies the laws of physics for practical applications such as to build a stronger structure. Both basic and applied sciences are required for human development. Applied sciences cannot stand solely, but instead relies on basic sciences for its advancement. Hence it cannot be assumed that one science advanced than others, since it has interdependencies relationship.

Significance of two distinctive items that has mutual relationship had deliberated by Sayer. He explained “The system of dualism that I have used [...] as example of how meaning constituted through the ‘play of difference’ among the units of the language” (pg.56). Two words are mutually reinforcing each other however retains its own function and meaning. For instances play of difference between knowledge and practice where knowledge or theory is more gain the abstract about phenomena, while practice or observation test the theory how well it reflect to the

society. Other instances are subject and object, subject as the observer and object is the important part of the research as the unit of analysis (Sayer, 1992). Understanding the unit of analysis is important because it figures what sort of data that you should gather for your study and also from who you should collect the data (Bhattacharjee, 2012). However, Sayer also reminds us, there is “asymmetric internal relation can also be distinguished in which one object in a relations can exist without other, but not vice versa” (pg.90). For instance applied sciences cannot stand solely, but instead relies on natural sciences for its advancement, but not vice versa.

Sayer mention about digression philosophy of science by Popper, where his belief that science is not inductive, but deductive, “for instance: All metal conduct electricity (premise 1), Aluminium is a metal (premise 2), Therefore, aluminium conducts electricity (conclusion), the conclusion has been falsified, because aluminium does not conduct electricity and so” (pg.169). In this experiment the result will be incorrect since the premises are false. Those two typical of approach in social science reiterate Sayer’s statement in his book that dualisms do not operate singly but in parallel. Deductive draws conclusion about a phenomena based on theoretical, while inductive draws conclusion based on observation. To answer the research questions, we gather more than one hypothesis from observation than we use deductive to narrow down hypothesis to the most plausible explanation based on theory and reasonable premises. We need to work back and forth between theory and observation because if we draw incorrect premises, then automatically the conclusion will be incorrect.

According to John Kemeny (as cited in Singleton, 2010, p.28), the great physicist Albert Einstein, whose own scientific contributions were theoretical, repeatedly emphasized that science must start with facts and end with facts, no matter what theoretical structures it builds in between. In other words, at some point scientists

are observers recording facts: next they try to describe and explain what they see, then they make predictions on the basis of their theories, which they check against their observations again. Theories generate predictions or hypotheses, hypotheses are checked against observations, the observations produce generalizations, and the generalizations support, contradict, or suggest modification in the theory. The development of theory, is the goal of science. Research supports this goal through systematic observation that generates the facts from which theories are inferred and tested.

According to Sayer, “One of the main difficulties of the existing literature on social theory and the philosophy of the social science is that few constructive contributions have been made on the subject of method in empirical research” (pg.1). Today as time goes by from the point of Sayer written the book, many author contributed into development of empirical studies. For instance, now many other social science method books start to explain clearly from basic empirical research, sampling, development into data collection and analyzing, until postulate new theory. It does indicate development of social science has been expanded. However, research result cannot be generalizable, for instance same issues in different area should be treated in different ways. Nowadays issues regarding with research have been developing extensively in literature, instead we necessary to practice directly by conducting research once we comprehend the literature, because specific research is very meticulous and has its own treatment.

Method in Social science by Sayer is a distinguishing book. As a reader, we have to cultivate our fundamental understanding about social science before reading the book, because it needs depth comprehension to understand the author ideas. Sayer ideas gave a new perspective possibility to widespread the knowledge of social science.

However we need to translate the concept into practice, since the book does not describe clearly a significant case in detail. Expression of 'a realist approach' in the book's cover designates the purpose of the book in the realist approach to bridge the perspective gap between outsiders and the social science practitioners.

Conclusion

Ideas from Sayers gives new perspective on how research possibility developed in several ways, especially in social science where many outsiders give doubt to classify social into science. The new paradigms of post-positivism as a milestone of development social science contribute positive impact into development of social science. To be scientific, social science has to be measurable, explainable, and falsifiability.

Reference

Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social Science Research : Principle, Methods, and Practice*.

Textbook Collection. Book 3. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/oa_textbooks/3

Sayer, A. (1992). *Method in social science: A realist approach* (2nd ed.). London:

Routledge.

Singleton, R.A. & Straits, B.C (2010). *Approaches to Social Research* (fifth edition).

New York: Oxford University Press.