

TESTING THE TRUTH OF COMTE'S POSITIVISM BASED ON HABERMAS CRITICAL THEORY

Ribut Baidi¹, Ahmad², Abdul Munib²

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Law, University of Islamic Madura, Indonesia

¹ributbaidiadvokat2019@gmail.com

²ahmadasir@uim.ac.id

³pon.ireng@gmail.com

Abstract

The development of science, which Comte's positivism paradigm has dominated for approximately four hundred years, has made critical theorists represented by Jurgen Habermas as the second generation of the Frankfurt school continue to build criticism and test the truth of the theory of positivism. The size of the truth of science that Habermas cannot accept when there are Comte's limitations by legitimizing and justifying science through empirical fact research with standardization that has been determined through methodological prerequisites and norms. Habermas rejects this view with his critical theory because there is knowledge that cannot be measured by positivist research methodologies such as community communication and emancipation. On the other hand, Habermas also rejects the notion of value-free science, such as Comte's testimony in his positivism, because it has indirectly co-opted science with an interest that no longer has objectivity values but is full of interests.

Keywords: *Jurgen Habermas, critical theory, positivime Comte.*

Introduction

The emergence of philosophical schools from various figures worldwide has given birth to a new study of thought in the next generation of intellectuals. Philosophy explores everything that was, is, and is to come. The orientation of philosophy is to study all creations of Allah SWT partially from one generation to the next to open up knowledge as a whole.¹

¹ Muhamad Erwin, *Filsafat Ilmu: Refleksi Kritis terhadap Hukum dan Hukum Indonesia (dalam Dimensi Ide dan Aplikasi)* (Depok: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2016), 26.

This philosophical discourse and study, apart from being based on a battle of thoughts approach to bring about new theories from generation to generation, is also based on empirical-analytical facts to emerge new methodologies as a counterweight to an existing and commonly used theory.

The two formulations of a philosophical approach (theory and methodology) are based on the historical debates of philosophers, then giving rise to philosophical theories to testing these theories in the empirical world which can give rise to philosophical methodology. The two approaches between theory and methodology are one sided with the same meaning, because without theory, methodology will not emerge. On the other hand, methodology without theory cannot be accepted, because understanding methodology must begin with understanding theory.

In Susanto's view, the methods used in philosophy are numerous, as are the many philosophical figures that have emerged. For example, Socrates and Plato with their critical methods, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas with their scholastic methods or what is often called synthetic deductive. On the other hand, there are also philosophers who use systematic, historical, and critical methods, along with their ability to philosophize with their respective methods.²

The tendency to understand theory and methodology in philosophy as two poles of the same source from enthusiasts of philosophical studies is certainly not all wrong with the assumption that a methodological approach must be based on a philosophical theory to understand an object. One example, the flow of positivism which uses philosophical theory (assumptions) is then tested for its validity through a research methodology of an object (fact validity).

At first glance, the school of positivism philosophy is very interesting because it provides certainty of the truth of an object that is discussed not only through a debate approach to create theory, but also must be tested for validity through

² A. Susanto, *Filsafat Ilmu: Suatu Kajian dalam Dimensi Ontologis, Epistemologis, dan Aksiologis* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2017), 13.

scientific methodology that can be accepted logically through observation, can be repeated, can be measured, can be tested, and predictable/predictable.

In philosophical epistemic notes, the flow of positivism can be traced to the thought tradition that developed in Continental Europe in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. This paradigm is rooted in the philosophy of positivism developed by August Comte (1798-1857) with an outline of his views on the theory of recognizing the development of science, the historical development of Western society, and the foundations for improving the condition of society. The philosophy of positivism introduced by Comte was actually not the first idea to discuss the philosophy of positivism, because before that there had been writings on the philosophy of positivism from Henry Saint-Simon (1760-1825). However, through Comte's thought, the philosophy of positivism was described systematically and can influence the development of science until now.³

The positivism paradigm (positivism paradigm) has revealed the truth of reality and received justification for a long time (+ 400 years) from scientists to understand a science, but then a new paradigm flow emerged to understand science from all fields of life. This flow legitimizes knowledge based on facts, not based on inner experience.⁴

Historically, Comte's positivism was born on the basis of the ontology of realism which states that reality exists in reality that operates in accordance with natural laws and must place a science in the proportion of facts that can be accepted through a methodological approach. On the one hand, this school justifies that knowledge is value-free (not bound and not contaminated) with an understanding, because science exists and operates according to natural laws. The contradictions of this school, we can see in the style of thought, all of which measure knowledge on

³ Bekti Suharto, "Menyoal Sudut Pandang: Kritik Terhadap Epistemologi Positivisme Hukum", *Prosiding Seminar Nasional*, ISBN 978-602-72446-0-3, hlm. 301. <https://publikasiilmiah.ums.ac.id/bitstream/handle/11617/5678/20.Bekti%20Suharto.pdf;sequence=1>,

⁴ Muhammad Muslih, *Filsafat Ilmu*, (Yogyakarta: Belukar, 2014), 91-92.

facts through observation, repeatable, measurable, testable, and predictable. Thus, understanding science in philosophy outside of this category cannot be accepted scientifically.

This research wishes to reveal the truth of science in a philosophical study by using Habermas' critical theory approach to Comte's positivism paradigm and to provide an illustration that this critical theory approach is more acceptable in understanding philosophy, especially in the post-modern era as it is today.

Research Methods

This research is doctrinal research using a critical perspective paradigm approach, with the conceptual approach.

Discussion

A Brief Biography of Jurgen Habermas

Jurgen Habermas was born on June 18, 1929, in Germany, in the City of Dusseldorf, to be precise. He attended the University of Gottingen and studied German literature and philosophy, as well as psychology and economics. He also studied philosophy at the University of Bonn and earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University in 1954.

To deepen his knowledge and broaden his thinking, in 1956, Habermas joined the Frankfurt School (school) and became Adorno's assistant for 3 years (1956 - 1959). In 1964, he became a professor of philosophy at the J. Von Goethe University, Frankfurt. During a period of 10 years (between 1971 - 1981), Habermas served as director of the Max Planck Institute. Then, in 1982, he returned to Frankfurt, and in 1994 he retired to live in Starnberg.⁵

Habermas' simple ideas that depart from the ideas of modernity and various contradictions with the principles and ideals of modernity itself since the

⁵ Akhyar Yusuf Lubis, *Pemikiran Kritis Kontemporer dari Teori Kritis, Culture Studies, Feminisme, Postkolonial Hingga Multikulturalisme* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2015), 20-21.

Renaissance and the Enlightenment, both rationalists such as Descartes or the Empiricists (Bacon, Locke, Hume) always emphasize the need for rationality criteria as a basis for scientific accountability. Habermas himself formulates the goals of his society's critical theory as an effort to account for his criteria of critical rationality. He argued that there was an interest in the "enlightenment project", namely freeing people from superstitions, religious dogmas, traditional beliefs and other claims to power, and called it a project of modernity or "aufklarung" ideals. He made a paradigm shift from "subject philosophy" to "communication philosophy", from "consciousness philosophy" which was dominant in modern society since Descartes to "language philosophy" by focusing on equal dialogue.⁶

In "communication philosophy" an important term that is often raised is "communicative rationality or communicative action". To understand communicative rationality, it is necessary to understand what is called "instrumental rationality". This instrumental rationality is rationality that is directed or works to pursue self-interest as effectively as possible, is domineering and hegemonic. This instrumental rationality is also monological and has a controlling purpose. Meanwhile, communicative rationality is rationality that works to reach a common understanding through language or other means of communication. Communicative rationality is dialogical rather than monological, aimed at finding mutual understanding rather than control and aimed at achieving enlightenment rather than coercion or domination.⁷

There are four claims in communicative rationality or communicative action so that mutual understanding can be achieved, namely: first, what is said to be clear and understandable (understandability). second, expressing something correctly (truth). third, say honestly or express oneself as it is (sincerity). fourth, stating

⁶ Akhyar Yusuf Lubis, *Dekonstruksi Epistemologi Modern dari Posmodernisme, Teori Kritis, Poskolonialisme hingga Cultural Studies* (Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Satu, 2006), 31-32.

⁷ Akhyar Yusuf Lubis, *Pemikiran Kritis Kontemporer dari Teori Kritis, Culture Studies, Feminisme, Postkolonial Hingga Multikulturalisme*, 24.

something in accordance with communication norms (rightness), so that speech can be understood by others.

Apart from these four claims, there are four more conditions for the implementation of ideal/rational communication, namely: first, each participant is given space to actively participate in the discourse and is free to criticize the viewpoints of other participants. second, dialogue runs freely without coercion, domination and power play. third, participants can understand the differences in the validity criteria of theoretical, moral-practical and aesthetic claims that appear in the dialogue and resolve the dialogue and differences through argumentation. fourth, there is an open rational consensus on changes and further considerations.⁸

Habermas' perspective dialogue is an endeavor to express the search for meaning to convey useful messages. He started from the question, what does it mean if an action or view of life is said to be rational? For Habermas to be a problem means to be more rational. Then, Habermas distinguishes between instrumental rationality which seeks to effectively pursue self-interest and communicative rationality which aims to reach a common understanding through language and other means of communication. Communicative rationality is openness to criticism and being able to present good (rational) arguments for our beliefs, decisions and actions.⁹

As the second generation of the Frankfurt school, Habermas has managed to break the domination of other paradigms that dominate theory and methodology in a science with a long span of time that cannot be disputed. Habermas with his paradigm wants to provide an epistemological basis for social theory and propose a prescriptive and normative view, namely how behavior should be shown in social democratic life. The concepts and ideas, are not just ideas and understand the social situation, democracy and equality, but also formulate a formulation and a way how to change the situation and eliminate inequalities in social life.

⁸ Lubis, 25-26.

⁹ Akhyar Yusuf Lubis, *Dekonstruksi Epistemologi Modern dari Posmodernisme, Teori Kritis, Poskolonialisme hingga Cultural Studies*, 37.

With his intelligence, Habermas has succeeded in formulating a critical theory that does not only rely on epistemological criticism – even further – he is able to formulate an ideological critique that starts from the practice of power and capitalism towards the social conditions of society which give birth to a hegemony of power in all aspects. Both, political, economic, social, and even scientific aspects. Thus, science is not value-free like the views and beliefs of positivism, because the structure and methodology of science is made by those who have an interest in conducting research on the truth of object reality.

Habermas' Critical Theory

This flow cannot actually be said as a paradigm, but is more accurately called ideologically oriented inquiry, namely a discourse or perspective on reality that has an ideological orientation towards a certain understanding. Critical theory is a stream of scientific development based on a critical conception of various thoughts and views that were previously found as other scientific understandings. This flow projects dialogue and communication methods with transformation to find the truth of ultimate reality. Epistemologically, the relationship between the observer and the reality that becomes the object cannot be separated. This school tends to emphasize the concept of subjectivity in finding knowledge with the argument that the values held by the subject/observer interfere in determining the truth about something. The conception of understanding this flow is: (a). internal criticism of the analysis of the arguments and methods used in various studies. This, is focused on theoretical reasons and procedures in selecting, collecting and assessing empirical data. This flow is very concerned with the reasons, procedures and language used in uncovering a truth. The characteristics of this paradigm can be seen in continuous cross-assessment and through intensive observation of data. (b). the meaning of criticism in formulating logical problems, ie This logic besides involving formal arrangements and internal criteria in observation, also focuses thinking on skepticism (curiosity and curiosity) towards social institutions and conceptions of

reality related to ideas, thoughts and language through historical social conditions. Criticism in this concept relates to the condition of social arrangements, the distribution of resources that are unequal/unequal, and power.¹⁰

There are six main themes that have become the mainstream critical theory paradigm introduced in scientific practice, namely: (1). procedural problems, methods and scientific methodology. procedures, methods and methodologies in research of a scientific field are separate and rigid things and tend to forget things that are social and historical. In the conception of critical theory, this is something that is not justified, because procedures and methods are not something that stands alone, but are part of the suspicions, questions, and practices currently prevailing in society. (2). reformulation of scientific standards and rules as logic in a historical context. In the general paradigm, the logic of science is usually obtained through a valid and continuous process in explaining and formulating science as a progressive and cumulative development. This formulation in the conception of critical theory is not always correct, because in some ways the logic of science can change but not always cumulative and progressive, it can only occur as bits and pieces of experience and practice in social transformation. (3). object and subject dichotomy. In various scientific researches, the emphasis on objectivity is a must so that the findings are more meaningful and avoid things that are subjective. The dichotomy between the two in the view of critical theory is a contrived thing. Relationships in research practice are hard data in the form of numbers, quantitative analysis cannot be separated from soft data, namely the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the person analyzing it. (4). partiality of science in social interaction. The paradigm states that science is something that is neutral and knows no differences in society to reveal the truth of existing reality. According to the critical theory paradigm, this view is unrealistic, because knowledge is created to side with reality, certain groups or people according to the wishes of the initiators. (5). the development of

¹⁰ Muhammad Muslih, 96-97.

knowledge is the production of values. The science that is being developed at this time not only uncovers existing realities and seeks the truth from reality, but is also projected to produce values that can be used as a guide for humans in everyday life. (6). science (especially the social sciences) is the study of the past. So, it is not justified in the view of critical theory that science is the result of contemporary studies, because almost all social sciences are studies of social order in the past. Correlation and inter-connection of social sciences are researched to provide lessons and guidelines for social science studies on the reality of society in the present and the future. The integration of the three (past, present, and future) will provide formulations and descriptions of science to regulate phenomena that will lead us to various possibilities in understanding social reality.¹¹

Besides that, the development of science continues to progress along with changes in time and the development of human thought. The emergence of new sciences that give birth to new sub-sciences and even towards more specific knowledge such as specializations is a necessity that cannot be denied. Therefore, it is precisely what Van Peursen stated, that science can be seen as a system that is interconnected (intertwined) and consistent with the principles (consistency) of expressions whose true or false nature can be determined.¹²

The Validity of Comte's Positivism in Habermas' Critical Theory

As mentioned earlier, the view of positivism with its character Auguste Comte stems from his interest in seeing the development of natural sciences with his investigations of natural behavior and then discovering permanent laws that apply generally to nature (natural laws).¹³ Comte then "copy-pasted" natural science

¹¹ Muslih, hlm. 97-99.

¹² Syahrul Kirom, "Filsafat Ilmu dan Arah Pengembangan Pancasila: Relevansinya dalam Mengatasi Persoalan Kebangsaan", *Jurnal Filsafat*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Agustus, 2011), h. 102. <file:///C:/Users/ACER/Downloads/3111-26936-1-PB.pdf>,

¹³ Irham Nugroho, "Positivisme Auguste Comte: Analisa Epistemologis dan Nilai Etisnya Terhadap Sains", *Cakrawala*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (Desember, 2016), hlm. 171. <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/58189-ID-positivisme-auguste-comte-analisa-episte.pdf>,

methodology to be used to investigate "social behavior" and projected his theory based on three stages, namely: (1). the theological stage, that is, humans see everything based on the existence of God. (2). metaphysical stage, namely reality based on metaphysical notions, such as substance, form, cause and so on. (3). positive stage, that is, humans have entered a positive phase and left behind metaphysical and mythological civilizations, and believe in scientific norms called "scientific methodology" which can be trusted and can be accounted for, because it is based on positive-empirical facts, where this positive methodology is then gave birth to antinomies translated into methodological norms, in the form of:¹⁴ (a). all knowledge must be proven through a sense of certainty, intersubjectively guaranteed systematic observation. (b). methodical certainty is as important as sense-certainty. The validity of scientific knowledge is guaranteed by the unity of the method. (c). the correctness of our knowledge is guaranteed only by the construction of formal theories following the deduction of law-like hypotheses. (d). Scientific knowledge must be technically usable. Science allows technical control over both natural and social processes. Control over nature and society can be multiplied through recognition of principles of rationality or unification of theories, not from the blind expansion of empirical research. (e). our knowledge is in principle never final and relative, according to its relative nature and positive spirit.¹⁵

Comte's positivism paradigm can be rebutted through Habermas' critical theory because it has various weaknesses, namely:

(1). Comte with his positivism denied two stages of the development of science, namely the stage of theology and the stage of metaphysics, and believed that the positive stage was a new chapter and was the absolute truth in understanding science in social life based on empirical facts. This has directly given rise to an a priori attitude and distrust of things that are invisible to the naked eye (cannot be

¹⁴ Murtadha Muthahari, *Filsafat Materialisme: Kritik Filsafat Islam tentang Tuhan, Sejarah dan Konsep tentang Sosial Politik* (Yogyakarta: RausyanFikr Institute, 2014), 30-31.

¹⁵ Muhammad Muslih, 110-111.

seen, repeated, measured, tested, and predicted). In Habermas' view, the first sciences are astronomy, physics, chemistry, and psychology (sociology) – if Comte's antinomies are related to the existence of these sciences, and these are not argumentative and irrational.

In theory and methodology of Comte's positivism, astronomy is a science that studies the sun, moon, stars and other planets in outer space. It can only be accepted if objects in that science can be scientifically investigated through its methodology. This is very subjective because it could be that outside of our vision of these objects there are those that cannot be examined due to the limitations of the subject's view and analysis of these objects. For example, the size of objects, the origin of the light from each object, radiation, the distance traveled from one object to another, and the initial process of creating these objects cannot be studied hierarchically (order). Apart from that, Comte introduced the sequence of scientific understanding, that understanding physics would not be effective without first studying astronomy, or studying psychology would not be effective without first studying chemistry. In fact, Comte's denial of mathematics not as a science but only as a tool of logical thinking, even though it could be used to explain phenomena, has proved that Comte's positivism methodology is increasingly questionable.

(2). According to Habermas, positivistic science with all the arguments or logic it brings has become a separate problem, especially the problem of value-free science and the exclusion of the role of the subject from the process of discovery and looking at humans only in their material aspects. On the other hand, the involvement of scientists in social practice has reduced that science is value-free, because in principle it is full of interests through the "mode" of the scientific method. Value-free science in the view of Comte's positivism has created contradictions with communicative rationality and instrumental rationality initiated by Habermas.

These two terms provide an articulation that the importance of understanding science related to social society must begin with good communication to reach a common understanding through language or other means

of communication. Dialogical communication (not monological/not one-sided) is the main prerequisite for achieving the true nature of knowledge in the social life of society. Therefore, communicative rationality is different from instrumental rationality which is monological in nature and aims to control, but both are entities that cannot be separated to achieve validity claims, namely: communication can be understood (understandability), expressing something correctly (truth), saying something correctly (truth). honest (sincerity), and state something in accordance with the rules of communication (rightness).

If science is value-free, then research in sociology that has to do with public communication is certainly not value-free, because when this research is used by scientists who are accomplices of the authorities, it will reveal the hidden interests of the will of the authorities themselves. For example, to measure the level of justice of the ruler towards his people in the economic and welfare aspects, of course, satisfactory results will not be obtained according to the will of the ruler himself, because in principle the name of the people will surely be hegemony by the ruler (marginal). Therefore, to convince the authorities, it is possible that the research was arranged in such a way with an objective level of standardization, even though it is subjective.

(3). Community involvement in understanding unfair and inhuman conditions in life can be done through the sciences of action (criticism) as a form of self-reflection. In a sense, the interest of liberating individuals or society from unfavorable conditions in the structure of social life is part of "emancipatory interests" which cannot be carried out through theoretical-practical research as described by Comte's positivism. That is, these theories cannot be applied in emancipatory action. The goal of positivism, is nomothetic (manipulation of the external world). Meanwhile, critical theory is emancipatory (aware of hidden repression in order to liberate and be able to find real interests).

(4). Structure in positivism is objectivizing (theory represents objects). In Habermas' view, this theory cannot be accepted, because theory is part of the object being represented or what is known as reflection.

(5). Confirmation in positivism is verification (empirical or experience) and experimentation as legitimacy (absolute and indisputable truth). Meanwhile, this theory is contrary to critical theory whose confirmation is in accordance with the form of discourse and the validity claims of each group of science or knowledge.

Benny H. Hoed provides a conception of facts in science through his semiotic theory. Facts are something that can be recorded by our five senses. According to him, natural science would state that facts are everything. However, in the aspect of social and cultural knowledge, facts are not everything because behind facts there is something else. In fact, in a socio-cultural perspective, thoughts, emotions, and desires are facts.¹⁶

Thus, what is meant by the absolute truth of a science through empirical facts initiated by positivism with a scientific methodology, in the form of research on the truth of reality which is considered value-free can ultimately be refuted by Habermas's critical theory. Science is not value-free, because in principle the terms of science such as observable, repeatable, measurable, testable and predictable are a measure of value so that knowledge can be scientifically accepted and accountable. Besides that, apart from this fact, there are scientific truths that cannot be tested through the positivism paradigm, such as the science of communication that develops in society and the science of community involvement (emancipatory) in the structure of social life and democracy.

Conclusion

The development of philosophy from generation to generation continues to grow, where the counter thought of the first generation with the next generation in

¹⁶ Benny H. Hoed, *Semiotik & Dinamika Sosial Budaya* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2014), 5.

defending their theory is a necessity. Comte's positivism legitimizes the truth of science not only based on theory but must be proven by research on the truth of reality, which is called scientific methodology as a standard for recognizing the legitimacy and validity of science as a process of climax and conclusion, which is called the "positive stage" in Habermas' view. Contradictory things with the reality of science that lives in a society whose truth cannot be measured through research methodologies, such as communication and social emancipation.

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