



# Anti-Positivist Philosophical Approaches in West

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**Abstract:** *Since positivism as a general philosophical approach has dominated the intellectual and epistemic space in west for several years now and following western epistemology the scientific and academic community in Iran has been intensively influenced by this current and even for many times it has influenced the public policies in the country, the current essay seeks to study the philosophical approaches which challenge this epistemological school. Thus, we struggle to show that even in west this epistemological approach which claims to be a consistent approach before revealed and rational epistemology is challenged and many of western intellectuals and philosophers cast serious doubts concerning the principles of this approach.*

**Keywords:** *Approaches, Philosophical, Opposing, Positivism, West.*

## INTRODUCTION

Positivism as an epistemological approach claims that it can provide an epistemic system based on experience and secular reason and denial of revelation and discursive intellect which can serve as a measure for universal planning for man and his individual and social destiny. This article shows that positivism has faced a serious problem in its homeland, i.e. west, and its principles have not been implemented in Iran in view of the revealed and religious foundations. However, Iranian academic community has adopted a non-defensive approach in strengthening and implementation of positivist principles in the thoughts of students and following it in the country. It needs to be mentioned that the current essay aims at the criticism of positivism in the discourse of western thinkers and it does not seek to discuss it from an intra-religious perspective. We need also take it into consideration that the views within western discourse of positivism are divided into two classes: first, the criticisms of the positivists themselves who believe in the necessity of certain reforms are required to be done within the school. The first camp hosts moderate positivists who despite their defense of the idea of positivism insist on some necessary modifications. The idea of neo-positivism and refutationism are two examples of the approaches that belong to this camp.

The second camp hosts the perspectives that oppose the idea of positivism as a whole and adopt certain ontology, anthropology and epistemology that stands against positivism. To put it otherwise, they criticize the epistemic foundations of positivism and deny them though they share atheism and a secular interpretation of existence with it and deny the centrality of religion and Greek wisdom. These perspectives belong to the present era and are discussed today in academic circles of Europe and the US and continue their life along with the idea of positivism and despite a type of domination of positivists that has its origin in certain social and political observations. They are producing theories based on their specific foundations and we briefly study them in view of their epistemological divergence from positivism. These perspectives consist of Frankfurt School, Phenomenological School, Postmodernism and Existentialism.

The necessity of delineation of the opposing perspectives in this article has its origin in the very fact that in western countries the idea of positivism has been frequently criticized and there is no longer any

absolute domination of science in positivist sense in European countries and the US and there is also a possibility of theorization based on non-positivist epistemic foundations.

### **Neo-Positivism and Severe Criticisms against Vienna Circle (Refutationism)**

Popper was one of those thinkers who leveled numerous criticisms against logical positivism particularly its doctrine of science which is based on inductionism and it was indeed these very criticisms that in some case convinced positivists to review their perspective of science and also in some cases caused serious damages to this philosophical school. This critical stance turned Popper to one of the greatest opponents of logical positivism along with Quine. He challenged their most important principle known as the principle of verifiability. This principle is so important that the doctrine of science of logical positivism which is based on inductionism owes its existence to the principle of verifiability. This principle not only suggests that whatever is not empirically verifiable should not be described as scientific rather considers it to be nonsense. Thus, whatever is empirically verifiable could be demonstrated or denied through induction. For this reason the aforementioned principle is of two main branches; first, nonsensicality of all non-empirical proposition (except analytical propositions); second, empirical demonstration via method of induction. Popper criticizes both branches. According to Popper, one of the problems of the thesis of verifiability which has been used as the measure of the difference between science and non-science is Hume's idea of the invalidity of inductive generalizations. He endorsed the lack of logical congruity between the universal propositions and particular observations. Particular observations regardless of their number can by no means justify any universal proposition or scientific thesis. Even Popper believed that a universal proposition is not even approximately justified by particular and frequent empirical verifications. For in the history of science, there were so many theories that despite the existence of numerous evidences have been proven to be incorrect (Khoramshahi, 1982: 123).

The results of the reflections of Popper of the problem of induction and its explication are as follows: "How can one demonstrate the veracity of the causal propositions based on experience like the hypotheses and theoretical systems of empirical sciences? We are not certainly allowed to deduce universal propositions from particular propositions no matter what is their number; because whatever conclusion is drawn from them they are possible to be false" (Popper, 1991: 31-32).

Logical syllogism suggests that if the premises are true the conclusion is surely true but induction does not guarantee the veracity of conclusion. In fact, inductionism is based on the thesis that "future is like the past". According to Popper, this thesis is not a reasonable thesis and is not grounded in any foundation, insofar as he asks the following question: "what is the justification of the thesis that future is like the past?" (Popper, 1995: 2) Popper does not find any answer to this question and then considers it to be basically wrong.

As it was mentioned, the other criticism that is leveled against inductionism is that one which has been propounded by David Hume. According to Hume, principle of induction involves circle because its truth is dependent upon itself because it has been acquired via this argument: A) principle of induction was successful in situation I. B) Principle of induction was successful in the situation II. C) Principle of induction was successful in situation III. Conclusion: principle of induction is always successful. As we see Hume says that the demonstration of the principle of induction has been done via induction, then this argument involves circle. To avoid this circle we may want justify the principle of induction with a higher degree principle but the latter itself should be demonstrated via another higher principle and this will lead to vicious circle (Malekian, 2000, vol. 3: 90-91).

Moreover, we might even try to avoid Hume's objection in the way Bertrand Russell did in the sense that we would consider the principle of induction valid in its previous form, i.e. not as an empirically grounded principle rather as an apriori thesis. Russell believes that since the demonstration of induction via our experience faces circle then we are forced either to ignore our expectations of future or to accept it based on essential evidence. Since the first alternative obstructs the path of empirical science then Russell prefers to take the second path and accepts the principle of induction as an apriori thesis while this axiom has not been proven anywhere and logical positivism accepts it based on a blind sense of certainty (ibid).

Popper also believes that we can be a scientist without providing any inductive inference and this is done by resorting to refutationisms and conjectures and refutations (ibid: 49).

Ambiguity of the meaning of the words, diversity and numerousness is another objection that is raised of the principle of induction. How many of observations are considered to be numerous? In which conditions observations will be diverse? If our hand's being burnt once with fire is enough for demonstration of the burning power of fire? However, there are other propositions that cannot be justified by one experience. Moreover, what is the measure of the diversity of observations? From where have the measures of diversity and numerousness come? Where are they grounded? Whether for solving these problems the expression of the principle of probability by moderate inductionists is enough? They claim that although we cannot guarantee the complete veracity of the decisions resulted from the inductions, these generalizations are probably true. But before this review two further objections are raised: 1- this modified principle is itself a universal proposition that requires a justification; 2- probability will be always zero (Popper, 1991: 32) because we can show probability as a fraction whose numerator is constituted of the number of observations while the denominator is infinite because the denominator is a scientific proposition that includes the unhappened and future situations (Popper, 1993: 334-337).

What is of importance in Popper's criticism of inductionism based on refutationism is the priority of hypothesis over observation. For as it was mentioned already, inductionists believe that observation is the beginning of science while Popper contends that there is no observation which is not preceded by a hypothesis. In this regard, Popper suggests that every observation is a sensory perception but a perception that has been prepared and designed in advance. We do not have any observation the way that we have a sense perception rather we observe. Observation is preceded by certain attention and interest, e.g. a special question or problem or something theoretic (Soroush, 1996: 222). Popper also takes the positivist claim of pure observation to the task. He is of the belief that there is never anything called pure observation because observation is always optional and is done under the guidance of the predictive theory.

According to Popper, science contrary to what is claimed by inductionists and logical positivists does not begin with observation; rather it begins with conjecture. Conjecture is itself of hypothetical nature. Then the scientists start to criticize themselves through critical observations in order to refute the conjectures (Gillies, 2002: 49). These conjectures and hypotheses determines it for the scientists that what they want from the world. In other words, it shows what is it they are seeking after? In fact, hypothesis's role in sciences is that it casts light on the searched field. To put it otherwise, it clarifies what should be sought for and in which forms the phenomenon should be conceived (Soroush, 1996: 21-22).

The hypothesis and conjecture that stands numerous hard tests and is not refuted will be temporarily accepted. We can never acquire certain knowledge of any scientific, theory, law or generalization because the theory at issue could be refuted in next test or observation (Gillies, 2002: 49).

Observations regardless of their number and diversity do not prove the theory, rather they can just validate it until the refutation of the theory and if there was an opposing observation the theory is surely refuted. In other words, falsity of universal propositions can be inferred from the proper particular propositions. Refutationists like Popper take the utmost advantage of this logical point (Chalmers, 1999: 51-52). Accordingly, Popper believes in the lack of congruity between refutation and confirmation and this is not something that one could seriously deny it. A group of particular observational propositions can refute or deny a universal law but it cannot demonstrate a law (Popper, 1993: 196).

With these criticisms, Popper presents his own refutationist theory. One scientific test is incessant search for examples that refute or falsify a hypothesis. Some of the hypotheses are more refutable than others because they refute more cases. In other words, their scope of refutability is wider and in this way they are more prone of being refuted. The proposition "All stars move through an ellipse course" is more refutable than the proposition "All constants move through an ellipse course", because what contravenes the first does not contravene the second; while whatever contravenes the second necessarily does the same with the first. The more falsifiable is a hypothesis the more impossible is it. By fulfilling more expectations it provides more information for us (Khorramshahi, 1982: 124). The correct method of science

is production of the most falsifiable hypotheses. Then, falsifiability or refutability or the thesis of certainty of falsity based on observation is the measure of scientificity and empiricity of a theory.

Popper's refutationism distinguishes between the discovery of scientific hypotheses and justification or their validation. According to Popper, in the discovery and invention of theory, logical analysis and justification does not have any place, because logical analysis is not an issue related to the facts rather it is a matter of justification and validity (Gillies, 2002: 49). This theory of Popper leads to a type of reconciliation between science and art. According to Popper, great scientists enjoy a type of creativity which is considered to be among the features of great artists. Therefore, Popper is of the belief that there is no such thing as the logic of scientific discovery, rather we have only the logic of scientific test (ibid: 50).

According to Popper, contrary to the stance of verificationists who believed in the necessity of verification of a scientific theory, the latter needs to be refutable in the sense that it should be refutable via empirical test. He goes even beyond this and suggests that the more refutable is a theory the better or the more scientific is it. To explain this issue, one has to note that every theory is refutable when it could be refuted via probable observational propositions. Popper describes these observational propositions as potential refuters.

One of the criteria that distinguishes Popper from the verificationists is the issue of elimination of metaphysics from the epistemic foundations, because they believe that their criterion allows them to detect metaphysical (nonsensical) propositions and described their own goal the elimination of metaphysics through linguistic analysis. They believed that they have a method that allows them eliminate metaphysical (nonsensical) elements from scientific theories but Popper contends that metaphysics is not meaningless and the elimination of all metaphysical elements from science is not possible though wherever it is possible to do so it is completely good and in the interest of science, because elimination of an untestable element from science tackles part of the existing impediments before the development of refutations that ensure the scientific content of theories. In fact, in some cases with the discovery of a metaphysical element in a scientific theory that can be eliminated a considerable profit is achieved. Popper struggled to find a measure in order to demarcate the scope of intervention of metaphysics and to restrict its reach as much as possible (Popper, 1995: 194-195).

Among important objections that are raised against Popper's refutationist doctrine of science one can refer to the idea that scientific propositions are not always simple and clear so that to be refuted by a simple observation (Soroush, 1996: 139). Moreover, Popper's refutationism is also criticized based on historical reasons. For many of theories in the history of science have not been jettisoned with refutations and if this was the case many theories like Newton's theory of gravity should have been put aside.

Finally, Popper with these intra-discourse objections of logical positivism paved the ground for its modification and also these critical reviews of positivism caused him to have a specific place. It needs to be mentioned that the common point of Popper and logical positivism is their realism.

#### **Frankfurt School:**

Frankfurt School refers to the intellectual and theoretical heritage of a group of distinguished German intellectuals and their particular social theory. The aforementioned intellectuals were directly or indirectly related with the Institute for Social Research which was established in Frankfurt in 1923 under the financial aegis of Felix Weil and was affiliated to University of Frankfurt and later the so called intellectual movement of Frankfurt School and Critical Theory emerged from it. Of course, it was only by the appointment of Max Horkheimer as the chancellor of this institute in 1930 that the required ground was prepared for the emergence of a phenomenon called Frankfurt School. Among the renowned thinkers who were members of this school along with Horkheimer one can refer to the names of Herbert Marcuse, the radical philosopher, Theodor Adorno, sociologist and art theorist, Erich Fromm, philosopher and psychoanalyst. The members of Frankfurt School had been mainly influenced by the ideas of Marx and Hegel (Nozari, 2007: 9-10).

Frankfurt School is indeed a critical theory and has influenced the scientific and social life of west in many respects and its effects continued to be until the late 1990 and even beyond.

Frankfurt School is a complicated phenomenon and the social thought which has been associated with it (critical theory) is interpreted in different ways.

The major concern of the theorists of this school was dealing with social philosophy which lied on the top of the agenda of the institute; of course, social philosophy in this context does not refer to a philosophical theory of value that would provide a better understanding of the concept of social life and also not as a type of synthesis of the achievements of the social sciences rather as a source of important questions that are required to be assayed by sciences as well as a framework within which general affairs and concepts are not neglected (Bottomore, 1996: 17). As we mentioned earlier, Frankfurt Critical Theory addressed various problems but here we are just concerned with its specific stance on the dominant scientific stream of Europe and the US particularly in sociology as well as the criticisms that have been raised against positivism as a paradigm of methodology and epistemology. We also discuss its practical plan of reform.

In his essays of 1930s, Horkheimer sought to explicate the role and place of metaphysics via criticism of the modern positivism as well as the empiricism in general and empiricism as propounded by Vienna Circle following the domination of the perspective of natural sciences particularly the domination of positivistic methodology and epistemology over the domain of sciences and immediate penetration of this movement into social and human sciences as well as the modern philosophy. His argument in this regard was outlined in two levels in his prominent essay entitled *The Latest Attack on Metaphysics* (1937): first he underlines the relationship between thinking style and situations of social group within the framework of the ideas derived from sociology of knowledge although contrary to e.g. Karl Manheim he does not analyze the exact interrelations between thought and socio-historical conditions. He also believes that the whole system of modern empiricism belongs to the transient world of liberalism. In another level, Horkheimer criticizes positivism in three major cases as the theory of knowledge or philosophy of science particularly in relation to social sciences: A) the idea that positivism deals with active human agents as facts and subjects within the framework of a mechanical determinism; B) the idea that positivism takes for granted the world as a tangible phenomenon in the domain of experience and does not distinguish between the essence and accident; C) the idea that positivism absolutely distinguishes between the fact and value and in doing so it separates knowledge from human interests. Horkheimer compares positivism with dialectical theory in which individual realities always emerge with a determinate relationship with each other and struggles to present reality in its totality. Moreover, dialectical thought puts empirical elements in the form of empirical structures which are of paramount importance for historical interests related to dialectical thought. When an active individual who is of common sense sees the chaotic conditions of the world the interest in interpretation of this situation turns to a guiding principle with the aid of which he seeks to organize the status quo and forms them in the form of theory. Correct thinking is as more dependent on correct willing as that the latter is dependent on the former. Horkheimer pursued this discussion in one of his most renowned articles of 1930s entitled *Traditional and Critical Theory* which can be regarded as the document of establishment or the charter of Frankfurt School. In that article traditional theory has been interpreted as the implicit or explicit perspective of natural sciences which is expressed in the modern philosophy in the form of positivism and empiricis; more importantly, Horkheimer in this article is more concerned of the generalization of this type of conception of theory to human and social sciences which have sought to follow the leadership of natural sciences. The opposed kind of social thought, 'critical theory', rejects the procedure of determining objective facts with the aid of conceptual systems, from a purely external standpoint, and claims that 'the facts, as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic in the same degree as they are for the savant (Bottomore, 1996: 17-19).

Marcuse the other main figure in the formation of Frankfurt theory; in several articles in 1930s and particularly in *Reason and Revolution* has propounded a dialectical social theory in opposition to the positivist social sciences and in this regard he argued that positivist philosophy seeks to align the study of society with the study of nature: social study should turn to a science that seeks to discover social norm, i.e. certain set of rules whose validity is like the validity of physical laws. Thus, social practice, particularly the issue of interpretation of social system as a result of these rigid and inflexible laws faces a deadend (Marcuse, 1979: 343).

The members of the Frankfurt School struggled to relatively stay away from the influence of the major currents of social sciences and continue more with independent intellectual activities and even when finally under the influence of American social sciences in exile due to the opposition with Hitlerian racist political system, they still considered theory to be prior to observation and research (Bottomore, 1996: 27-28).

At the end of 1940s the major lines of the new social theory or social philosophy were presented and one of the main concerns of this philosophy was the criticism of positivism and empiricism and its denial in more extensive form, i.e. criticism and denial of all types of conception of the science of society and instead, insistence on philosophical notion of reason, as a phenomenon that is able to distinguish and discover the nature and substance of phenomena versus appearances and accidents or mere emergence. Reason was also considered to be a phenomenon that is closely related to freedom. Thus conceived, knowledge of world was in line and accommodated with determination of authentic values. According to Horkheimer, correct thought and correct will are mutually interdependent (ibid: 28-29).

Adorno another member of this school who considered positivism to be a perspective which is: 'in terms of its mere structure of categories, elevates the simple reproduction of what exists to an ideal.... Positivism is an attitude which not only clings to what is given, but takes a positive view of it'; and the attack upon positivism became the *leitmotiv* of his work during 1960s.

Positivism became the *leitmotiv* of his work for the next decade. The criticism of positivism and empiricism, and the attempt to formulate an alternative epistemology and methodology for social theory, provided not only the foundation, but also a large part of the substance of the Frankfurt School's theory of society over three decades, from Horkheimer's essay on traditional and critical theory in 1937 to the debate about positivism in 1969, and it is this central core of their doctrine which must now be more closely examined. In broad outline, their criticism had three distinct aspects, which I shall consider in turn: first, that positivism is an inadequate and misleading approach which does not, and cannot, attain a true conception or understanding of social life; second, that by attending only to what exists it sanctions the present social order, obstructs any radical change, and leads to political quietism; third, that it is intimately connected with, and is indeed a major factor in sustaining, or producing, a new form of domination, namely 'technocratic domination'.

At another level Horkheimer undertakes a criticism of positivism as a theory of knowledge or philosophy of science, especially in relation to the social sciences, on three main points: (i) that it treats active human beings as mere facts and objects within a scheme of mechanical determinism; (ii) that it conceives the world only as immediately given in experience, and makes no distinction between essence and appearance; and (iii) that it establishes an absolute distinction between fact and value, and hence separates knowledge from human interests. Horkheimer contrasts with positivism a 'dialectical theory', in which 'individual facts always appear in a definite connection', and which 'seeks to reflect reality in its totality'. Furthermore, dialectical thought 'integrates the empirical constituents into structures of experience which are important...for the historical interests with which dialectical thought is connected (ibid: 32-33).

As we mentioned earlier, another criticism leveled by Frankfurt School against positivism is concerned of the relationship between positivist philosophy of science or in more general terms positivist worldview and the acceptance of the status quo. This argument can be explained by referring to the point that logically speaking, as Marcuse suggests, a science that seeks to discover the social laws ruthlessly resists any social activity specifically in the form of social system change. In other words, this scientific perspective is a type of conservatism (ibid: 37-38).

Another point as to the distinction between positivism and critical theory of society is related to the accounts of these two perspectives as regards metaphysics. While Critical Theory believed in the existence of certain positive elements in metaphysics, Positivism considers metaphysics an empty current. Frankfurt School specifically criticized Vienna Circle that considered metaphysics as something meaningless (Nozari, 2007: 165).

Another important criticism that Frankfurt School has raised against positivism is concerned with the distinction between value and reality. According to the members of Frankfurt School, positivism due to

this very distinction between value and reality and giving priority to means versus ends (in fact, for realization of ends) turned to an essentially conservative current which is unable to oppose the status quo. In the words of Martin Jay, "the result of this positivist perspective was not but absolutization of realities and objectification of the status quo. According to Horkheimer, positivist epistemology by raising the idea of value neutrality of sciences and the absence of value judgements in researches in the domain of social and human sciences, has excluded social mission, and more importantly, the liberation mission, from the theory. Horkheimer suggests that truth and value are not separated the way that positivists suggest (ibid: 162-167).

### **Phenomenology:**

Lexically speaking, phenomenology refers to the study or knowledge of phenomenon; because whatever appears is a phenomenon. The domain of phenomenology is infinite in practice and we cannot restrict it to certain science; if we just suffice to the root of the word, anyone who is involved in some way in the study of emergence and appearance of something and as a result, anyone who describes the appearances of anything is doing phenomenology (Dartigues, 1997: 13).

Phenomenology germinated in the crisis of subjectivism and irrationalism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. We must situate this thought in history as it situated itself in a history which is equally our own. It is against psychologism, against pragmatism, against an entire period of occidental thought that phenomenology has reflected, proceeded, and battled. It began, and remained, a meditation on knowledge, a knowledge of knowledge; and its famous "putting in parentheses" consists above all in dismissing a culture and a history, in tracing all knowledge back to a radical non-knowledge. But the rejection of this inheritance-of this "dogmatism," as Husserl somewhat peculiarly called it-is itself rooted in a heritage. Thus history envelops phenomenology, as Husserl knew from the beginning of his work to the end. Yet there is an ahistorical pretention in phenomenology; and this is why we will approach phenomenology through its history, and leave it in its debate with history (Lyotard, 2005: 9-10). Phenomenology is a stage of European thought whose meaning is evolving as a historical fact. Among the key figures in phenomenology one can refer to Husserl, Fink, Ricoeur and Levinas (ibid: 13). In *Crisis of European Sciences* Husserl shows that empiricism is in conflict with human freedom. In other words, empiricism cannot fathom the transcendent contingencies of subjectivity and is not able to support the science of essential contingencies. On the other hand, this perspective is haunted by positivism. This perspective in itself imposes the scientific necessities to the society and the man himself and entangles him in the domination of these rules. Positivism in its complicated forms has permeated into various domains of thought and denies the priority of transcendent subject over the objective subjectivity in its all form and by the denial of priority of transcendent subjectivity over psychological, logical and mathematical subjectivity does not accept intuition as the basis of all sciences. It basically denies phenomenological transcendent epoche. Husserl believes that the way out of the existing problems lies in the certainty of a subjectivity that is beyond all natural affairs and thus nature is a secondary truth. He believes that European sciences particularly human sciences are bogged down in crisis and transcendent phenomenology is the solution to this crisis in sciences (Husserl, 2009: 17-18).

Despite continuous developments in sciences, there is a crisis in the dominant methodology of sciences (ibid: 59). Husserl considers the crisis in science to be referring to the lack of meaning in life and states that contemporary science does not allocate any meaning for life (ibid: 60). Husserl believes in the inadequacy of human sciences. His critique of these sciences is that they are under the influence of the methods of natural sciences without endorsing the fact that their subjects and methods differ while nature is not conceivable but through indirect (acquired) methods, human life and its related phenomena are directly intuited and should be just described (Dartigues, 1997: 13).

According to phenomenologists, one needs to find a third way between theoretical discourse of metaphysics and positivist sciences and it is indeed the path of direct encounter with reality. According to Husserl, we should move towards the things themselves. In fact, one can state that phenomenology is the result of thinking of the crisis of sciences as a new method of positivist knowledge. Phenomenologist philosophers have become tired of the narrow-mindedness of positivist perspectives as well as the

metaphysical systems. They are more interested in finding a new method in all domains in order to retain the majesty and honor of human sciences. Undoubtedly, Husserl's goal was the establishment of meaning for human sciences. According to Husserl, particular explanations should not make us to neglect the metaphysics (ibid: 33).

Against this view of science Husserl appealed, like rationalists such as Brunschwig, to the essential inadequacy of induction. In reality the hypothesis of constancy the empiricist claims to find through his observations is constructed by the mind, on the basis of possibly only a single observation. We cannot induce a law from a large number of "cases"; this is an "idealizing fiction" fabricated by the physicist, which draws its explanatory power not from the number of facts on which it is based, but from the clarity it brings to those facts. Of course this fiction must then be put to the experimental test, but the fact remains that induction and statistical processing cannot alone constitute the entire scientific procedure—it also involves a creative act of the mind (Lyotard, 2005: 60).

Finally, one needs to say that phenomenology is a philosophy that seeks to find something transcendent for *lebenswelt* and is tired of the meaninglessness of the positivist life and is criticizing positivism under the influence of this philosophy and ontology. Thus knowledge is not restricted to experience rather for knowledge one needs to perceive the phenomena and things themselves in indirect fashion. They value reason and speak of essence, substance, form and the like. Phenomenology does not accept inductive method as a result of this type of vision and considers it to ineffective and unrealistic particularly in human sciences. Thus, this school is a serious critic of the empirical and positivist epistemology and methodology and believes that this perspective results in the crisis in sciences particularly in its meaninglessness. Then, the essences themselves have to be considered and instead of turning to the external world one needs to embark upon introspection in order to provide a better and correct analysis of them and it is basically against scientific and positivistic explanation. Phenomenology is loyal to the introspection that was once denied by August Comte and is a philosophy that in its ontology, methodology and epistemology is against empiricism and positivism (Dartigues, 1997: 39).

### **Postmodernism (Modernism)**

Postmodernism is a complicated and interrelated body of ideas that emerged in late 1960s and is still active, dynamic and expanding. Postmodernism has permeated into the whole gamut of Europe and the United States particularly into the academic circles (Nozari: 35).

Postmodernism refers to a complicated set of reactions to modern philosophy and its presuppositions without having the least agreement with them in the basic beliefs. Postmodern philosophy is essentially against foundationalism, essentialism and realism. Among the distinguished postmodern thinkers one can refer to the names of Heidegger, Foucault, Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. Postmodern philosophy as a cluster complicated notion is consisted of the following elements: an anti-epistemologic perspective, anti-essentialist and realistic stance, denial of transcendent argument, denial of truth as correspondence and agreement with the reality, denial of principles and rules and rational categories, binding individuals and places (ibid: 29-30).

Postmodernism has entered various domains ranging from architecture to art, philosophy and social and human sciences and even natural sciences (ibid: 35).

Lyotard who is the paragon of postmodernists believes that truth and meaning can exist in specific gatherings of belief and desire. Lyotard is speaking of a type of skepticism in the sense that whether humans are basically able to know a thing? (ibid: 39) It is well clear that this notion of knowledge is explicitly in contradiction with positivist epistemology because positivists basically believe that man is able to know and they sought to know the reality and they believed that man is able to know the world in a decisive way and with utmost clarity though they restricted knowledge to experience and sense perception.

It is necessary to be noted that modernism as the notion against which postmodernism is propounded refers to a set of ideas and perspectives that have been offered by the philosophers of the age of enlightenment like Leibniz, David Hume and their predecessors in seventeenth century such as Descartes, John Lock as well as the philosophers of nineteenth century who are mostly positivists. Then,

modernism includes the so called empiricist and rationalist philosophers who share almost the same notion of reason: rationality is a faculty and potency that all human individuals enjoy of it as human beings regardless of their individual, cultural, racial, ethnic and historical features. The outstanding human rational capability could be found in logical and mathematical thought. While postmodernism does not offer such an interpretation of reason and rationality and considers all these elements in knowledge and believes in a complicated notion of reason (ibid: 155-156).

Postmodern ideas concerning what is generally known as fundamental issues, i.e. issues related to epistemology, are summarized in the answers to two questions: A- How do we find the origin of knowledge? B- How do we found knowledge in a way that differs from the conventional definitions of modern social sciences?

Skeptic postmoderns deny the perspectives of modern science, epistemology and methodology. They are suspicious of reason and do not accept conventional measures for evaluation of knowledge. Another part of postmoderns does not deny the modern perspectives of knowledge and methodology in a fundamental way but they offer effective proposals regarding the review of these titles (Rosnaeu, *Postmodernism and Social Sciences*: 182). As we mentioned earlier, modern social sciences drawing upon natural sciences is after a function which is grounded on hypothesis and supposition and accepts an independent reality that needs a testable theory. Part of postmoderns organizes the epistemologic around personal, intuitive and illuminative knowledge. They are often inspired by hermeneutical science. The skeptical postmoderns also believe in the impossibility of epistemology (the perspective that considers knowledge to be impossible), a fundamental disseminating sense, undominatable indeterminateness as well as a type of nihilism associated with epistemology. According to the first group of postmoderns, epistemology is concerned with nature and research limitations and in this context it is related to the ontological aspects of nature and reality (ibid: 183).

According to what we said earlier, it is completely clear that the view of postmoderns concerning knowledge stands in conflict with the perspective of positivists who constitute a major part of modernism, because positivist current of science denies exactly the personal, relative and intuitive knowledge and instead of relativity of knowledge believes in the discovery of general and comprehensive law through experience and sensory perception and by the assistance of logic and mathematics. Thus, positivism suggests that by experience and sense perception one can describe reality with utmost certainty (of course, that part of reality which is accessible via sense perception) while postmoderns deny this certainty and determinateness even in sensory and empirical part.

The perspective of postmoderns of reality is that there is no sufficient and proper meaning for representation of objective reality. All postmoderns deny all types of perspective regarding reality which accepts the independent individual subjectivity instead of intersubjectivism. Many skeptic postmoderns even prohibit the entrance into the discussion of nature or essence of reality. They cast serious doubts regarding the concept of reality in the sense that no reality would be found because even if there was a reality scientific activity would have no validity (ibid: 183).

Postmoderns agree with the hermeneutic notion of reality. They interpret the distinction between mental modes and external world as the error of human sight. The scope of mind prepares the category of understanding: there is nothing in the world but human mental states. Natural world is a dream (ibid: 184).

Their philosophical-epistemological foundations are idealistic, relative and mental and not positivistic and objective. Some postmoderns accept thematic and hermeneutic translations of reality which are consistent with their epistemological perceptions. They deny absolute and unconditional causality in positivistic perspective (ibid: 186-188). Their method is deconstruction along with illuminative interpretation (ibid: 195). Postmoderns criticize the modern and positivist science due to its effort for discovery of identity, whether it is a construct and combination or a subject. They insist on replacing otherness with it (ibid: 204).

Many of postmoderns do not accept rationality and deny it. They believe that there are different reasons. In their view, instrumental or scientific reason due to its being emerged as a purposeful and thematically

concentrated reason, is criticized, because it is focused on the functional utility, trustability and supremacy. Reason and rationality are in conflict with sense of secret, feeling, emotion, introspection and illumination (ibid: 214-215).

In fact, one can say that one of the principles of this perspective which has always been concerned with the criticism of general beliefs of the modern age of enlightenment is skepticism of the central role of reason and modern and positive human rational thought. Postmodernism is a movement which is concerned with the criticism of the claims of undoubtable truth, unshakable belief in science and metaphysical methods of argument and rationality, lack of relation between the perspectives and truths and rather it is based on diversity and intellectual and cultural relativism. Philosophical stance of postmodernism is based on the idea that modern era is experiencing a type of rational crisis based on the existing paradigms. Then, the goal of this new paradigm is finding paths and solutions that includes reductionism and idealism and is not concerned with the structures of power and control (Mohammadpur, 2010, vol. 1: 46).

In postmodern thought, there is no truth beyond human discourses rather truth emerges in the context of every discourse. One needs to take it into account that postmodern perspective and epistemic foundations have their origin in philosophical evolutions of the west. This perspective casts serious doubts of the claims of positivism through offering a relativist perspective of knowledge and truth. This perspective speaks of a dark and lamentable atmosphere that has surrounded the western civilization and epistemology and uncovers the baseless claims of modernity and aligns western civilization with other civilizations and in doing so it is the tragic elegy of modern positivist scientific world (Parsania, nd.: 105-106).

#### **Existentialism:**

One of the current philosophical schools in past two centuries is existentialism with all its branches. This philosophy is considered to be a contemporary philosophy. Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher and theologian, is the founder of existentialism in nineteenth century. This school of thought has been developing since its emergence along with positivism as its dominant philosophical rival in west. These two schools have indescribable conflict with each other. This school in its philosophical approach is ahistorical rather anti-historical. Ahistorical in this context should be understood as the denial of necessity of reference to the historical ideas of a certain philosophical theme for possible theorization as regard it (Malekian, 2000: 13-14).

Existentialists believe that philosophy should turn to internal principles not to external events and phenomena. Real philosophy is the one that speaks of the secret of human desire for immortality. Real philosophy is the one which seeks to know why man is suffering from the sense of injustice.

One of the issues of epistemology is identification of the extension of a concept. The followers of this school believe that the identification of extension of a concept particularly such concepts as belief, hope and love are so difficult; because these concepts do not have any tangible extensions based on which we could know what one means by belief. Philosophy of existentialism does not want to know what is the nature of time, space, accident, substance and the essential rather it is interested in knowing the objective extension of such notions as belief, love, hate, frustration and so on and so forth. In Kant's era philosophy changed from ontology to epistemology. Kant invited the philosophers instead of turning to reality and existence of universe to deal with means of knowledge which is mind and to see what is a knowledge correspondent to reality. But existentialists before turning to mind preferred to discuss language as well as the rational limits and linguistic restrictions and that linguistic restriction could be transferred to epistemic and mental restriction (ibid: 16-17).

As we mentioned earlier, there is a huge conflict between this school and positivism insofar as none of the two philosophical schools even like rationalism and empiricism have ever had such a degree of antagonism. One of the points of disagreement between these two schools is that due to ahistorical perspective they have no shared stance. The other issue is that humanists consider philosophical themes to be existential while positivists are more interested in the issues of mind. Existential issues in their view consist of issues the knowledge of which leads to change in human life. These are issues the knowledge of

which causes real change in human mode of existence. Albert Camus states that what would happen if the number of categories is 10 as Aristotle suggests or 12 according to Kant's perspective or if they are concerned with reality or mind. Even if we know that who is right what major change would happen in our life. Albert Camus believes that the most important philosophical issue is that whether life worths to live or not? On the other hand, positivists are interested in subjective themes. The species of beings their being a substance or accident and the relationship of beings and their effect on each other and other similar issues are not important according to existentialism (ibid: 19-20). According to existentialists, Socratic self-knowledge is of value and importance; while for positivists this is meaningless. The main slogan of positivists is the priority of self-knowledge over the world-knowledge. They believe that there is no avail in the mere correspondence between knowledge and reality (ibid: 22-23).

The other difference of these two schools lies in the fact that the writings of positivists are simple and clear while the works of existentialists are difficult and complicated and even the positivists are scorning these works for their complicate style. Positivists believe that the philosophical words of existentialists are not of any application and effect. Such subjects as virtue, beauty and immortality that are discussed by existentialists are unscientific and meaningless from the point of view of positivists (ibid: 23-24).

### **Conclusion**

Accordingly, these two schools have chosen two different philosophical paths and are in contradiction with each other from the very outset and in such an atmosphere their epistemological difference is clear. These two philosophies are two different schools and they naturally have their own independent epistemologies. Positivists give much value to science and are externalists while existentialism is introspective and pays no attention to positivist science and instead insists on emotion and cordial knowledge. In other words, their themes are different. For example, existentialism is after aesthetics, virtue and self-knowledge while positivists believe that these are meaningless and unscientific. Existentialism pays attention to introspective knowledge and intuition and sets reason before heart while positivists follow sense perception and logical notions of reason. Moreover, the measure of utility and significance of philosophical issues and knowledge is different in these two schools. Thus these two schools enjoy different ontological perspectives and as a result their epistemological approaches are also different. Their ontologies are so different that remains no space for epistemological discrepancies. This question is important to know that upon which basis does existentialism understand science and episteme and what is its measure of evaluation? No matter what kind of answer is given to the latter question as in any case it will be in total conflict with positivism.

### **Result**

positivism as a historical and intellectual school in west which has always had the claim of guidance of human society and according to the claims of its forefathers sought to realize the promised paradise on earth and called for serious attention to sensory certainty as a source of construction is now facing challenges in its philosophical and social life. Of course, we do not deny the fact that in deeper layers positivism has left its influence on the denial of the transcendent and divinity and has also made western philosophical pragmatist. On the other hand, this philosophical school suffers mainly from the lack of meaning. We have sought in this article to assay the latter point but the studied schools in this essay after positivism show that the claims of positivism regarding liberation and new insights are nothing except darkness. Even Frankfurt School is scorning the themes of this philosophical school. The last question of the author the answer of which is clear to every fair man of thought is that how positivism could permeate into the very texture of theorization in Iran with its specific cultural and intellectual history that rests wholly on meaning and then used as a basis for major and minor theorizations of society? Unfortunately, this diabolic plan has been successful to some extent.

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