Vetenskapsteori

Summary:
Theory of Social Science part III
in English

Om vetenskapsteoretisk
debatt och vetenskapligt
praktiserande

Johan Cronehed

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THEORY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Continuation of footnote 16 and the conclusion of this book concerning the theory of Social Science and the Social Science debate.

In 1980, a book was published by the University Press of Oslo entitled *Social Science for What? Festschrift for Johan Galtung*, compiled by Hans- Henrik Holm and Erik Rudeng. There is an article in the book written by Håkan Wiberg entitled *Justification of Social Science* that is filled to the brim with reflections on research into Social Science. These are arguments that can be applied to other fields of research and education at universities and colleges.

The article and Wiberg's analysis maintain that some social scientists willingly take on the role of expert. Others see the dissimilarities in the intentions of different spheres of interest within society and take a more neutral stand, or alternatively strive to be controversial by taking sides and letting their research into the foundations of Social Science serve a specific interest and/or specific members of society. Håkan Wiberg discusses the state of Social Science as presented above as an on-going phenomenon through time. In this way, there will always be participants in society who, with their different interests in that which is being researched will quite naturally define the problem. In this scenario, according to my point of view, it is 'also' about finding interested parties with the economic resources to be able to run and develop a working programme of research (ibid).

Winberg then deals with a number of parameters that Social Science research is related to - for example, basic research contra applied research, participant orientated contra structural research and to what degree of transparency - examination by others - the researcher is to report his findings. If this level is too low then the researcher is just an opinion-maker like many others. If, on the other hand, the level is too high then the scientist will have considerable difficulty influencing at the political level (ibid).

Finally, it is about Håkan Wiberg's vision of scientific theory - in accordance with the way he conducts his own research - by presenting a broad perspective in his search for a pattern in interplay/interaction between various social phenomena - often dealt with by experts from different scientific disciplines, or not at all. That which can be gained, by linking together several different social perspectives and by de-touring the specialised and sometimes overexaggerated regulations designed to check the hypotheses that research poses, is new knowledge - which is an important argument in my interpretation of his article (ibid).

The search for knowledge is, in that case, one of the most fundamental driving forces for science, in the societal context where debates on scientific theory at one level are about identifying boundaries and prerequisites for the science in question. Furthermore, once these boundaries and prerequisites have been identified and their content defined, and then transgressed more or less willingly by different parties, a condition may emerge comprising both consensus and disagreement. Without such a scenario a debate on scientific theory would be somewhat diluted, life-less, as well as both insipid and meaningless.

Identifying similarities and dissimilarities between what is considered to be science or not is central to a debate on scientific theory.

The course of events outlined above is a process that is inherently always open to redefinition, that is, in relation to one historical moment of scientific progress/regression, different forms of cooperation that in turn encompass economic, social and political factors etc. In other words, factors exist within the historical intersection with the time line that the scientific community in question likewise always finds itself.

It is even possible to say that each period of time has its own “horizon of understanding” - in philosophical terms an outer limit for our knowledge or, that which we know and have knowledge about in relation to that which we, as scientists in the researcher community, recognise as unfamiliar and unexplored.

When a piece of scientific territory - a piece of reality - is claimed by its researchers, a picture of reality is created with a scientific view of how the results are to be achieved, that is, which methods should be used, which traditions, schools of thought and an approach to how science has developed and will develop in the future. We can now see how the individual - and maybe even those researchers without much experience, have to work very hard to achieve the skills expected. For example, when he/she learns to master different instruments and theories and at the more concrete level various forms of methodological management. Furthermore, when he/she assimilates advanced documents and

communicates with his/her colleagues in order to develop ideas etc.

This is a matter of making one's thoughts communicable given the selection and perspective of the person in question, not only when reading but also when producing one's own written work. If we now problemise this assimilation of knowledge further, by maintaining that a text as an instrument of understanding should have a high degree of attainability, that is, have a sufficiently high degree of compatibility in relation to other research disciplines, then we find that the individual researcher often has no easy task - for example, as a writer.

Furthermore, that which demands a lot of effort to assimilate scientifically and intellectually 'also' is often part of a tough structure that is resilient to change - if the need is there. 'Tough structures' are in my view, not always a disadvantage given the basic premise that the characteristics of stability and change are necessary, or rather that a change occasionally needs to meet resistance through the processes of revision and refinement.

However, this is not the same as saying that science - for example, Social Science as in my case - need not be an active factor in changing society when this happens. And in this context the scientific community 'also' becomes a kind of mirror-image of the direction society is taking.
Naturally, receiving scientific schooling also means having the potential, to some degree, of being critical towards the register of perception that has been assimilated in the process.

This attitude part of the parameter that even academics have a somewhat fettered relationship to the scientific schooling he or she has received or been raised in. This process and attitude however need be neither dramatic nor subversive. It could mean that new scientific areas of interest develop naturally that could reveal themselves as cooperative efforts between different areas of science, sometimes developing as projects within the relevant academic research community. Occasionally - nowadays rather often - this process can branch out into a new area of research that establishes itself in the academic arena, as a new or partly new course of study with a likewise new or partly new area of research.

How a theory, or an alternative theoretical supposition, is received by the specific scientific community in question, depends on its structure. It is a question of the ability of an individual research community - given its own potential and based upon the progress of individual members in their own research activities - being able to assimilate new and somewhat radical ideas. Sometimes there is room for variety or even competitive theories, each with their own spokesman, within an institution - a research programme - but not always. Factors that steer this are, for example, the competition for financial and intellectual resources, which makes co-existence impossible. However, it can also be about a well-developed scientific speciality that is exclusive in character in relation to other research areas and problem formulations. The opposite is also possible, i.e. a differentiated research environment where several orientations and theoretical models can co-exist, because there are intellectual, political, social and economic boundaries for this to

happen. Finally, the very existence of science can be built on the fact that within the same research environment there are several competing perspectives.

The paradigms of researchers and other professionals are made up of the different interests of the individual/scientist, the qualifications they have and their world-pictures in combination with an individual sense of reality. A paradigm is by definition a kind of provisional view that is under constant review. This process of improvement ought to influence the analytic and more practically orientated level in, for example, a profession. Naturally, an individual can have knowledge and skills relevant to several different paradigms. Some disciplines and their relevant research have as a duty to support other sciences and organisations within the community - for example, education in the field of teaching, medicine in the field of health-care, and research into social issues for the social care system. The division into different academic branches of science and areas of activity is not a stable state of affairs - as has been shown earlier in this book. A few new subjects can in time be introduced into a faculty just as others can leave and find a home in other faculties and/or other organisations. In addition, the organisation of a university includes different kinds of independently working organisations, like centres and research institutes etc.

The point?

The pattern that emerges is that in the same way a university organisation is subject to change because of the context and times in which it finds itself, an individual discipline and its organisation are likewise affected. In other

words, each individual subject and its academic discipline define at regular intervals their present status and their relationship to their own "historical roots". This process of definition and revision is cyclically reoccurring. As far as changes to an organisation go - even within a university and/or college - outside impulses are of importance, often as models and in combination with various intentions and contacts at the personal level.

When defining one's own subject and field of activity it is also important to see them in relation to cooperation with other disciplines. In other words, to crystallize an approach that is both intra-scientific and multi-scientific regarding relevance and validity. In this context, cross-scientific and multi-scientific are rather synonymous concepts, even if these concepts can sometimes be seen to have different parameters. For example, multi-science is considered to imply cooperation between several differing scientific disciplines.

The course of events above can form part of a discussion and debate on research and educational aims within a said institution or department. At another level it could mean that representatives for different institutions and departments lift the prevalence of the subject into view, together with its future potential for development and cooperation. That which must be dealt with is finding the basis for a common, all-embracing education and research policy concerning which perspectives are to be pursued. Last but not least, the "relationship and possible precedence of different subject disciplines, if this is of interest to the course of events.

Basically, it is about how contact between different disciplines is to take place. Furthermore, like in all encounters, how to crystallize common and efficient communicative denominators for these meetings.

If we now turn to variation, that within a discipline there exists one or more perspectives that need to be to presented and raised, then we have a complex diversity situation.

Perspectives that are composed of different facets from, for example, psychology, sociology, gender science, social anthropology etc are now to be found in almost every separate discipline. This is a condition of diversity that in the social sciences and the humanities is clearly reflected in both basic education and in research organisations within and/or between different institutions.

Breadth, flexibility and coverage, in relation to profound competence within one's own scientific discipline, are important components of the debate. Just like different forms of cooperation within the social sciences and how the humanities, social and natural sciences are to be united and have a communicative relationship with one another.
A scientific theoretical debate is, according to the basic choices presented earlier, continually recurring in society, where science in its optimal state finds itself on the front line regarding the problems created by the development of society that need to be solved - with an attitude that is not always loyal to or uncritical of its commissioners.

Given the following formula of historical relevance, that a specific development in society also generates a perception of its problems and that this perception therefore, poses questions. Describing the perception of society in the

singular is not relevant however, especially in relation to our own era that embraces diversity, co-existence and/or competition. Perceptions situated in different context and composed of various aspects related to time and space.

It is then again possible to talk about “horizons of understanding”. In as much that it concerns the interaction between the perception of the individual researcher and/or research team in question and the knowledge that is available, i.e. a rather complex reciprocation between the different fields of vision knowledge has, in correlation to that which is available and procurable within the field to be investigated.

One of the objectives of this text is that it will encourage the reading of more literature on the scientific theoretical debate and to a greater understanding of scientific affiliations - both as a profession and an ambition.

I thus finish this text in accordance with its main thread, by suggesting more reading material and delving deeper into the subject.

I skuggan av framtiden: Modernitetens idéhistoria by Sven Eric Liedman, published by Albert Bonnier, Stockholm 1997.

Vetenskapsteori för psykologi och andra samhällsvetenskaper. An anthology compiled by Carl Martin Allwood & Martin G Eriksson, Studentlitteratur 1999.

Över tidens gränser: Visioner och fragment i det akademiska livet. Kaj Skölsberg, Miriam Salzer-Mörling, Carlsson, Stockholm 2002.

Diskussioner om social science: Gränser, innehåll och framtid. Editors Thomas Brante, Kerstin Johansson, Sune Sunesson, Social Science Faculty, University of Lund.

And as an entry to the social anthropological approach of investigation / research: *Small places, Large Issues.*
Thomas Hylland Eriksen, published by Pluto Press 1995.

Johan Cronehed / jan 2008