

A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO JÜRGEN HABERMAS' HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION AS A METHODOLOGY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine and evaluate Habermas' thoughts on hermeneutical reflection as a methodology of social science based on his work titled *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften (On The Logic of The Social Sciences)*. By starting from a theory of action approach focusing on the process of inquiring and understanding intentional action, Habermas developed a hermeneutical reflection approach emphasizing the importance of communicative experience between the researcher and the subject examined. This approach has emancipatory power because it encourages researchers to thoroughly identify the ideological elements of social reality researched. Apart from all the advantages of Habermas' methodological thought, his thinking should be evaluated critically because there are problematic aspects when viewed through the lens of ontology, methodology/method, and axiology.

Keywords: Habermas, hermeneutical reflection, Theory of Action, Critique of Ideology, intersubjectivity

Abstrak: Tulisan ini hendak mengkaji dan mengevaluasi pemikiran Habermas tentang refleksi hermeneutis sebagai suatu metodologi ilmu sosial sebagaimana tertuang dalam karyanya *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften (On The Logic of The Social Sciences)*. Bertitik tolak dari pendekatan teori tindakan (*theory of action*) yang berfokus pada proses menelusuri dan memahami tindakan yang disengaja (*intentional action*), Habermas mengembangkan pendekatan refleksi hermeneutis yang menekankan pentingnya pengalaman komunikatif antara peneliti dan subjek yang diteliti. Pendekatan ini memiliki daya emansipatoris karena mendorong peneliti untuk menelanjangi realitas sosial yang diteli-

tinya sehingga unsur-unsur ideologis yang mengandaikan begitu saja kondisi subjek yang diteliti dapat teridentifikasi. Namun, terlepas dari segala keunggulannya, pemikiran Habermas ini patut dievaluasi secara kritis karena memuat beberapa hal yang problematik ketika ditinjau melalui kacamata ontologi, metodologi/metode, dan aksiologi.

Kata-Kata Kunci: Habermas, refleksi hermeneutis, Teori Tindakan (*Theory of Action*), kritik ideologi, intersubjektivitas

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of *On The Logic of The Social Sciences* – the work of Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) that is the focus of this paper – Habermas argued that the distinction made by Neo-Kantian thinkers between the scientific research methodologies of the natural and social sciences had been forgotten by scientists,¹ especially those who embraced the Logical Positivism.² Scientists of this movement³ latently only used the positivistic point of view for all types of science. This made the positivistic viewpoint linking with a nomological approach – which is closely related to

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- 1 Habermas (1988, pp. 3-16) referred to the thoughts of Rickert, Cassirer, and Weber who first reflected the methodological distinction. First, Rickert – by taking Kant's transcendental philosophy as a starting point – considered phenomena as a nature that can be explained through general laws, while culture could be understood through the relationship between facts and value systems. Unlike the general nature; culture on the one hand is unique and unrepeatable, but on the other hand it can also be general and repeatable. Habermas was not satisfied with Rickert's explanation. Second, according to Cassirer, natural sciences (nomological sciences) produced statements about reality in formally defined symbolic systems so that reality is understood selectively within a certain frame of reference. Different from the natural sciences, the social sciences (cultural sciences) are preoccupied with the formal relationship between symbolic forms that provide statements about pre-given information. Third, in contrast to Rickert and Cassirer, Weber combined the diverse methods, goals, and presuppositions of the natural and social sciences. Weber combined explanation (*erklären*) closely related to natural science and understanding (*verstehen*) connected to social science. Weber's methodology is considered suitable for understanding a purposive-rational action since it allows us to understand the intention of a person or group which can then lead us to a convincing empirical explanation.
 - 2 Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans., Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 1.
 - 3 According to Logical Positivism (Outhwaite, 1987, p. 6), some positivists preferred the term 'logical empiricism' because they would like to avoid Comte's positivism term which was strongly linked with metaphysical nuances.

the methodology of natural-empirical science – as the main methodological reference for social scientists.⁴

According to Habermas, natural and social sciences did have methodological differences so that the dualism between the two types of science should always be critically discoursed.⁵ Natural sciences use a nomological approach to explain the pattern of regularity of facts in reality, while social sciences do not just stop there, but also give a meaning through a hermeneutical approach to the social reality inquired. Nonetheless, these differences were rejected and considered unimportant by positivists. Through *On The Logic of The Social Sciences*, Habermas thoroughly explored the distinctive characteristics of social science methodology as a form of criticism towards positivists who ignored these methodological differences.

Habermas argued that positivists opposed this dualism since the methodologies in the social sciences are diverse, conflicting, and intermingled with each other. This encouraged positivists to develop a unified science based on a natural sciences approach that is considered more certain than the social sciences. Habermas disagreed with the positivists because the object of the natural sciences is not as complex as human beings as the predominant object of the social sciences.⁶ This makes general theories and methodologies that apply to the natural sciences not sufficiently qualified to be fully applied to the social sciences.

Habermas pointed out the improper methodological treatment of social science by referring to the science of sociology practiced by scientists at the time he wrote *On The Logic of The Social Sciences*. He asserted that sociological scientists had eliminated the historical-hermeneutical aspect

4 Logical Positivism set a standard for scientists to make science produce scientific explanations that allow them to describe reality objectively. According to Rosenberg (2012, pp. 39-40), the power of scientific explanation came from scientific laws obtained through various observations and experiments which are then identified as a fixed pattern of regularity. In other words, the task of science is to objectively describe the regularity of reality, not to explain why reality can occur and not to reflect it normatively.

5 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 2.

6 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 3.

explaining the context of the specific conditions of a society as a social reality.⁷ There are two reasons why they eliminated the historical-hermeneutical aspect of sociology. First, positivists realized that they cannot draw an empirical uniformity in the midst of the concrete social facts.⁸ Second, by referring to Joachim Ritter's analysis of society, Habermas argued that the approach taken by positivists only aims to make sociology an instrumental tool that lucratively benefits the advanced industrial society.⁹ This epistemic orientation encourages sociology to adopt the natural science framework which fundamentally associates with instrumental value. For advanced industrial societies, in the framework of natural laws, society exists as a system of needs that is exclusively based on the pure desire to defend themselves and fulfill the basic needs.

Habermas certainly found himself disagreeing with the positivistic perspective. By referring to Ernest Nagel, Habermas stated that social science cannot rely on universal scientific laws as in the natural sciences to explain the causal relationship of social reality.¹⁰ The premises in social science about concrete human situations that are often explained through statistical generalizations are ultimately pre-constrained by using general assumptions or suppositions. Social scientists will eventually have serious difficulty in explaining concrete and complex social reality as a whole.

Consequently, Habermas depicted two methodological implications. First, as scientific explanations of social reality are substantially probable, it results in the difficulty of generating general scientific explanations, as such that repetitions and replications in the social science scientific inquiry are invariably required.¹¹ Secondly, the methodological difficulty

7 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 16.

8 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 76.

9 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 17.

10 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 27.

11 The probability in scientific explanation does not only apply to social science, but also to science in general, including natural sciences. This thinking came from Popper's reflection on the problem of Induction which was first popularized by Hume (Popper, 2009, pp. 476-480). According to Hume, empirical facts obtained through the process of induction reasoning could not describe a solid causal relationship of a phenomenon because phenomena are always concrete, not general. The difficulty of the causal rela-

should drive social scientists to rely on historical judgment – which was ignored by positivists – so that social reality can be explained.¹² Hence, that kind of judgment implies that social sciences have to adopt hermeneutics approach – Habermas then called this approach *hermeneutical reflection*.

Overall, this paper aims to not only describe Habermas' thoughts on hermeneutical reflection as a social science methodology, but also to respond critically. I would like to argumentatively exhibit whether Habermas' methodological approach is reliable or not in the practice of social science scientific inquiry. In narrating the theses, I divide this paper into four parts. Initially, I will explain the methodological background underlying Habermas' thinking about hermeneutical reflection. Then, I will present Habermas' primary thoughts on hermeneutical reflection. Next, I will depict my arguments that critically show the strengths and weaknesses of Habermas' methodological approach. In the end, I will conclude this writing and provide another consideration that can help us determine whether hermeneutical reflection approach is reliable or not.

In describing Habermas' thoughts on hermeneutical reflection, I conduct a literature review by using one of Habermas' books entitled *On The Logic of The Social Sciences* ([1967] 1988). In addition, there are other literatures utilized to emphasize, comment, support, or criticize Habermas' thoughts such as *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (1961), *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (1990), and *The Constitution of Society* (1984).

tion makes causal laws seem difficult to construct. Despite the problems of induction, humans always try to find something certain from the phenomena they observe. According to Popper, humans have a psychological dimension that makes them always look for patterns or regularities from various phenomena or empirical facts so that reality can be explained with certainty. In other words, in order for this problem to be resolved, humans need a universal law in science so that it makes it easier to explain phenomena even though the level of truth will always be uncertain. Therefore, every scientific explanation needs to be refuted or falsified.

12 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 27-28.

THEORY OF ACTION APPROACH AS A METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Before exhibiting the methodological background adopted by Habermas in building his methodology, I would like to describe Habermas analysis about three general approaches commonly used in the social sciences: normative-analytical approach, analytical-empirical approach in the behavioral sciences, and analytical-empirical approach in the theory of action.

Table 2.1. Three Methodological Approaches in Social Sciences

	Normative-Analytical	Empirical-Analytical (Behavioral Sciences)	Empirical-Analytical (Theory of Action)
Objective	Describe (descriptive purpose) and predict (practical purpose) social reality.	Construct scientific hypotheses, explain social reality descriptively, and help researchers make purposive-rational solutions.	Gain an understanding of the subject's true intentions (intentional action) and subjectively meaningful behavior.
Orientation	Strategic action that is purposive-rational to obtain rational alternatives so that economic goals can be maximally achieved.	Instrumental action which is purposive-rational aiming to overcome adaptive behavior.	Subjectively intended meaning.

Methodological Background	Based on maxims (like a <i>ceteris paribus</i>) that contain general laws regarding human actions and freedoms that are described mathematically.	Based on theoretical assumptions in the form of hypotheses that refer directly to the relationship between stimulus-response behavior that works on the basis of a maxim that is decisive and universal.	Based on a subjective interpretation of social facts focusing on observable symbolic behavior, especially in the form of linguistic communication that emphasizes ordinary or everyday language.
Example in Science	Economics	Psychology and Ethology	Sociology and Cultural Anthropology

Source: Habermas (1998, pp. 45-58)

Habermas' position followed the empirical-analytical approach focusing on the theory of action—closely related to the hermeneutic approach in interpretive sociology—which seeks to understand intentional action. Habermas argued that empirical facts and causal relationships of stimulus-response behavior in behavioral science are just data. After data is collected and verified empirically, researchers need to understand (*verstehen*) the data hermeneutically so that the subject's intentional action can be fully understood. Furthermore, according to Habermas, the use of maxims—both in normative-analytical and empirical-analytical approaches in behavioral science—which act as a methodological supposition is also considered unreasonable as maxims can be easily refuted when empirical verification is carried out. Thus, it can be concluded that theory of action, which is methodologically linked to hermeneutics, plays a very important role in the social science methodology.

Nevertheless, the original theory of action—developed by Weber and Parsons—is insufficient due to at least two logical difficulties. **The first logical difficulty** occurs when subjective intentional action statements are transformed into objective statements that are associated with the language of empirical statements. Empirical language is extensional;

in other words, an empirical statement has multiple meanings or refers to synonymous things. The word “furniture” can be an example of the empirical language extensionality because the word can refer to various objects such as chairs, tables, cabinets, etc. The extensionality of empirical language is an implication of the empirical language purpose which focuses on the condition of truth-functionality. The truth of an empirical statement is judged on the purpose for which the statements are used. This cannot be used in understanding intentional action which is subjective and has its own form of logic.

Habermas stated that intentional action cannot be directly and clearly correlated with facts. By following Neo-Kantianism, Habermas argued that the intentional action statement does not refer to facts directly but refers to “statements about facts”.¹³ In order for statements about facts to be concretely understood, empirical statements need to be further explored through a metalinguistic approach that explores the symbolic context inherent in the subject by focusing on ordinary language. This approach became popular after Wittgenstein popularized the philosophy of language that focuses on everyday language through the concept of language games. Thus, it can be concluded that linguistic communication has an essential role in understanding intentional action.

The second logical difficulty is that the original theory of action approach contains a conception of *functionalism* that emphasizes the importance of a hermeneutic approach that focuses on cultural traditions and value systems, but this approach will unfortunately only be effective if these traditions and values are always oriented towards the normative power possessed by society as an “institution”.¹⁴ In other words, sociology only focuses on institutionalized values. As a result, the original theory of action, like the normative-analytical or empirical-analytical approach in behavioral science, purportedly presupposes a maxim that limits the process of inquiring and understanding intentional action.

13 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 61.

14 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 75.

The conception of functionalism is critically rejected by Habermas for at least two reasons. First, this time, Habermas agreed with positivists (Hempel and Nagel) who stated that the causal relationship between variables in the self-regulating system – also between the system and its external environment – can be analyzed *without* the reference to the specific meaning or objective contained in the actual reality; in other words, without the expectations of institutions.¹⁵ Social systems cannot be equated with the human body systems in biology that inspire functionalism.¹⁶ The conception of functionalism cannot be taken for granted in social science methodology owing to its complex and dynamic social reality.

Second, Habermas was made aware that the goal (need-disposition) or ideal condition (equilibrium state) that is considered important by society cannot be universally presupposed and descriptively explained without the concrete aspirations of the community. The goal or ideal state is not just *given* for granted as Parsons stated, but *found* in a society that believes in the elements of utopia or ideology that are considered essentially significant by the society.¹⁷ This condition is only possible through public discourses where members of society can communicate freely with each other without being dominated by certain parties (communication free from domination).¹⁸ The functionalism model used should be no longer based on a biological model, but a dramaturgical model that focuses on

15 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 82-83.

16 Weber/Parsons' functionalism was inspired by the biological model. In biology, systems are units (cells, tissues, or organs) organized around each other through self-regulation that – under changing conditions – aim to maintain themselves in a normal state. The adaptive behavior of the self-regulating system in the human body can be interpreted as instrumental action by sociology. In other words, social theory is considered meaningless if the theory – or the elements contained in the theory – does not support the achievement of a goal (need-disposition) or ideal condition (equilibrium state) that is considered important by society as an institution. (Habermas, 1988, p. 79)

17 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 83-87.

18 One of Habermas' signature phrases is "systematically distorted communication". According to Allen and Mendieta (2019, pp. 418-419), the expression refers to communication activities between subjects that are not oriented towards mutual understanding, but to conditions that seek to achieve a certain goal (oriented towards success). Distorted communication occurs when one subject tries to manipulate others in the conversation, whether through rhetoric or psychological manipulation, so that its ideological goals or intentions can be fulfilled.

the dialectical process between fellow community members. This shows that intersubjective communicative experience is firmly important in social science methodology.

In addition to the two logical difficulties described above, Habermas also emphasized the importance of grammatical elements when researchers would like to understand intentional action hermeneutically. Habermas' argument was based on his criticism of other weaknesses possessed by the stimulus-response behavior approach. His criticism is based on Noam Chomsky's critical argumentation about language against learning theory established by B. F. Skinner.¹⁹ According to Chomsky in Habermas' view, the process of learning language cannot be overcome by learning theory which emphasizes behavioral concepts (stimulus and response, reward and punishment, reinforcement and extinction, etc.). Learning theory was rejected by Chomsky because it reduces language to just a behavior that is derived based on stimulus and response without considering the grammatical elements that organize language elements.

Grammatical elements are important because they are always internalized in the subject, and this influences their actions. This makes sense because grammar allows the subject to distinguish between correct and incorrect sentences. Furthermore, it also helps subjects understand new sentences in certain situations and identify various ambiguities and expressions in language. It affects the way subjects learn to interpret the reality they face and manifest it into concrete actions.

To recapitulate, theory of action needs to emphasize three important things. First, the role of everyday language-based intersubjective interactions that define "statements of fact" over intentional action. Second, intersubjective communication processes that are free from any domination. Third, grammar as part of linguistic communication. These three need to be further adopted by the theory of action so that hermeneutics as a methodological approach can truly explore and understand intentional

19 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 68-70.

action. Habermas then calls this type of hermeneutics as hermeneutical reflection.

HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODOLOGY

Habermas adopted three major schools of 20th century philosophical thought in constructing his methodological thinking about hermeneutical reflection, namely phenomenology, philosophy of language, and hermeneutics. Habermas' thinking is synthetic since he not only adopted the ideas of other thinkers, but also argued vigorously with them. Great philosophers such as Schutz, Wittgenstein, and Gadamer were Habermas' discussion and debate partners in *On The Logic of The Social Sciences*.

First, based on phenomenology developed by Alfred Schutz, hermeneutical interpretation in communicative experience can be implemented if the researcher understands the social lifeworld of himself and the subject under study. Social lifeworld is significantly important in this matter since it is closely related to the worldview of the subject.²⁰ Worldview includes expectations, motivations, living conditions, historical conditions, and also how the subject views or interprets the social world (social lifeworld) around them.²¹ Therefore, Habermas emphasized that understanding the meaning of intentional action is only possible through a communicative experience between the researcher and the subject examined by involving a process of interpretation of the social lifeworld owned by both.

In Habermas' view, Schutz's phenomenology, which he learned from Cicourel's writings, posits that the structure of the social lifeworld can only be understood through a process of reflection which focuses on the

20 The concept of social lifeworld cannot be separated from Edmund Husserl, who is known as a pioneer of phenomenology. Habermas, in Wolin's view (2019, p. 1), adopted this conception as a form of criticism of modern science and philosophy of science which he considered a misguided "mathematization of nature" since it firmly disregards the contextual condition of individuals or society.

21 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 101-103.

theory of culture as a methodological reference.²² This encourages social researchers to seriously understand linguistic (language) and nonlinguistic aspects (non-language cultural symbols) through a process of reflection on communicative experience.

In addition, the process of phenomenological reflection can only occur when we capture everything that is taken for granted in the communicative experience that binds the researcher and the subject under study. This indicates that participatory observation techniques that allow researchers to communicate using everyday language and immerse themselves with the subjects under study are inseparable techniques in understanding the meaning of intentional action. Only through such reflection can the structure of the social lifeworld be identified and understood intersubjectively by social researchers.

Second, as mentioned above about the role of cultural symbols, especially language, linguistics plays a central role in hermeneutical reflection. In adopting the philosophy of language, Habermas referred to Wittgenstein's thinking in his famous work *Philosophical Investigation*. Wittgenstein in Habermas' understanding viewed language not only as a form of rules or grammar that regulates everyday grammar in communication, but also as a "form of life" that is immanent in a human being. This immanent nature affects how human beings orient and carry out their lives. In other words, language determines the social lifeworld that underlies the way human beings understand or interpret something. Language in this way lends itself to the praxis level, not at the theoretical one.²³

22 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 104-105.

23 Although Habermas made language as one of the important philosophical aspects that he adopted in developing his methodology, he also criticized the language, both as a symbol of tradition which is the focus of study in hermeneutical reflection and as a medium of communicative interaction. Language is often considered normative because language seems to act as a metainstitution in which social institutions depend on it. Habermas argued that this made sense since social action is always expressed through language, especially everyday language. Nevertheless, Habermas seriously rejected this because all social actions cannot be reduced to normative relationships. Habermas' argument indicates that language has the potential to become a means of domination and social power. In other words, language is ideological or contains certain interests. (Habermas, 1988, p. 172)

Language as a form of life cannot be separated from the conception of language games initiated by Wittgenstein. According to that conception, linguistic analysis is not only about the grammar of everyday language, but also about the cultural symbols that surround the subject's social lifeworld. Language games are very diverse because they depend on the cultural context of a society's life.²⁴ In addition, language games – as a guide that regulates the use of everyday language as well as the cultural symbols in a particular society – are also implicit or unwritten so that the process of understanding the structure of the social lifeworld and the meaning of intentional action cannot be comprehended positivistically.

Wittgenstein's conception of language games is pragmatic.²⁵ The pragmatic aspect lies in the rules of language games which aim to achieve an intersubjective consensus among the subjects involved (the researcher themselves and the subjects examined). In language games, intersubjective consensus is extremely necessary since it indicates an internal connection between language and praxis that has implications for the way subjects understand the meaning of intentional action. However, analyzing or reflecting language games in communicative experience is difficult because the experience involves two or more individuals. Researchers need to intersubjectively find common ground between the language games owned by the subjects involved.

Habermas had the same opinion as Gadamer that mastering language is different from understanding language. They disagreed with Wittgenstein who stated that mastering language games is the same as understanding the form of life of an individual formed through the process of "language training" which is internalized through the socialization process since the subject has been living in the world. According to Habermas and Wittgenstein, mastering (being skilled) a language game did not mean understanding life because language is only a medium so that the process of understanding can take place. Habermas quotes Ga-

24 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 132-133.

25 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 130.

damer, "Thus hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of language, but of the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language".²⁶ In order for researchers to truly understand the meaning of intentional action, after mastering the language, researchers need to carry out interpretation through **hermeneutical reflection**. Therefore, the hermeneutic approach needs to be adopted in social science methodology.

Third, Habermas adopted Gadamer's hermeneutics in developing his social science methodology. Gadamer's thoughts adopted by him are the conceptions of "horizon" and "the history of a text's influence" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).

According to Gadamer in Habermas' view, the process of understanding involves a "horizon" which is a range of views on everything that underlies how a person views and interprets something.²⁷ On the one hand, the horizon is vertical because it contains historical elements that underlie the way the subject interprets facts; on the other hand, the horizon is horizontal since it contains linguistic elements that are substantially cultural or geographical. Horizons are open as they can widen as history invariably moves. Each subject interacting in communication lives on their own horizon and this affects the way they interpret various facts expressed through language. In the process of interaction or communication, the horizons of the subjects – between the researcher and the researched subject – meet and fuse with each other to form a fusion of horizons, which is a synthesis of horizons that are different from each other. In the process of synthesis, the meaning of intentional action can be comprehended intersubjectively.

In Habermas' view, Gadamer stated that our conception of the present certainly contains historical elements that influence us in interpreting the facts that occur in the present. In other words, we are always moving in history. The influence of history – usually called the history of

26 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 146.

27 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 151-153.

a text's influence – is an embodiment of Gadamer's conception known as *Wirkungsgeschichte*.²⁸ Based on this conception, it is impossible to bring back everything that happened in the past and explain it objectively because we are always moving in history. Everything we understand today is dialectical and synthetic, involving historical elements that contrast with each other, ultimately shaping our understanding of the present. In other words, the activity of understanding is not merely about the reproduction of meaning, but also the production of new meanings that are relevant to the present.

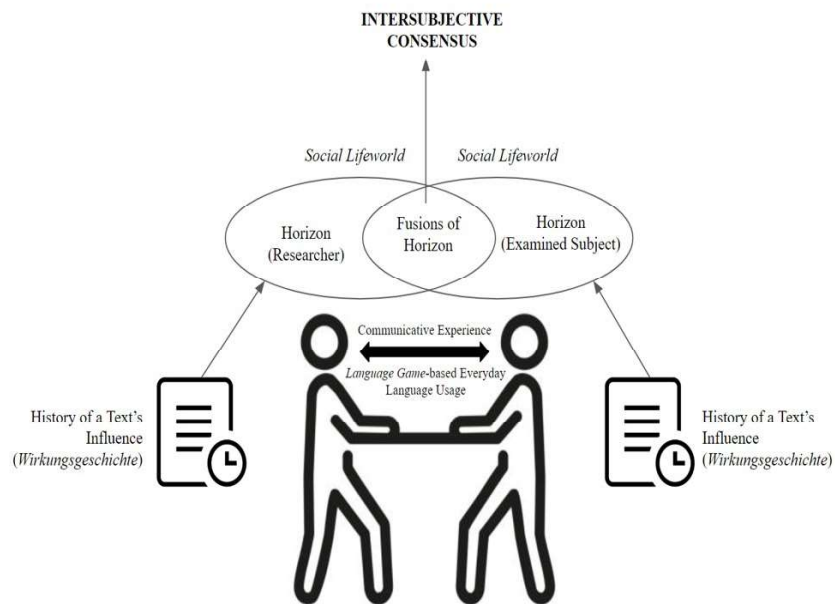


Figure 3.1. How Habermas' Hermeneutical Reflection Works

How can *Wirkungsgeschichte* be illustrated by researchers? Habermas refers to Arthur Danto's thoughts regarding his conception of narrative statements.²⁹ Habermas argued that narrative statements allow researchers to explore and illustrate *Wirkungsgeschichte* since narratives can lead phenomena to be elements in a series of stories that have a beginning and an end that are intertwined with each other so that the plot can be illustrated. According to Danto in Habermas' view, narrative allows re-

28 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 154-155.

29 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 155-161.

searchers to implement hermeneutic interpretation or reflection. This is possible because we can anticipate the conditions that will occur, either in the present or the future, when we trace everything that happened in the past.

Habermas stated that hermeneutical reflection has practical implications because this approach is not only about the process of understanding the meaning of intersubjective intentional action, but also about the *Critique of Ideology*. This conception comes from Habermas' criticism of Gadamer which stated that the prejudices or traditions that surround one's horizon will always be rehabilitated in hermeneutical reflection. For Habermas, Gadamer had failed to identify the power of reflection in the process of understanding (*verstehen*).³⁰

In Habermas' view, when we implement hermeneutical reflection, traditions that contain prejudices do not constantly have to be rehabilitated because we can break the relationship with them. Prejudices do allow us to gain knowledge, but these prejudices can only become knowledge after we accept them through reflection.³¹ In other words, we need to critically reflect on traditions to answer the question of whether or not they are worth maintaining as a basis for hermeneutical reflection. If through reflection we do not agree with the values contained in the tradition, perhaps because they alienate us; then the tradition can be rejected. Thus, hermeneutical reflection is emancipatory. Habermas brought back the power of reflection in social science methodology that had been ignored by positivists so that ethical considerations can be taken into account in social science.

This emancipatory hermeneutical reflection cannot be fully realized in an original interpretive sociology model, even if the process of unders-

30 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 168-169.

31 The example given by Hardiman (2015, pp. 215-216) about contemporary democracy can concretely illustrate Habermas' criticism of Gadamer. In contemporary democracy, one's understanding cannot be isolated from the various opinions spread through the mass media. Moreover, the operation of mass media cannot be separated from various networks of power that bend interpretations so as to direct people's understanding. This exhibits how hermeneutics operates within the medium of power.

tanding the meaning of intentional action is still the main focus, considering that the research practice still engages the framework of a positivistic nomological approach.³² This science still presupposes the existence of general theories that are concluded based on causal relationships such as stimulus-response behavior in behavioral sciences and their relation to the conception of functionalism criticized by Habermas.

This made Habermas adopt Freud's Psychoanalysis model into interpretative sociology.³³ This is possible because psychoanalysis allows us to trace the unconscious motives that influence the way subjects act and behave in everyday life. In this context, the subject experiences an internal disturbance or neurosis which is shown by his/her autonomously unwanted actions. The internal disturbance is influenced by unconscious motives caused by external domination or disturbance that he has experienced throughout his life, such as trauma, bad experiences in the household, etc. Knowledge of these unconscious motives allows the subject to recognize and shape himself as a whole and autonomously so that the various life decisions he lives can run according to the subject's ultimate will. In other words, the subject experiences emancipation since he is free from alienation that alienates himself.

CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS' HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION

Hermeneutical reflection as a methodological approach to social science offered by Habermas has given a new perspective for the development of social science methodology, especially in interpretive sociology. His thinking contains methodological advantages because it offers a new way of thinking for social researchers to not only inquire and understand intentional action, but also critically uncover all ideological elements that are unconsciously taken for granted in the framework of thinking behind scientific search procedures. In other words, Habermas' struggle with science—in line with Medawar's thinking³⁴ in Lipton's view—is not only

32 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 175-180.

33 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 180-186.

34 Peter Lipton, "The Medawar Lecture 2004: The Truth About Science," *Philosophical*

limited to discussions about methodology (descriptive dimension), but also about the ethical or practical implications (normative dimension). However, behind all its advantages, there are various things in Habermas' thinking that deserve critical evaluation. I identify some of the advantages and disadvantages of Habermas' methodological thinking based on three aspects consisting of ontology, methodology/method, and axiology.

Based on the ontological aspect, the advantage of Habermas' hermeneutical reflection lies in the ability to see the object (*Sache*) or subject under study contextually or as it is without initially presupposing anything related to the subject – unlike the conception of functionalism of Weber/Parsons in the original theory of action or the use of maxims in normative-analytical approach and empirical-analytical approach in behavioral sciences. With reference to Adorno,³⁵ the weakness of normative-analytical and empirical-analytical approaches lies in their false claims of objectivity towards the object inquired. These approaches claim that they can explain the overall reality in general or universal terms through empirical findings, whereas the social reality consisting of concrete individuals is complex and contextual. These approaches can explain and classify the concepts of social reality systematically, but they cannot describe the state of society as a social reality as it is. Different from these approaches, hermeneutical reflection allows social researchers to inquire or understand the subject's true intentions (intentional action) entirely and thoroughly.

Moreover, I also agree with Habermas' criticism of the conception of Weber/Parsons functionalism which is inspired by the biological science model. Scientific explanation or reasoning in biological science is often associated with causal relationships that are mechanistic or related to a certain mechanism.³⁶ The mechanistic nature of biological functionalism

Transactions of The Royal Society, no. 360 (2005): pp. 1259-1260.

35 Theodor W. Adorno, "Sociology & Empirical Research", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 68-86.

36 Lauren N. Ross, "Causal Concepts in Biology: How Pathways Differ from Mechanisms and Why It Matters," *The British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 72, no. 1 (2021): pp. 131-132.

presupposes that there is a fixed causal relationship between one organ of the body and other organs so that a biological system that is presupposed can survive or run optimally—for example: the circulatory system, respiratory system, secretion system, etc. In such an illustration, a mechanistic causal relationship can be called objective scientific reasoning. Nevertheless, if we look at the development of scientific reasoning in biology, the mechanistic causal relationship is not even the only scientific reasoning used in biology. There are other reasoning bases besides mechanism-based reasoning, such as pathway, cascade, trigger and process. If in biology—as the basis of the social science functionalism model—there are other ways of reasoning, social science, which places humans as beings who have free will, should also be open to other ways of reasoning.

In addition, the problem of objectivity based on functionalism also lies in hidden subjectivity that is actually perched in the purpose of conducting scientific research. Adorno illustrated a concrete example that can exhibit this objectivity problem, especially in the empirical-analytical approach, is market research in marketing management.³⁷ He revealed that any statistical data tracked in market research—such as gender, age, income, opinion, behavior, etc.—would only be considered an important discovery if it met a presupposed administrative need or purpose—or functionalism in the context of business systems. This approach claims to be objective, when in fact there is a subjective intent behind the market research practice.

Nonetheless, the process of understanding the condition of the subject as it is authentically in hermeneutical reflection without any suppositions or restrictions is not possible in scientific inquiry, both in natural and social sciences. This is due to the very limited human ability to explain and understand the complexity of the world, whereas science essentially aims to always find a probable explanation in the midst of complex natural and social reality. In this light, science needs to confine the attributes that surround the object/subject being examined—or in the economics term is referred to as *ceteris paribus*—so that scientists can explain the regularity

³⁷ Adorno, "Sociology & Empirical Research", p. 71.

of the reality they inquire even though the explanation will never be perfect. In other words, it needs to be invariably tested by other researchers.

Limiting various attributes within the scope of the object/subject under study does not mean eliminating the value or normative dimensions that Habermas considered important. This argument was expressed by Popper when he refuted the argument stating that science must free itself from any values. Popper upheld this view because science can never free itself from value. He argued that what needs to be done is not to eliminate values, but to distinguish between purely scientific values and extra-scientific values.³⁸

Pure scientific values are all the regulative principles that enable researchers to find the ultimate scientific truth. These values include the strength of correspondence with empirical facts (truth), the significance of scientific statements to the scientific problem at hand (relevance, interest, and significance), success in achieving scientific goals (fruitfulness), strength in explaining causal relationships (explanatory power), simplicity of the resulting theory (simplicity), and precision to the object inquired (precision). Aside from those, extra-scientific values are all things that are not related to scientific truth, such as ideology, public welfare issues, national security issues, etc. I contend that this distinction—between questions of truth and questions of action—remains necessary to disassociate science from the notion that it can explain everything with perfect certainty. Distinguishing them does not mean that we can act immorally in the name of science, but it is an effort to explain factual reality in a clear manner.

In the aspect of methodology/method, hermeneutical reflection helps researchers achieve a condition of mutual understanding intersubjectively between the researcher and the subject under study without eliminating the peculiarities of the social lifeworld of each subject involved. This is very reasonable in social science which does have a methodological

38 Karl L. Popper, "The Logic of The Social Sciences", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 96-97.

characteristic in the form of double hermeneutics which is characterized by a dialectical relationship of mutual interpretation – like the Danto dramaturgy model described in the previous section – between the researcher and the subject examined. Double hermeneutics allows the description of social reality to be interpreted by the subject under study, so that the researcher gets feedback that will influence how the social researcher responds or operationalizes the research at a later stage.³⁹

The example given by Herry-Priyono can help us comprehend the dialectical style of social science embodied in the rules of double hermeneutics.⁴⁰ Herry-Priyono illustrated Indonesia's 1977 crisis when the exchange rate of the rupiah against the US dollar increased by 700%. At that time, people rushed to banks and financial institutions to exchange rupiah for dollars or vice versa. This could not be separated from the role of financial analysts who observed and analyzed the behavior of foreign exchange traders and buyers. The results of the analysis were described and presented to the public who were traders and buyers of foreign exchange. The results of the analysis were then reinterpreted by traders and buyers to influence their next actions. Then, their actions were analyzed again by financial analysts. This reciprocal relationship happens continuously. In this illustration, a dialectical relationship between the researcher (financial analyst) and the subject under study (foreign exchange traders and buyers) occurs.

The illustration above indicates that social scientists cannot be completely separated from the subjects they examine and the relationship between the two is dynamic and reciprocal. Hence, both the results of the analysis produced by social scientists and the subjects they study are in a continuous process of becoming (in flux). If there were a social theory that sounds outdated, it would not mean that the theory is poor, but that the theory is an integral part of the whole object researched.⁴¹

39 Anthony Giddens, *Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p. 284.

40 B. Herry-Priyono, *Ilmu Sosial Dasar: Asal-Usul, Metode, Teori, plus Dialog dengan Filsafat & Teologi* (Jakarta: PT. Kompas Media Nusantara, 2022), pp. 13-14.

41 Herry-Priyono, *Ilmu Sosial Dasar*, p. 15.

Methodologically, however, hermeneutical reflection can be considered inadequate, especially when juxtaposed with Popper's thinking, which is often adopted by both natural and social scientists today. Popper offered a formal logic of science, namely a regulative conception of truth and scientific explanation.⁴² In the context of scientific truth, Popper followed Kant since he confined the discourse related to the scientificity of a study to empirical phenomena. Scientific reasoning can be considered objective if scientific propositions correspond to empirical facts. Not only in the context of the discussion about truth, but scientific explanation also relies on empirical facts (initial condition) which are then deductively reasoned through a rule in the form of concepts that presuppose a fixed law.

There is a reason why Popper's regulative conception makes more sense than Habermas' hermeneutical reflection. I argue that science essentially aims to always find probability in the midst of complex natural and social reality. Although Popper's scientific reasoning is only limited to the process of explaining (*erklären*) reality, not the process of understanding (*verstehen*) as the view offered by Habermas, Popper's reasoning is sufficient in the context of scientific studies. This is different from philosophy, which always seeks to understand the whole reality without certain epistemic boundaries.

However, Popper was quite humble in proposing his views because he recognized that the scientific reasoning he offered was limited since it could not explain reality completely. Therefore, theories as research products need to be refuted or falsified continuously, especially in the academic community.⁴³ A theory is reliable in explaining reality if there is no better theory to explain it. In other words, scientific truth is never absolute and the reliability of a theory as a result of scientific inquiry is constantly tentative. If a theory is closely guarded or not open to be refuted or falsified, then the science that underlies the theory is categorized by Popper – based on Pigliucci's view – as pseudoscience.⁴⁴

42 Popper, "The Logic of The Social Sciences", pp. 101-102.

43 Karl L. Popper, "The Logic of The Social Sciences", p. 89.

44 Massimo Pigliucci, "The Borderland between Science and Philosophy: An Introduc-

Critics of hermeneutical reflections argued that they run the risk of promoting pseudoscience, referencing Freud's model of psychoanalysis as an example. Pigliucci provided an illustration of an out-of-body experience that indirectly explains why Freud's psychoanalysis can be said to be a pseudoscience.

she may question what it means to "see" one's body from outside. To the best of our knowledge, seeing is something we do with a complex bodily apparatus that includes not just eyes, but a brain connected to them and capable of interpreting light signals. But if one is disembodied, how would "vision" work? Moreover, subjects who claim to have undergone out-of-body experiences usually talk as if their vision were of the same kind as ordinary vision, i.e., with a limited horizon. But if vision were somehow possible outside of the constraints imposed by biological structures, why would people not be able see at 360°?⁴⁵

The patient's propositions did not show correspondence with facts and coherence between one proposition and another, so research results based on the patient's propositions could not be verified and falsified.⁴⁶ A true scientist would examine the patient's body condition or the condition of the room where the surgery took place to empirically trace the cause of why the experience occurred (correspondence), and examine the phenomenon argumentatively like a philosopher to examine the coherence of the patient's proposition.

By exploring the axiological point of view, Habermas' contribution was reflected in his criticism of Gadamer, who always revived the status quo through prejudice and tradition. I argue that Habermas had brought back the power of reflection in science through his hermeneutical reflection focusing on the conception of the Critique of Ideology, so that the distinction between "what is" and "what should be done" can be clearly distinguished. I agree with Adorno's statement that epistemological debates—especially since Bacon and Descartes—have only focused on

tion," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 83, no. 1 (2008): p. 9.

45 Pigliucci, "The Borderland between Science and Philosophy", p. 11.

46 Pigliucci, "The Borderland between Science and Philosophy", p. 11.

conceptions related to how science works, both inductive and deductive approaches.⁴⁷ They had forgotten the importance of reflection in epistemology, which is also an essential aspect in the process of humans understanding their world.

Habermas' criticism of the type of science that only ceases at the methodological stage without emphasizing the aspect of hermeneutical reflection should be appreciated. I agree with Habermas' view that hermeneutical reflection is needed in science because science is often motivated by ideological human interests, so we need to dismantle it. This is important since the impact of the rapid development of science not only generates positive impacts on human life, but also tremendously negative impacts. The development of smartphones as a result of the development of science is one clear example in which it is like a double-edged knife. Smartphones do make human life more efficient, but excessive use of it can cause mental illness such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children.⁴⁸ The illustration is a reminder for scientists, policy makers, or businessmen, to reflect on the impact of the development of science.

Moreover, the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the end of the Second World War is one concrete example that the reflective power of science emphasizing ethical struggles must be wholeheartedly adopted. The event involved renowned physical scientists such as Ernest O. Lawrence, Arthur H. Compton, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Enrico Fermi—some of whom were Nobel laureates.⁴⁹ More than 200,000 people were killed in the event. In this case, the distinction between “what is” and “what should be done” must be made and this will not

47 Theodor W. Adorno, “On The Logic of The Social Sciences”, in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. Glyn Adey dan David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), p. 111.

48 Youl Pyo Hong, Yeon Ok Yeom, dan Myung Ho Lim, “Relationships between Smartphone Addictions and Smartphone Usage Types, Depressions, ADHD, Stress, Interpersonal Problem, and Parenting Attitude with Middle School Students,” *Journal of Korean Medical Science* 36, no. 129 (2021): p. 9.

49 Barton J. Bernstein, “Four Physicists and the Bomb: The Early Years, 1945-1950,” *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 18, no. 2 (1988): pp. 234-244.

happen, as emphasized by Habermas in his methodological approach. If in the natural sciences alone such reflection can take its toll, how about in the social sciences that involve the human mental world?

However, Habermas' conception of the Critique of Ideology needs to be critically evaluated. On the one hand, the Critique of Ideology does have emancipatory power because it encourages social science to not only help us understand social reality, but also change social reality for the better; but on the other hand, this conception does not explicitly help scientists define prejudice or tradition – as an element criticized by Habermas – which is considered good or bad.

The ethical problems above at first glance seem to be overcome by Habermas' methodological approach which involves intersubjectivity in hermeneutical reflection, both between the researcher and the subject under study as well as between one researcher and another in the academic community. Long after *On The Logic of The Social Sciences*, Habermas later developed his ethical thought called Discourse Ethics in *Faktizität und Geltung (Between Facts and Norms, 1992)* which emphasized the principles of intersubjectivity and universality in ethics.⁵⁰ Habermas' views on ethics cannot be separated from the foundation of the intellectual thought he developed in *On The Logic of The Social Sciences* because his conception of ethics emphasizes the important role of intersubjectivity. Discourse Ethics is concerned with a practical discourse that brings together people from different backgrounds. They come together to discuss claims of accuracy for the conditions that make the various norms governing their behavior rationally and intersubjectively intelligible according to the true will of all participants.

I nevertheless argue, despite the sophistication of Habermas' ethical conception, the conception is not still effective in defining good and bad prejudices or traditions, especially in the context of a multicultural society like Indonesia. The discourse about good and bad accepted intersubjec-

50 F. Budi Hardiman, *Demokrasi Deliberatif: Menimbang 'Negara Hukum' dan 'Ruang Publik' dalam Teori Diskursus Jürgen Habermas* (Yogyakarta: PT Kanisius, 2009), pp. 46-53.

tively in Javanese society is certainly different from the people of North Sumatra. Likewise, the conception of human rights in the Western and Islamic worlds is different despite the universal values that can be agreed upon. In a concrete reality, this kind of conception is not as effective as Habermas hoped about the universality of intersubjectively agreed values. The conception of ethics still has the potential to be trapped in the relativity of ethical truth in the context of the life of the nation, so that many public policies that have been agreed upon intersubjectively in the discourse, but still cannot be accepted by some parties. If the ethical definition of good and bad prejudices or traditions is difficult to determine, how can scientists know whether Critique of Ideology is an appropriate approach or not in social science?

CONCLUSION AND ANOTHER CONSIDERATION

Habermas' thoughts on hermeneutical reflection offers a significant contribution to social sciences despite the various shortcomings of his thinking. Hermeneutical reflection provides a methodological alternative in the midst of the triumph of normative-analytical and empirical-analytical approaches in social science that have forgotten the emancipatory value. However, I conclude that hermeneutical reflection is inadequate since it still contains various methodological weaknesses that make the approach less relevant in the practice of social science inquiry. I have two considerations related to these methodological weaknesses.

First, I agree with Ralf Dahrendorf, the debate moderator in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, who stated that the debate between positivists (Popper & Albert)—or more precisely mentioned as critical rationalism—and critical theorists (Adorno & Habermas) did not provide any methodical contribution in the form of technical research procedures for social researchers.⁵¹ Both, especially Habermas with his hermeneutical reflection, did not help social researchers define concrete scientific research procedures, whereas the function of methodological debate should help

51 Ralf Dahrendorf, "Remarks on the Discussion of the Papers by Karl R. Popper and Theodor W. Adorno", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 125-126.

social researchers determine these concrete steps. In addition, Habermas repeatedly did not emphasize social science (especially interpretive sociology) as a science that deals with empirical field research. He kept science trapped in a mere theoretical approach to social reality.⁵²

In the context of hermeneutical reflection, which in this case focused on interpretive sociology, Habermas did not clearly explain the process of data collection, data analysis, and conclusions that can indicate whether an understanding (*verstehen*) of social reality can be considered valid or not. I argue that positivists are more relevant in this regard, both through normative-analytical and empirical-analytical approaches, because they were able to explain more concretely these methodical steps – such as the use of maxims, *ceteris paribus*, deductive-nomological reasoning, etc. – so that social reality can be firmly explained (*erklären*) despite all its shortcomings. I consider that the hermeneutical reflection is not relevant since it does not provide a clear picture for researchers in determining methodical steps in conducting scientific social research.

Secondly, although the various scientific approaches already explained above are different from each other and each has methodological advantages and disadvantages, they can potentially be integrated without having to betray their unique methodological theses. This can also overcome any difficulties which hermeneutical reflection has so that this approach can become more relevant in the practice of social science inquiry. According to Longino, this can be methodologically implemented by distinguishing and integrating the constitutive and contextual dimensions of science. The constitutive dimension regulates the procedures or methods that ensure the reliability of a scientific inquiry, while the contextual dimension considers ethical values and human interests in science as well as debating the constitutive dimension itself, so that the research methodical procedures taken can be in accordance with the context of the subject being studied.⁵³ I argue that the normative-analytical or empirical-analyt-

52 Dahrendorf, "Remarks on the Discussion", p. 127.

53 Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 4.

ical approach can be considered as an approach that can strengthen the constitutive dimension because of its rigor in determining the appropriate scientific procedures for researchers in explaining (*erklären*) social reality, while Habermas' hermeneutical reflection approach can enrich the contextual dimension that helps researchers understand (*verstehen*) social reality which is contextual in fact.

Longino differed from Popper who merely distinguished between the two, which in Popper's conception are expressed through the terms purely scientific values and extra-scientific values. Longino stated that the constitutive and contextual dimensions have reciprocal relationships or interactions that influence each other in the practice of scientific research. To quote Longino, "I will argue not only that scientific practices and content on the one hand and social needs and values on the other hand are in dynamic interaction but that the logical and cognitive structure of scientific inquiry requires such interaction".⁵⁴ In other words, scientists can remain faithfully obeying scientific principles despite their particular contextual intentions or goals in science.

If we establish a reciprocal relationship between the constitutive dimension (normative-analytical and empirical-analytical approaches) that aims to explain (*erklären*) social reality and the contextual dimension (Habermas' hermeneutical reflection) that is tasked with understanding (*verstehen*) social reality. This will help researchers fulfill the whole function of science—as mentioned by Okasha—which aims to gain understanding, explanation, and prediction of the world around us through various methodical searches that can be scientifically accounted for, such as experiments, observations, and the construction of general theories.⁵⁵ If we establish such a reciprocal relationship or in other words adopt *erklären* and *verstehen* together, then the tasks of science can be better fulfilled.

⁵⁴ Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-3.

How is such interaction possible in the practice of scientific research? Longino provided a real-life example of this. The practice of financing scientific research can illustrate the concrete interaction between the constitutive and contextual dimensions.⁵⁶ Research financing, which is part of the contextual dimension, is not only able to influence researchers in determining scientific objectives or orientation, but also the methodical procedures of the research, such as determining how to collect data, determining the number of respondents, determining the demographic profile of respondents, etc. (constitutive dimension). Otherwise, the constitutive dimension will be largely determined by the contextual dimension. Researchers cannot determine the methodical steps of the research if they do not know the purpose of the research and the budget plan that will finance the operations of the research.

Longino's thought above can also fulfill the expectations of Habermas in *On The Logic of The Social Sciences* – as well as Adorno in *Sociology and Empirical Research* – about how empirical social science should also be critical of the aspects of ontology (functionalism) and axiology (Critique of Ideology) contained in the individual or society inquired. To quote Adorno's critique of empirical science practice, "Empirical Methods have ignored societal objectivity, the embodiment of all the conditions, institutions and forces within which human beings act, or at most, they have taken them into account as accidentals".⁵⁷ By adopting Longino's methodological proposal, researchers can determine ontological and axiological aspects more contextually before conducting scientific research. In other words, science does not lose its reflexive power or merely limit itself to methodological struggles.

By adopting Habermas' thoughts on hermeneutical reflection and Longino's thoughts on the reciprocal relationship between the constitutive and contextual dimensions of science, I offer a framework that not only allows social science to remain rigorous to the method (constitutive

56 Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge*, pp. 5-6.

57 Adorno, "Sociology & Empirical Research", p. 71.

dimension), but also to be critical (contextual dimension), both towards the methodology and methodical steps of science (methodology & methods) and the contextual condition of the individual or society examined (ontology & axiology). In other words, hermeneutical reflection can help researchers be able to determine the aspect of ontology, methodology and methods, and axiology in a more contextual and critical manner in social science (Figure 4.1). By adopting this framework, researchers can explain (*erklären*) and understand (*verstehen*) social reality simultaneously.

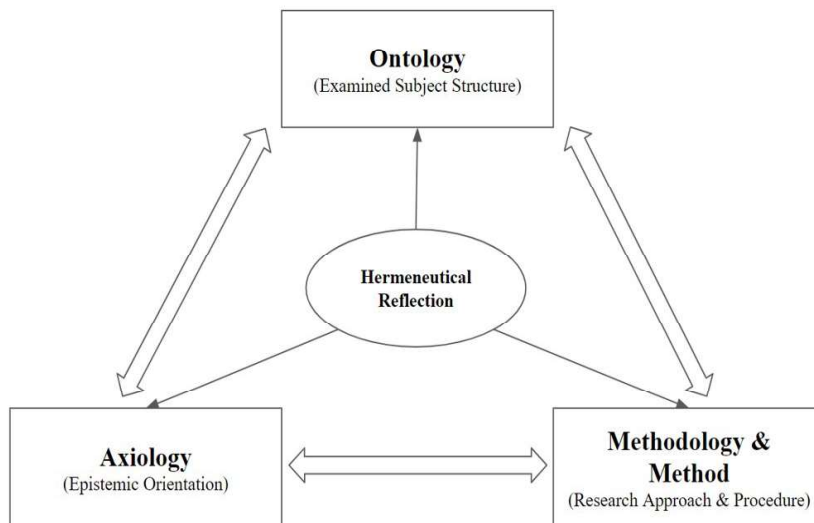


Figure 4.1. Hermeneutical Reflection in Social Science

Hermeneutical reflection can help researchers be critical of the subject under study (ontology) as well as the relevant contexts which surround them. The individual or society as the examined subject is no longer arbitrarily determined by nature, such as Weber who determined the structure of society as the Division of Labor. Researchers can ask critically to find out who the individual or society really is. In addition, through hermeneutical reflection, the researcher can also determine more flexibly the scientific approach that is suitable for the research. The methodological/methodical approach utilized to examine the intentions behind cultural symbols in the hinterland of Java certainly differs from the coastal

communities of the Sulawesi sea. In the aspect of axiology, hermeneutical reflection can critically criticize the epistemic orientation of research. If the research results have the potential to cause community divisions, researchers or policy makers can further consider whether the research should be carried out or not.

The process of examining the phenomenon of Indonesia's economic growth, which is often undertaken by many social researchers and policy makers, can be a clear example of how the contextual dimension in social science is often ignored, resulting in consequences that adversely affect people's lives. Indonesia is a fortunate country in the contestation of economic figures. We can see this achievement when observing Indonesia's economic growth figures from 2000 to 2019 (before the Covid-19 pandemic). Indonesia's economic growth managed to grow from US\$ 165.02 Billion (2000) to US\$ 1.12 Trillion (2019)⁵⁸. Overall growth has been steady and has tended to increase at around 5-6% per year, touching 6.3% in 2007.⁵⁹ The financial crisis in 2008 did not make Indonesia's economy falter at a time when advanced economies were paralyzed. The economic growth rate is often the main reference or basis for the government in considering and determining various public policies that are not only related to economic aspects.

When we take a closer look at these economic phenomena, Indonesia's economic growth is an achievement on the one hand, but on the other, it hides an unhealed wound. The economic gap between the rich and the poor has widened in the last twenty years. This is depicted by the Gini Ratio, which increased from 0.28 (2000) to 0.37 (2021), and even reached 0.4 in 2013.⁶⁰ In other words, the distribution of wealth is unequal and tends to benefit only the rich.

58 World Bank. "GDP Growth (Current US\$) - Indonesia," <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=ID> (diakses 1 September, 2023).

59 World Bank. "GDP Growth (Annual %) - Indonesia," <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=ID> (diakses 1 September, 2023).

60 World Bank. "Gini Index - Indonesia," https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?contextual=aggregate&end=2021&locations=ID&name_desc=true&start=2000&view=chart (diakses 1 September, 2023).

Observance for human rights is also not as impressive as economic growth figures. Indonesia was ranked 16th out of 194 countries in 2021⁶¹ as the country with the highest economic growth, but in 2022 Indonesia was ranked 84th out of 163 as a country that respects human freedom (Freedom Index).⁶² The same goes for environmental issues. In September 2023, Indonesia ranked second out of 107 countries with the worst air pollution.⁶³ This is a strong warning for social researchers and policy makers to be more critical in considering various contextual aspects that surround real conditions of the community.

In my opinion, the problems we face go beyond these illustrations. The symptoms and implications we face are more complex and absurd. There is a core problem that has yet to be identified, either by the empirical facts or mathematical economic calculations. Hence, this makes hermeneutical reflection very relevant as a methodology of social science because this approach not only seeks to describe reality clearly through its constitutive dimensions, but also to reflect critically and seriously on the contextual dimensions behind the lives of the people or individuals who are the subject of social research. Moreover and most importantly, this approach is able to put human beings just the way they are – not as a production factor which is instrumentally utilized to contribute to the certain system as illustrated by Weber – leading to practical implications which uphold greater emancipation.⁶⁴

61 Statistics Times. "World GDP Ranking," <https://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-ranking.php> (diakses 1 September, 2023).

62 World Population Review. "Freedom Index By Country 2022," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/freedom-index-by-country> (diakses 1 September, 2023).

63 IQ Air. "Air Quality in Indonesia," <https://www.iqair.com/world-air-quality-ranking> (diakses 1 September, 2023).

64 Paulo Vitorino Fontes, "Critique of Positivism, Hermeneutics, and Communicative Reason in Habermas," *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2021): p. 459.

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