COMPARATIVE THEORIES AND METHODS

Between Uniplexity and Multiplexity

RECEP ŞENTÜRK *et al.*

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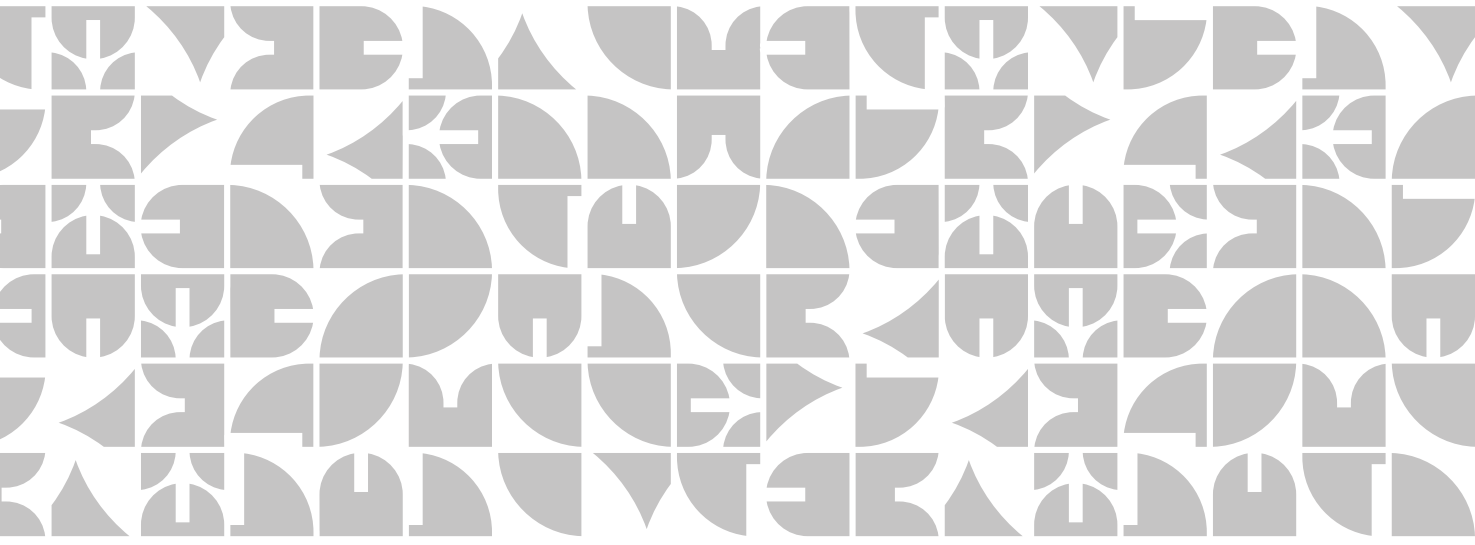

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PREFACE

This work is intended to be a textbook for the fundamentals of theories and methods in the social sciences and the humanities. Along with the knowledge of the existing theories and methods, this book will provide the analytical tools that will help the reader comprehend the hidden assumptions and philosophical underpinnings from a comparative and critical perspective. More precisely, this book aims to introduce not only theories and methods but also the worldviews from which they emerge and the paradigms that they are rooted in. Crystallizing the ontological, epistemological and methodological categories in mind, this book will also help the reader be consistent in research questions, methods and conclusions.

Social science is not just about randomly picking one among various theories and methods and applying them in research, if one aims at originality in thinking. For that purpose, this book aims to teach the reader the art of theory building in addition to offering a better understanding of the existing theories. Once one masters this art, it will be possible to start thinking about building one's own theory and eventually become intellectually independent. Indeed, our ultimate aim in writing this book is to enable the reader to achieve "intellectual independence." This book is good for students and readers alike who follow the Chinese proverb: *Don't give me the fish but teach me to fish*.

After long years of study and teaching in Istanbul, Cairo and New York, I felt the need for a book that would guide my students through the jungle of mixed theories in social studies which indeed is confusing and perplexing for many. For, while trying to understand a myriad of theories and methods which contained conflicting views and contradictory ideas I found out that the initiates cannot navigate in the ocean of social studies. My students are always amazed about the divergent theories scholars developed about the same phenomenon and the contradictory answers they offered to the same question. Every student finds studying theories with clashing ideas somewhat amusing and try earnestly to understand why they are different

from each other and how they can make sense of them. I have also wondered why there are so many different scientific theories about the same issue. I would ask myself: Why do great thinkers disagree among themselves? If reality is one and if there is only one scientific method, then why is it that scientists have different, indeed opposite, opinions? Should not the scientific method and its application lead them to the same conclusions?

I am sure the same questions occupy your mind as well as the mind of every student and young researcher from every discipline in the humanities and the social sciences. But before addressing this issue, let me ask you a very fundamental question: do you know who classified your discipline as part of the social sciences or the humanities?

Let me share some of the insights I obtained during my educational journey. As I continued to progress further in my research, I discovered that even the conventional distinction between the social sciences and the humanities is a contested one among scholars for it is based on a particular theoretical approach to what science is and what it is not. I learned with great surprise that some scholars outright reject this distinction which I used to take for granted.

Furthermore, I have come across other classifications of the sciences including many that are very different from the one we commonly use today. For instance, the classification of the sciences by Ibn Khaldūn is very much unlike the one we adopt today in our schools and universities. If we had adopted Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the sciences and disciplines, we would have different names for the departments and schools in our universities. Eventually, I have also come to agree with the view of those scholars who focus on the question that they research and reject disciplinary boundaries.

I have always found studying theories to be intriguing and enjoyable especially because it provides a sense of awareness of the hidden assumptions and conceptual foundations behind the ideas you used to take for granted and the institutional practices you accepted without any questioning. This awareness helps you better analyze from a critical and comparative perspective the ideas presented to you as "scientific theories" and their applications in our lives. It is an undeniable fact that policy

makers commonly use scientific theories to regulate our social, economic, political, educational and institutional life. For instance, the distinction I mentioned earlier between the social sciences and the humanities as well as the organizational structure of our current educational system which is based on this distinction comes from a particular theory, namely positivism, about what science is and how we can group sciences into different categories. According to positivism, disciplines such as literature and philosophy are not sciences because they do not use experimentation and observation and should therefore be placed under the category of the humanities. But why should we accept observation and experimentation as the only valid methods of science? And why should we use it as the only criterion to judge some disciplines as nonscientific?

This suffices to demonstrate that theories are not abstract entities void of any practical implications and applications. On the contrary, theories are very powerful tools and have an immense impact on our lives through the institutions with which we interact. This is why theories must be taken seriously.

And yet theories should not be treated as dogmas because they all have their limitations. All theories are products of human imagination similar to what we find in fiction and in stories. They are there as tools to help us understand reality or the subject we study. However, there is a disadvantage to this. Theories may, at the same time, condition our mind to think in a particular way or to focus on a particular dimension and, consequently, neglect some facts and other important dimensions of the subject we study. One must therefore be aware of the boundaries, limits and drawbacks of each theory.

Briefly put, there are two main rival theoretical imaginations and worldviews: "uniplex" and "multiplex". Uniplex means a single layer while multiplex means multiple layers. Some theories assume that reality has only a single layer, either material or ideal. In contrast, some theories see this dichotomy between materialism and idealism as a false-dichotomy and view reality as multiplex, which includes both material and non-material levels. This book exposes this deep cleavage in theoretical thinking and worldviews to help you better understand each one of them. Eventually, being aware of the philosophical assumptions behind theories regarding reality, knowledge and approach, we hope that you can both consciously choose between different

existing theories and methods in consonance with your own attitude towards reality, and potentially build your own theory and method.

In this book we used labels such as positivists, idealists and materialists, constructivists and many others to classify and describe various relevant schools of thought in social sciences. We understand that it is hardly possible to find any scholars who label their own ontological, epistemological, methodological choices with any of these labels today. We label some currents of thought with these widely known terminologies because they exactly reflect and represent their underlying assumptions. Classification and reduction are inescapable in such an introductory book. First and foremost, our deliberate and thoughtful reduction has an analytical and pedagogical purpose. We preferred to reduce them under single umbrella terms such as these labels to communicate our message. We are aware of the fact that there are many nuances as well as palpable differences between these schools of thought; some scholars would even deny being labeled by any of these terms. Besides, it would be naive to assume the proponents of each view to disclose their hidden assumption with any of those labels, given the fact that those labels became the targets of criticisms from many different angles last few decades and they carry all the baggage of negative connotations. But the labels do a fair job to reflect their proponents' tacit commitments. Disclosure of these commitments in a critical perspective is the major aim of our book. Think of our preferred labels as ideal types, as common mental constructions, they do not conform exactly what actually they represent but they are deliberate simplifications and exaggerations. They help us to see reality in a more systematic and clearer way. It will be clearer what we mean by each label under the subsequent chapters where we discussed them separately.

The present book is divided into six modules covering thirteen chapters in addition to an introductory chapter. These thirteen chapters are covered in six separate modules with respect to the subject's priority and relevance. For the reader's convenience, we explained in the introduction the fundamental notions regarding theories and methods that are necessary for a self-sufficient understanding of this book —the definitions of fact, concept, thinking, idea, theory, method and methodology. The reader will also find a new

classification of different theories and methods, as uniplex and multiplex, concerning primarily their assumptions about reality and knowledge that will be thoroughly explained in the following chapters. A more detailed structure of the book will be provided in the introduction.

*
* *

It gives me great pleasure to present this textbook *Comparative Theories and Methods: Between Uniplexity and Multiplexity*. Let me now briefly share with you the story behind it. I have been personally working on the idea behind this book for more than twenty years in my articles and books. My first book on the subject was completed during my doctoral studies at Columbia University and published in 2015 entitled *Modernization and Societal Sciences*.* It begins with a comparison between the paradigms of *fiqh* and social sciences on how to study human action. In that book, I explored the causes and the process of transition in the Muslim world, particularly in Turkey and Egypt, from *fiqh* to Western social sciences, which made the Muslim world intellectually dependent on the West. The last book that I wrote from this comparative perspective is titled *Open Civilization*.** In this book, I argued that "open science" is a prerequisite for "open civilization." By "open," I mean anti-reductionist and thus open to diversity of opinions and theoretical perspectives.

Despite my administrative responsibilities as a university president, last year (2018-2019) I took on the task of teaching the "Comparative Theories and Methods" course, which is one of the main core curriculum courses offered to freshmen students at Ibn Haldun University. As a first step, I formed an interdisciplinary group to work on the syllabus of that course. This group included professors Önder Küçükural, Alparslan Açıkgenç and Qayyim Naoki Yamamoto, along with graduate students who served as teaching fellows including Maria Taiai, Seda Özalkan, Danish Naeem, Metin Noorata, Ayaz Asadov, Cyrus McGoldrick, Evren Belkız, and İhsan Altıntaş.

We organized a week-long retreat at Enez in the city of Edirne, a summer youth camp on the Aegean Sea near the border with Greece, to finalize the syllabus and the course content. There, the idea of creating a DEF-TAB emerged. "DEF-TAB" is an abbreviation of two Turkish words: Defter (notebook) and

***** For partial English translation see. Recep Şentürk, *Modernization and Societal Sciences in the Muslim World*, (tr. Maria Taiai) Istanbul: Ibn Haldun University Press, 2020. For Turkish edition see. Recep Şentürk, *İslam Dünyasında Modernleşme ve Toplumbilim*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2018.

****** See. Recep Şentürk, *Açık Medeniyet*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2014.

Kitab (book). It contains the course syllabus, an academic calendar, lecture outlines, keywords, reading lists, visuals, and a glossary of the important concepts, students are required to know. There, in Enez, we also decided to name our group the "Istanbul Circle."

I offered the course with the contribution of the aforementioned professors and teaching fellows. We recorded the lectures and transcribed them from video to texts, collected student feedback from the discussion sessions, and decided to turn all the material that we have thus far prepared and compiled them into a textbook. Each member of the Istanbul Circle volunteered to work on the parts he or she is most familiar with.

To finalize our textbook, as the Istanbul Circle, we went to Enez again for a second retreat at the end of summer 2019. There, we reviewed all the work that we completed over the summer and discussed every idea and every sentence, one by one. Nursem Keskin Aksay from our Sociology Department along with our new teaching fellows including Léonard Faytre, Osman Kırkarlar and Ambreen Sultan joined our team and contributed to the editorial process of the book.

I am mentioning all of these things to demonstrate just how much work has been put in to produce this textbook and also to proudly acknowledge that this is a product of a collective work which was carried out over the past two years by members of our international and multidisciplinary team – the Istanbul Circle. Members of the Istanbul Circle have come from different countries and academic backgrounds and have all gathered around the idea of critically analyzing the existing theories and offering new alternatives based on "multiplexity." I thank each and every one of them for their fellowship and hard work in contributing to the production of the first edition of this textbook.

This project should be seen as a humble first attempt to produce a textbook from a non-Eurocentric perspective. We are aware that improvements will be made based on feedback from our readers, be they students or colleagues. Similar to other textbooks, revised editions will be produced in the upcoming years. Therefore, I greatly appreciate any input, feedback, critique and comments by students and colleagues alike.

I would like to conclude by thanking our staff at Ibn Haldun University, Tevhid Yeni who recorded the videos, and Savaş Tali who helped in printing. My special thanks to my tireless assistant Seda Özalkan whose meticulous and enthusiastic work has been crucial for the completion of this book in content and design. I would once again like to thank my young and senior colleagues from the Istanbul Circle who contributed to the production of this book with great enthusiasm, energy and sacrifice. I can proudly say that I am writing this preface on their behalf.

Recep Şentürk
Istanbul, 2020

INTRODUCTION

This book is a comparative and critical introduction to various major social theories and methods with an emphasis on the implicit assumptions upon which they are founded. It aims to go beyond the conventional theories and methods in social sciences that are colored with Eurocentrism. However, we do not intend for this book to be self-centered, either. Rather, it attempts to teach you not only the existing theories like other textbooks do but also the art of theory-building, which is vital for social sciences and, in fact, all sciences. Scientific knowledge progresses with theories, and we need a method that is suitable for this purpose. The concepts of theory and method for the social sciences are the main subject of this work. There is an intimate connection between social sciences and humanities. Therefore, the theories and methods you will learn in this book are relevant to both domains.

This book intends to enable students of social sciences to achieve "intellectual independence" by explaining how to:

- Critically and comparatively analyze existing theories and methods.
- Identify the origins of existing theories, methods, and ideas.
- Produce their own ideas.

Studies in each discipline are based on a theory, but the underlying assumptions behind the theories and methods are not usually exposed. This study will reveal the latent assumptions behind such social theories. Our aim is to enable you to better understand and critically analyze theories and methods in your discipline. Moreover, you will also be able to decipher the tacit assumptions and basic presuppositions lying at the foundation of any social theory. Finally, you will be able to build theories around principles that you choose consciously. The ultimate purpose of this kind of a study is to come up with original theories, which is only possible through critical and penetrating thinking.

1. Anatomy of Theory

A theory is like a body, in that a theory is a composition of parts. The smallest building blocks of a theory are "ideas" that are first built upon a concept, truth, or fact (depending on the theoretical school). Idealists begin with a concept (mental truth), while positivists begin with an observable fact (external truth). In contrast, the multiplex approach may begin with either. From a positivist perspective, if a theory is based on ideas that do not refer to any facts, then they are merely imaginary.

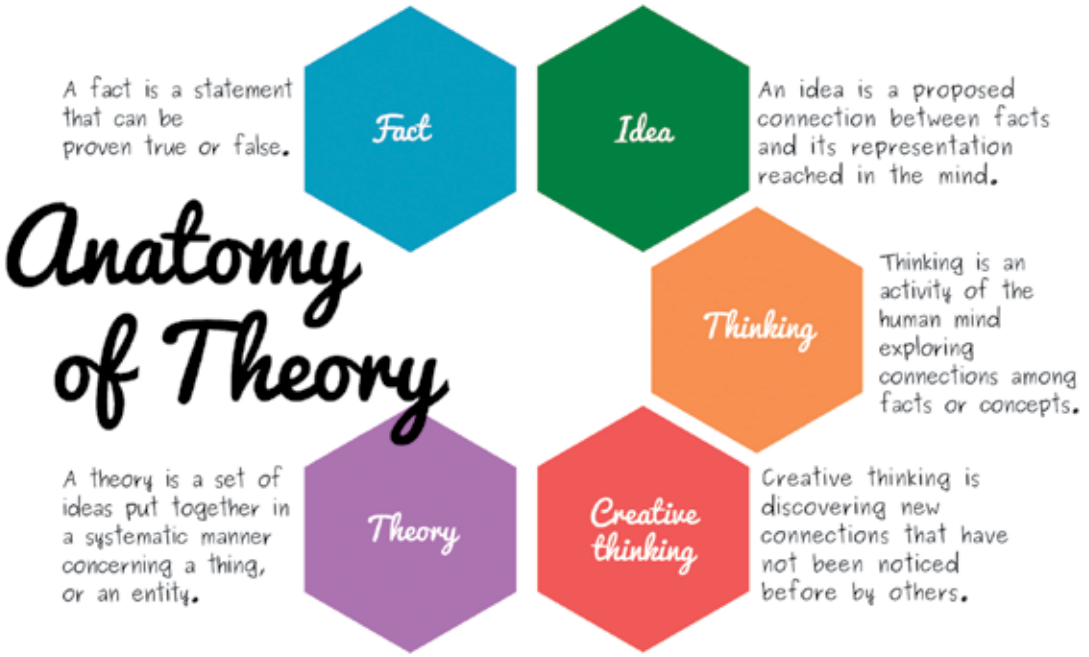

Figure 0.1: Anatomy of Theory

From an idealist perspective, theory construction begins with an idea in mind. Therefore, the starting point of a theory must be a certain fact about external reality or an idea about a mental reality. A simple idea is often used to mean a concept, but as it gets more complex, it then refers to a judgement or an argument, and an idea then becomes a proposed connection between facts or concepts.

Concepts versus Material Things*

Concepts are amazing things. They can do what no material thing in the universe can do. They can transcend space and time. No body can be in two places at the same time, but a concept can... Concepts have at least five characteristics that material things do not have. They are spiritual (or immaterial), abstract, universal, necessary, and unchanging.

1. Concepts are spiritual (immaterial, non-material). Compare the concept of an apple with an apple. The apple has size, weight, mass, color, kinetic energy, molecules, shape, and takes up space. The concept does not. It is "in" your mind, not your body. It is not in your brain, for your brain is part of your body. It has no size, so it cannot fit there. (If you say that it does have size, the size of an apple, then you must say that your brain must get as big as an elephant when you think of an elephant.) It has no weight, for when you stand on a scale and suddenly think the concept "tree," you do not gain the slightest amount of weight. In contrast to the concept "apple," the word "apple" is just as physical as an apple. It takes up space on the page, and it is made of molecules. The spoken word also is made of molecules: wave-vibrations of sound of a certain size and shape. But between these two material things — the apple and the word "apple" — there is the concept. That is the only reason why we can use the word "apple" to mean the physical apple we eat. We use one physical thing (the word "apple") as a symbol of another physical thing (the apple we eat), and that mental act, or mental relation, that we set up is not a third physical thing. It is a concept, and its meaning is the real apple even though its being is not the being of an apple. (It is not in space, has no molecules, etc.) The concept's meaning is "a physical fruit that grows on apple trees, has red or green skin, etc.," but the

concept's being is not physical (material), but spiritual (immaterial). Our having the concept of an apple is dependent on our having a physical body, of course: it is dependent both on the eye, which perceives the apple, and on the brain, which works whenever we have a concept. If we had never seen an apple, we would never have a concept of one, and if we had no brain we could not think the concept of an apple. But the concept is not just the physical apple or the visible word or even the sense image, which is somewhere between a physical and a spiritual thing. (We will see the difference between a concept and a sense image more clearly in the next few paragraphs.) The sense image is like a scouting report sent out by the intellect. The intellect is like a king who stays in a soul-castle and sends out scouts (the senses) to report to him What's going on in his kingdom. Or, to change the image, the intellect is like a paralytic in a wheelchair who directs a blind man where to push him. (In this image, the intellect is symbolized, paradoxically, by the physically sighted paralytic and the senses by the blind pusher.) The two are interdependent. When a thing is known, it acquires a second existence, a mental existence; the thing becomes a thought. If familiarity did not dull us, we would find this utterly remarkable, unparalleled in all the Lmiverse. No galaxy, no physical energy, no cell, no animal can do this; only a mind can give a thing a second life. Every language speaks of the human mind, or intellect, as doing something more than the (animal) senses do: as going "deeper" or "below the surface" or "penetrating" what is sensed, like an X-ray; as going beyond appearances to reality, beyond seeing to understanding. (Thus the irony in a blind poet or "seer" like Homer, John Milton, or Helen Keller "seeing" more than sighted people.) Only because we distinguish between appearance and reality do we ask questions. There would be no philosophy and no science without this distinction.

2. Concepts are abstract. The English word "abstract" comes from the Latin abstraho, "to draw (traho) from (ab(s))" or "to drag out of." Our mind extricates, or separates, something from something else. What is this something? When we form a concept, we abstract one aspect of a concrete thing from all its other aspects- e.g. the size of a flower (when we measure it), or its color (when we paint it). No one can physically or chemically separate the size from the color, or either one from the whole flower; but anyone can do it mentally. We can abstract, or mentally separate, adjectives from nouns. Animals simply perceive "green-grass," but even the most primitive men mentally distinguished the green from the grass; and this enabled them to imagine green skin, or red grass, even though they had never seen it. And once they imagined these things, they set about making them, e.g. by dying their skin green from the juice of grasses, or painting pictures of red grass with dye made from beet juice. (When he was two, my son made the thrilling discovery that he could make "purple doo-doo" by mixing up blue and red Play-Doh® in the shape of a hot dog.) Technology and art both flow from this human power of abstraction. The most important act of abstraction is the one by which we abstract the essential from the accidental. By having a concept we can focus on the essence and abstract from the accidents. Some people are reluctant to do this. Their conversation is utterly concrete — and utterly boring. You want to scream at them, "Come to the point!" These people have few friends, for to have friends you must learn to abstract, i.e. select, set apart, or pick out, the things that interest both them and you. Abstraction fosters friendship — a concrete payoff! Abstractions have received bad press in the modern world. Too bad. The next time you hear someone say "I'm a concrete, practical person, and I hate abstractions," remind them that babies are very concrete — and uncivilized. Abstract ideas do not move us as much as concrete things do. Intellectuals, who live with abstractions, are often practically ineffective dreamers and rarely "movers and

shakers" of men, because men will not usually live and die for abstractions that move only our mind — even stirring abstractions like "liberty, equality, fraternity" or "democracy" or "freedom" — but for concrete things that move their loves, like their families or their buddies next to them in the trenches.

3. Concepts are universal. Ask a child what he wants and he may answer, "Everything!" He has formed a universal concept. (Most concepts are only relatively universal, not absolutely universal like "everything" or "something" or "being.") E.g. "tree" is a universal concept because it is a concept of not only that one tree in your yard, but of all trees. "Beauty" is a universal concept, and when we judge whether San Francisco or Boston is more beautiful, we judge both cities by the universal concept "beauty" (or "beautiful city"). The literal meaning of "universal" is "one with respect to many" (unum versus alia). This means that a concept, while remaining one — one essence, one meaning — nevertheless is true of many things, predicable (sayable) of many things, applicable to many things. This oak and that oak and that maple are all "trees." We can truly apply the concept "tree" to any and every possible and actual tree that ever was, is, or will be. The concept signifies something common to many different things. This oak and that oak are different in size, and oaks and maples are different in shape of leaves and taste of sap, but all are trees. All share the same common essence, or essential nature. That is what we are seeking to know when we ask "What is that?" Only the concept gets at this one-in-many, this common essence in many different things. It is not in sense perception that we see this universal. We perceive only individual men and women, who are either tall or short, either old or young, but "human being" is neither male nor female, neither tall nor short, neither old nor young. "Human nature" does not look male or female, tall or short, old or young. It does not "look" at all; it "means." Appearances are particular; but essences, or meanings, or the natures of things, are universal.

You cannot touch them or feel them; you can only understand them. They are known by concepts.

4. Relations between concepts are necessary. Every tree necessarily has leaves; every triangle necessarily has three sides. A tree may or may not have many leaves, but it must have leaves. A triangle has three sides; that is dictated by its essence, which is grasped in the concept. Thus we can be certain of relations between concepts, as we cannot be certain of material things. We can be certain that a triangle will have 180 degrees in its three angles, but we cannot be certain how tall a tree will be. 5. Concepts are unchanging. Two plus two can never become other than four, but two bunnies plus two bunnies can become more than four bunnies. The concept of "blue" can never become not-blue, but the blue sky can become not blue. The nature of a thing, which is known by a concept, is unchanging; but things, which are known by sense experience, are changing. Humans change; essential human nature does not.

5. Concepts are unchanging. Two plus two can never become other than four, but two bunnies plus two bunnies can become more than four bunnies. The concept of "blue" can never become not-blue, but the blue sky can become not blue. The nature of a thing, which is known by a concept, is unchanging; but things, which are known by sense experience, are changing. Humans change; essential human nature does not."

* From Kreeft, Peter, and Dougherty, Trent. *Socratic Logic.* 2nd ed. South Bend, Ind: St. Augustine's Press, 2005, p. 36-39.

1.1. What is thinking?

The above process moving from facts or concepts to arguments is thinking which is basically exploring connections among facts. We are, however, more interested in creative thinking which is discovering connections that have

not been noticed before by others. It is basically thinking which is based on research and development of ideas that help us construct theories.

1.2. What is a theory?

A theory is a set of ideas brought up together in a systematic manner. Usually we need to provide proofs for our theories. This means that a theory is a provisional idea concerning reality.

A formal understanding common in the natural and social sciences is that theory is a unified, systematic causal explanation of a diverse range of social phenomena. It is also commonplace, however, to speak of theory in a less formal way, that is, theory may be said to come in many shapes and sizes depending on levels of sophistication, organization, and comprehensive-ness. At the simplest level, there are theoretical ideas or, more simply, concepts that function as analytical tools.

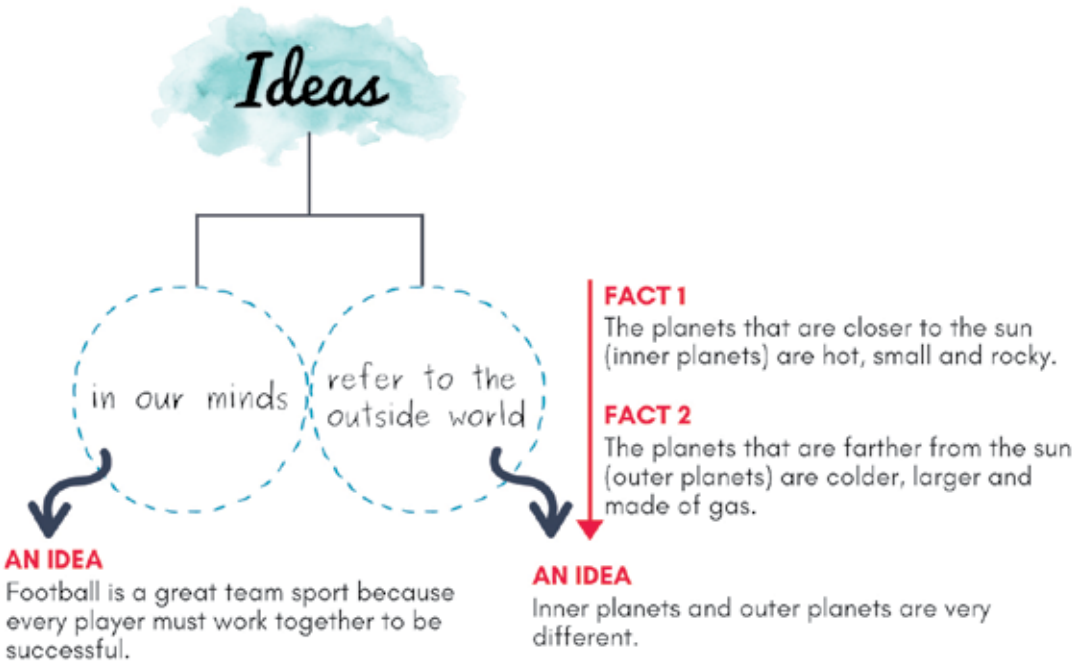

Figure 0.2: What is an idea?

> "Theory is the necessary lens that we bring to our relationship to the world and thereby to make sense of its infinite manifold. Everyone necessarily possesses theory- understanding how the world works, linking cause and effect- but some specialize in its production. The practice of social science is becoming aware that theory is its precondition" (Burawoy, 2009,13).

1.3. Why do we need theories?

Theories are explanatory tools that help us understand phenomena and events. For example, the theory of gravity is developed to explain why things fall. When we come across a phenomenon whether in nature or in society we try to understand the nature of that phenomenon. After some research and observation; moreover, using other such scientific methods we reach certain conclusions. Then we try to express our conclusion in a formula that is relevant to the area of study. This expression is called "theory" which is expected to explain that phenomenon. We should be careful that a theory is a provisional idea concerning a certain problem. This means that a theory may be proved or disproved by more research. If it is proved it becomes a scientific discovery. But if it is disproved then it is rejected and used only in the history of its respective science.

In social sciences, it is not possible to prove theories conclusively or in fact there is no need for this because of constant changing in conditions of social phenomena. Therefore, these theories are also used to explain social phenomena in order to effectively deal with them or solve problems related to them. For example again social conflict theory aims to explain why we have conflicts between nations, classes, and groups. Therefore, we use this theory in order to deal with class conflicts or other related conflicts.

1.4. What are the limitations of using theories?

Adopting a theory while studying an issue makes people focus only on an explanation but may blind them to others. This may lead to:

- Reductionism
- Selective bias/elective affinity

1.5. Why do people come up with different theories to explain the same issue?

Let us address this question with an example regarding the role of religion in society. If you survey the literature about this issue you will find three opposite claims about it by the most prominent social scientists:

- Karl Marx states that religion is the opium of the people.
- Max Weber states that religion gives meaning to life.
- Durkheim states that religion brings order to society.

This may seem very confusing to you that great scholars have conflicting theories about the same phenomenon. This brings to mind how can you make sense of these divergent theories about the social reality we live in. The origin of different theories to the same issue lies in 'interconnec-ted ontology, epistemology, and methodology', which constitute the foun-dation of social theory.

Different ontology leads to different epistemology which in turn leads to different methodology and as a result we get different theory(ies). This is because logically there are primarily three major questions that precede theory construction:

- The ontological question is 'what exists?'. Through this question you explore or rather you presuppose that the subject you inquire exists in a certain way;
- The epistemological question: Can we know what exists?
- The methodological question: How can we know what exists?

This book is based primarily on an investigation of these three questions and on how it is possible to build multiplex theories in social sciences based on this approach. After giving a brief explanation concerning the method in this introduction we shall proceed to the main subject matter of comparative theories and methods.

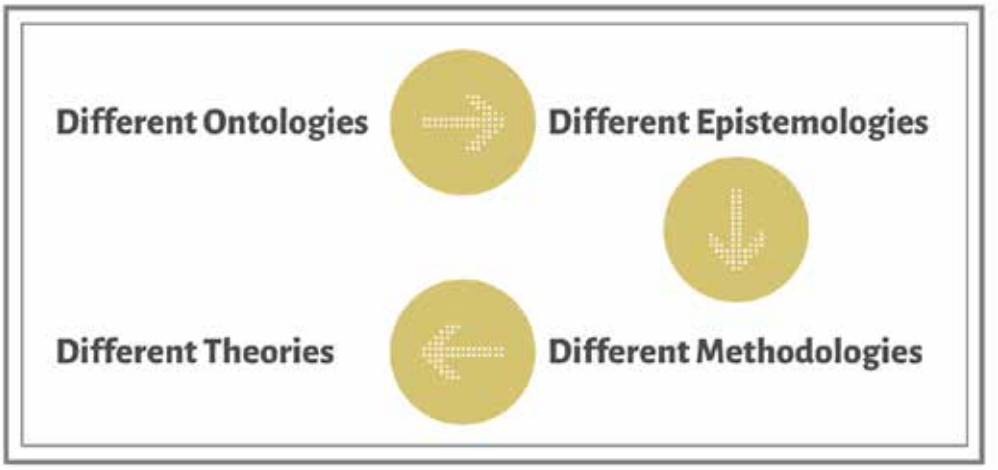

Figure 0.3: The relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology and theory

1.6. What is method?

In a very general sense, a research method refers to the set of investigative procedures used within a particular field of study or discipline. This term encompasses a number of different connotations that are relevant to the practice of qualitative inquiry. In the everyday ordinary usage of the term in qualitative studies (and social inquiry more generally), method denotes a procedure, tool, or technique used by the inquirer to generate and analyze data.

Method is also conventionally understood in purely instrumental terms. In other words, as a tool, method contributes to the generation and growth of knowledge but is itself transparent or neutral, or at least the effects of a method on the object of understanding are determinable and controllable. The modern, Cartesian, or Enlightenment conception of method also assumes a subject-object dichotomy. It begins from the belief that we should separate the mmd (the subject, knower, consciousness) from the thing (that which is to be known, the object of consciousness). In this way of thinking, the function of method is to bracket bias or prejudice and keep the object of understanding at arm's length where it can be observed safely with disinterest and lack of involvement. Thus, it is not the subjectivity of the inquirer that produces knowledge but the method.

1.7. What is methodology?

When you need to do research you must be systematic and organized in your procedure. This is because scientific study is not like everyday learning of how to do things. Therefore, you need a roadmap so to speak. This road map is your method. But you should ask the all-important question: How can I develop my method? The discipline which is the proper field of inquiry into the problems related to method is "methodology" which is a theory of how inquiry should proceed. Methodology is concerned with developing a method which explicates the following issues:

- Outline the procedure to follow in investigation with clear principles and criteria;
- Identify the problems worth considering in this procedure to investigate;
- How to frame a problem in such a way that it can be investigated using particular designs and procedures;
- How to evaluate and explain the consequences of research;
- How to judge matters of generalizability;
- How to select or develop appropriate means of generating data;
- How to develop the logic linking problem-data generation-analysis.

2. How is originality of thinking achieved?

Isaac Newton once said: "If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." This means that you need to know and understand the theories and ideas developed before you. This historical approach will place you on the shoulders of the giants. On the other hand, you should be aware of the fact that the giants can also commit errors. In that case, although Newton does not refer to this scientific attitude, you need to develop a critical approach in your research about the theories of others, as well as a self-critical approach about your own ideas.

A critical approach will also help you to check the validity of all theories in the diverse contexts in which they are applied, because logical coherence of a theory alone is not sufficient to apply it in any context. Sometimes a theory may be valid in one context but applicable in another. If a social scientist

tries to do so, it would end up forcing a context-specific theory upon others. We call this "self-centrism," which is to be avoided in the social sciences and humanities. Today in the global study of societies, many Western and non-Western scholars, consciously or unconsciously, try to force a perspective known as "Euro-centrism" upon all societies in the world. This is why many social scientists are trying to find alternative and comprehensive approaches to social theory and to come up with fresh theories that are not self-centered.

In order to rigorously evaluate these approaches from a comparative perspective, you need to understand how a theory is constructed and used in social re-search.

3. How should we approach the diversity of ideas, theories, and methods?

There are three major academic approaches that attempt to understand and explain reality:

3.1. Modernist Approach: Unity

This approach is based on a monist worldview which makes no distinction between the natural and social world. This outlook therefore uses the same method(s) to explain social and natural reality. It has two major advantages:

- It is simple to learn and apply.
- It has clear rules and standards.

But it also has the following limitations:

- It does injustice to multi-layered reality.
- It overlooks the difference between nature and society.

3.2. Postmodernist Approach: Multiplicity

This is the approach with a multiplicity of methods that operate at the same level of reality (the material level) through horizontal relations. Each method is accepted to be relatively true and therefore excludes the possibility

of absolute truth. Because it sees everything as relative, it may be called "absolute relativism." Like all other theoretical approaches, multiplicity also has its advan-tages and limitations. Two of its advantages are:

- Tolerance for ideas that have been marginalized or rejected.
- Freedom of expression.

Two of its limitations are:

- Loss of a sense of absolute truth, ushering what is now called the "post-truth" period.
- Plurality founded on competition. Alternatives compete with one anot-her and aim, sooner or later, to obliterate the other.

3.3. Holistic Approach: Multiplexity

The key word to introduce the holistic approach is "multiplexity," which recognizes that reality has multiple layers and cannot be reduced to a single layer. As such, it is a comprehensive approach that recognizes each layer of reality, including physical and metaphysical, material and ideal.

In the Islamic tradition, it is known as *marâtib al-wujūd*, which includes three major levels of reality:

1. The physical or visible realm (*mulk*),
2. The ideal or invisible realm (*malakūt*),
3. The divine realm (*lāhūt*).

It proposes multiple methods suitable for each layer of reality. This approach also has some advantages and limitations. Its advantages are:

- It does justice to reality.
- It accommodates a diversity of intellectual focuses and discourse communities.

Limitations and challenges of multiplexity are the following:

- It takes a longer time to understand and implement.
- It entails an additional challenge to determine and manage the relations between the different layers of reality.

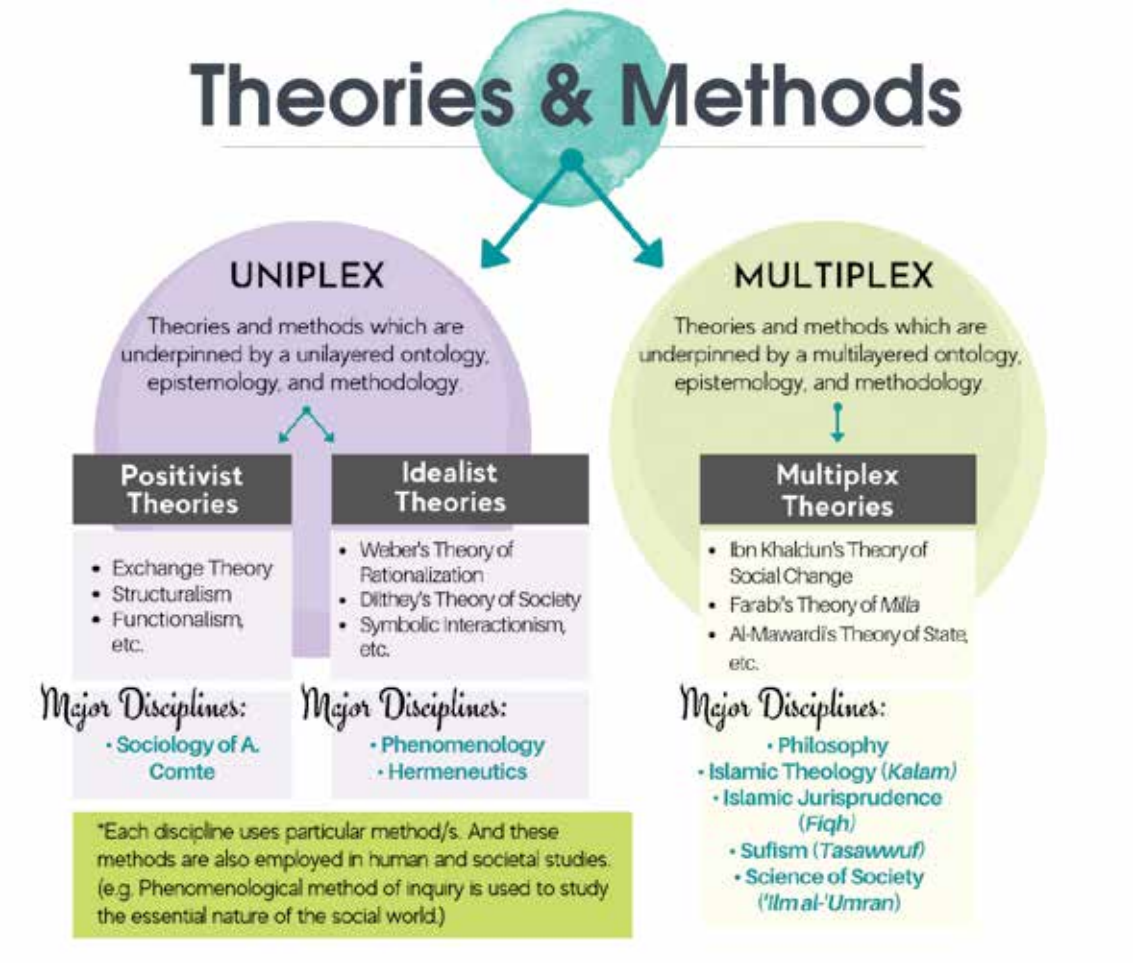

Figure 0.4: Classification of theories and methods with respect to their underpinning paradigms

4. The Structure of the Book

The present book is divided into six modules covering thirteen chapters in addition to the introduction. These thirteen chapters are covered in six separate modules with respect to subject priority and relevancy. For the reader's convenience, we explained in the introduction the fundamental

notions regarding theories and methods that are necessary for a self-sufficient understanding of this book —the definitions of theory, thinking, idea, concept, fact, method and methodology. The reader will also find a new classification of different theories and methods, as uniplex and multiplex, concerning primarily their assumptions about reality and knowledge that will be thoroughly explained in the following chapters.

After this general introduction to the basics of theories and methods, the book starts with **the first module** comprising of the first three chapters, namely ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This module deals with the philosophical underpinnings of different theories and methods. It investigates the implicit assumptions and worldviews which are usually not exposed to the students of research theories and methods, and crudely classifies them into three as positivism, idealism, and the multiplex approach. Materialism and positivism are classed together, although the former is an ontological approach, while the latter is not necessarily an ontological, but also an epistemological and methodological philosophy. Besides, not all positivists are materialists. The fact that positivists do not call in metaphysics in their explanations of phenomena and stop short at observable facts by only focusing on the end causes rather than the primary or ultimate causes make them sound no different than the materialists. Being aware of the nuances between these traditions of thought, we used such terms interchangibly. Another categorization which may fairly be criticized in the first module is regarding the idealist philosophy. Although not all idealist scholars deny the existence of matter altogether as George Berkeley did, we classified all of them as idealists.

In this module, we also put forward an alternative research philosophy, namely *multiplexity*, as a new approach to be applied in all of the domains of science, in other words, nature, society and language. Multiplexity is a translation of the age-old Arabic term "*marātib*" which literally means hierarchy or levels. We coined the term "multiplexity" as its English equivalent to refer to the multiple levels of existence (physical, metaphysical and divine), knowledge (acquired via reason, sense perception, intuition, and divine revelation) and truth (relative and ultimate). In social research multiplexity would indicate a concept of human ontology with multiple levels consisting of body, mind, and soul as well as a concept of social action with observable and unobservable

levels. Its diverse versions could be found in many world cultures and religions and is also deeply rooted in the traditional Islamic disciplines including philosophy, *kalām*, *fiqh*, and *tasawwuf*. Multiplexity calls in all levels of reality —visible, invisible, and divine— and knowledge —acquired through senses, reason and revelation— in research process for the sake of a more accurate and a more precisely corresponding-to-the-reality explanation of the complex phenomena, despite the difficulty in its application. Multiplexity not only offers a more illustrative explanation of the observable reality by its utilization of both sense perception and reason in addition to both quantitative and qualitative methods, depending on the choices of the researcher, but also sheds a bright light on the dark sides of the multifaceted reality which are not explicable by especially uniplex research philosophies. It completes the picture in which every phenomena and event become meaningful. There is not one positivism. There is not one idealism. As such, there might possibly be other conceptions of a multi-layered reality different in its details than what we have presented in this module. The essential characteristic of the multiplex approach is its preliminary acceptance and consideration of the multi-layered reality, knowledge and methods in the explanation and interpretation of phenomena in today's world.

The second module covers two subsequent chapters. Chapter Four deals with the societal sciences in different civilizations by examining the origins and historical developments of disciplines. Societal science is an umbrella term that represents a universal category to refer to knowledge systems about society in all world civilizations. Each society has developed a way to approach its social problems which are peculiar to itself. This distinctive way of dealing with social issues is shaped by the society's worldview. In line with its worldview, every civilization produces its own societal science not only to explain but also to regulate its social life. In Islamic civilization, this function is served by *fiqh* and its related disciplines. In Western civilization, it is served by the category of disciplines called social sciences. This chapter explains how *fiqh* and social sciences, which functionally correspond to each other, are differentiated through their respective ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. Chapter Five addresses levels of analysis and their interrelations. All social phenomena can be analyzed through different units of analysis at multiple levels. One of the most debated issues in social theory

is the relationship between the micro level and the macro level. Some social theorists say that individual actions determine everything that happens in the world, even when it comes to actions at the macro level. They argue that if you want to explain what is happening at the macro level, whether it be at the global, national and civilizational levels, you must look at the actions of individuals. Individual action is everything; it is what shapes everything in our social world. John Stuart Mill believed that all social behavior can be explained in terms of the psychology of the individuals rather than that of the group. For Mill, therefore, the individual is responsible for all actions at the meso and macro levels. In this sense, the micro level causes what happens at the macro and meso levels. But according to Emile Durkheim, society determines the actions of individuals, not vice-versa. According to Ibn Khaldūn, on the other hand, the micro and macro levels mutually affect one another in a circular way. As luxury increases in a society (macro-level) corruption among individuals increases (micro-level). Corruption among individuals (micro-level) culminates in the corruption of the city in general (macro-level).

The third module with two chapters is devoted to positivism in detail, its critics, and postpositivism. Starting with its ontology and epistemology, Chapter Six explores the historical background and development of the positivist approach. First, the nineteenth-century positivism of Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim propounds the idea that only the scientific knowledge can help accomplish a more just society and progress toward a better future for humankind and this knowledge is only achievable through the rational evaluation of the empirical evidence. Second, the early twentieth-century positivism of the Vienna Circle, namely logical positivism, gave a new impetus to the conception of science with a staunch commitment to empiricism by demarcating knowledge from speculation, superstition and metaphysics. And finally, the mid-twentieth century positivism of Karl Popper abondoned the principle of verifiability and inductivist conception of scientific method which are considered as the defining characteristics of logical positivism in favor of the principle of falsifiability and his hypothetico-deductive method. Chapter Seven explains the radical critique of positivism by Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyeraband. The critiques are radical because they question the basic premises of the positivist scientific endeavor. We

regard them as internal because they did not propose an alternative and they paved the way towards the formulation of postpositivism. We can regard the critiques of the Marxist school, feminism and post colonial theory or all the different varieties of interpretive approaches as an external critique because each are known to have established their own school of thought as well as their own epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches in addition to having established an alternative approach and separate canon outside of positivism. Postpositivism on the other hand emerged as a radical critique and revision of the basic tenets of the classical positivist paradigm.

The fourth module is about the critical approaches and covers two subsequent chapters. Chapter Eight deals with Marxism, the Frankfurt School and Feminism, while Chapter Nine explains postcolonial theory. These four major strands of critical theory all reject the assumptions of positivism and draw upon Marxist perspectives regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology. Contrary to the contention of positivist paradigms which view reality as singular and identifiable and that it can be measured and studied objectively, critical theories assume that reality is historically constructed. Historically constituted social structures determine the way we see the world and this determination is not immune to power relations and interests.

The fifth module consisting of two chapters deals with interpretive approaches. Starting with the philosophical assumptions of idealism regarding reality, knowledge, and methods, Chapter Ten explains social theories that use interpretivist methods and are underpinned by idealism such as Max Weber's approach to social reality and social constructionism. Chapter Eleven covers Hermeneutics as a social research method. This chapter starts with the description of the history of hermeneutics. Having emerged as a method for interpretation of biblical and literary texts, hermeneutics has then spread into other disciplines of social sciences. Even though there are different hermeneutic approaches used in social studies, such as that of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, what unites them is their opposition to positivism which overlooks the difference between the natural and social worlds. The hermeneutic approach in social sciences highlights the difference between natural and social worlds and holds that the most basic fact of social

life is the meaning of an action. Thus, they claim that the social sciences should be hermeneutic: what researchers are expected to do is the interpretation of the meanings of social actions.

And finally, **the sixth module** covering the twelfth and thirteenth chapters is about multiplexity in Ibn Khaldūn's works. Having already studied multiplex ontology, epistemology, and methodology in the first three chapters, you will be introduced to how multiplexity is manifested in Ibn Khaldūn's works in Chapter Twelve. In *Muqaddimah*, the first systematic study of human society, Ibn Khaldūn developed a science of society and a comprehensive and interdisciplinary social theory. Although Ibn Khaldūn is considered as the precursor of sociology by many scholars in the West, since his science is grounded on a multiplex worldview, he is more like an alternative to sociology than a precursor. Chapter Thirteen explains how Ibn Khaldūn's ideas had been read, elaborated, and applied during the Ottoman times. In this last chapter, you will also learn about what Ibn Khaldūn's thought has to say for the contemporary times that we are living in.

Summary

The main purpose of this book is to teach the reader different theories and methods used in the study of society, in addition to their philosophical underpinnings. In this book, the main thesis is that every theory is grounded on a set of assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology necessarily requires an epistemology suitable for it and a methodology which is required by both of these ontological and epistemological underpinnings in order to obtain knowledge systematically. In the first three chapters, you will study these underpinnings and see how each of these are interconnected.

In the subsequent chapters, you will examine the origins and historical development of disciplines in order to see how the humanities and societal sciences in Western and Islamic civilizations developed. Here, you will be familiarized with a new concept called 'societal science' to mean knowledge systems about society in all world civilizations. Each society has developed a way to approach its social problems. This distinctive way of dealing with social issues is shaped by the society's worldview. In line with its worldview,

every civilization produces its own societal science not only to explain but also to regulate its social life. 'Social sciences and humanities' are Western civilization's way of studying society and social phenomena. Having built upon a particular worldview, the concept of 'social sciences' that was invented in the West is not a neutral universal category. Metatheoretically, 'social science' is a value-laden scientific activity based on particular scientific preferences and a subcategory of 'societal science' which is a perspective-free universal category. Another subcategory of societal sciences as exemplified in Islamic civilization is *fiqh*. The disciplines of *lughah* and *âdâb* correspond to humanities in the Western civilization.

Then, you will study the levels of analysis -micro, meso, and macro- and their interrelations. Moreover, in order to compare and contrast theories offered in the study of social phenomena, you will first study positivist-functionalist approaches which are identified by the universalism of scientific method across nature and society, causal explanation, and the discovery of structures. You will then study the criticisms towards the positivist approach: postpositivism, critical theories, and idealist-interpretive approaches. Finally, you will learn more about multiplexity and how it shows up in Ibn Khaldūn's works.

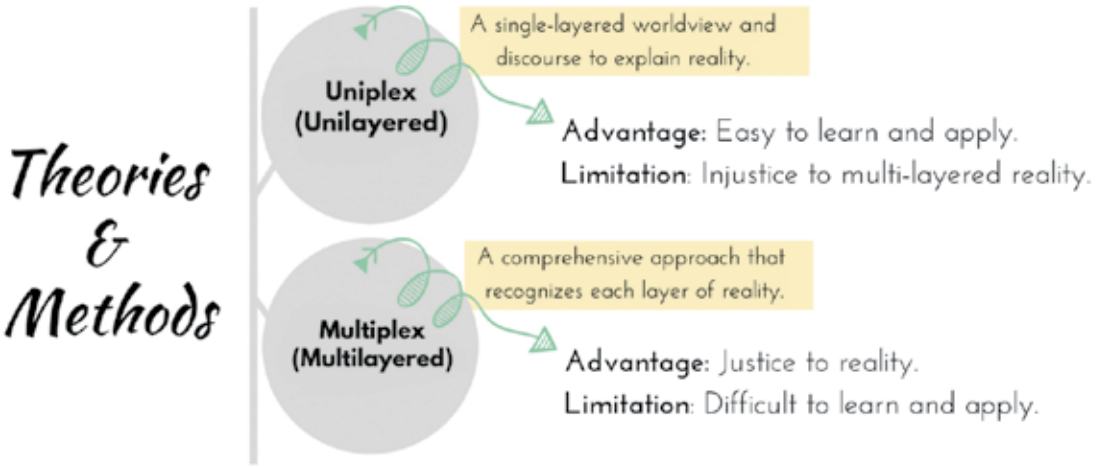

Figure 0.5: Advantages and limitations of theories and methods

ACTIVITY

Discuss with your friends about what you have learned in this class and try to come up with an idea of your own.

Dig Deep

James N. Rosenau "Thinking Theory Thoroughly" in Viotti, Paul R., and Mark V. Kauppi. *International Relations Theory*. Pearson Higher Ed, 2012. p. 29-37.

Burawoy, M. *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Univ of California Press, 2009.

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Kreeft, Peter and Trent Dougherty. *Socratic Logic*. 2nd ed. South Bend, Ind: St. Augustine's Press, 2005.