Comparison of Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Positivism in the Development of Science

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the role and contribution of idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism in the development of science. This study uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical method with a library research approach. The results show that these four schools of philosophy have different approaches to understanding reality and acquiring knowledge. Idealism emphasizes the importance of theory and concepts, realism emphasizes objective reality, pragmatism emphasizes practical results and benefits, while positivism emphasizes empirical data and measurable facts. This study concludes that these four schools of philosophy can help develop better and more effective science with a comprehensive and evidence-based approach

Keywords*: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Positivism*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi peran dan kontribusi idealisme, realisme, pragmatisme, dan positivisme dalam pengembangan ilmu pengetahuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif-analitis dengan pendekatan kajian pustaka (library research). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keempat aliran filsafat ini memiliki pendekatan yang berbeda-beda dalam memahami realitas dan memperoleh pengetahuan. Idealisme menekankan pentingnya teori dan konsep, realisme menekankan pada realitas objektif, pragmatisme menekankan pada hasil praktis dan manfaat, sedangkan positivisme menekankan pada data empiris dan fakta yang dapat diukur. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keempat aliran filsafat ini dapat membantu mengembangkan ilmu pengetahuan yang lebih baik dan lebih efektif dengan pendekatan yang komprehensif dan berbasis pada bukti.)

Kata Kunci: Idealisme, Realisme, Pragmatisme, Positivisme

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have extensively discussed idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism as independent philosophical foundations in the development of science. Idealism has been examined as a fundamental epistemological framework that shapes ways of thinking and supports educational reforms such as independent learning, particularly within the Indonesian educational context (Muslim 2023). Realism has been widely positioned as a philosophical stance that affirms the existence of objective scientific laws independent of subjective interpretation, emphasizing rational and

empirical investigation (Ivanka 2025). Pragmatism has been studied primarily in relation to educational practice, highlighting experiential learning, active engagement, and the practical application of knowledge (Idawati et al. 2024). Meanwhile, positivism has been consistently linked to the development of objective, measurable, and empirically verifiable scientific methods (Habibani, Fatimah, and Fitrisia 2024).

In addition, classical philosophical figures such as Plato in idealism, the realist tradition emphasizing objective reality, Charles Sanders Peirce in pragmatism, and Auguste Comte in positivism have been frequently analyzed to explain how each school conceptualizes truth, knowledge, and scientific validity (Parida et al. 2021; Hariyasasti, Setyawati, and Widyawati 2025; Habibani et al. 2024). However, most existing studies tend to examine these philosophical schools in isolation, focusing on their individual principles, historical development, or specific applications in education and science.

What remains underexplored is a systematic and comparative analysis that places idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism within a single analytical framework to examine their similarities, differences, and respective contributions to the development of science. Without such a comparison, the complementary and contrasting roles of these philosophical traditions in shaping scientific approaches, methodologies, and understandings remain fragmented.

Therefore, this research is important because it positions itself as a comparative study, aiming to bridge this gap by analyzing how idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism differently and sometimes complementarily contribute to the development of science. Specifically, this study seeks to compare the roles and contributions of each philosophical school, analyze their influence on scientific approaches and methods, and clarify how their integration or tension can contribute to the development of more comprehensive, effective, and evidence-based scientific knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive-analytical study with a library research approach by analyzing various conceptual information from books, articles, journals, and scientific articles to find supporting theories and data. The literature review approach is to collect various literature obtained from library information sources related to the research object such as books, research results, articles, and other documentation. Not just reading and taking notes, library research is a series of activities related to data collection, reading and taking notes, as well as analyzing and processing data (Al Kahfi, Wiyono, and Al Anshori 2024).

The main reference or primary research source in this study is a book written by Anda Juanda entitled Schools of Philosophy on the Basis of Curriculum and Learning (from Ancient Greece to Postmodern) published in 2016 in Bandung. Then for secondary references in this study are books and journals related to idealism, realism, pragmatism and positivism in developing science. The focus of the discussion in this study is to identify, analyze, and find out how idealism, realism, pragmatism and positivism in developing better and more effective science.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Idealism in science

One of the philosophical schools of thought is idealism. Idealism is a school of thought that holds that the highest knowledge and truth are ideas or human reason. Therefore, anything can be realized based on human thought (Yanuarti 2016). Idealism

is a philosophical school that views true reality as ideas or thoughts, not matter or physical objects. In the idealist view, the real world is the invisible world of ideas or thoughts, and the visible physical world is merely a reflection of that world of ideas. In the idealist view, reality consists not only of physical objects but also includes ideas and concepts thought by humans. In this view, ideas and concepts are not only products of the human mind but also serve as the basis or fundamental principles of the reality we experience (Basuki et al. 2023).

In the context of science, idealism emphasizes that knowledge comes not only from sensory experience but also from thought and reflection. The concept of idealism in science emphasizes that reality consists of abstract ideas or concepts that are more important than physical objects. Furthermore, idealism influences research approaches and methods by emphasizing the importance of theories and concepts, prioritizing reason and logic, and seeking universal truths (Muslim 2023). However, idealism also has limitations, such as a lack of attention to empirical evidence and the difficulty of testing developed theories. Therefore, the concept of idealism in science needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the research and scientific theories developed are well-founded and empirically testable.

One of the most famous figures is Plato. He was a figure of idealism. According to him, the soul is an original image that is only spiritual, and the soul lies between the original image that is only spiritual, and the soul lies between the original image and the image of the world perceived by the five senses. The main ideas of idealist philosophy consist of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. Plato also linked idealism with the understanding of reality and knowledge. He argued that true knowledge can only be obtained by understanding these ideal forms through thought and reflection, not just through observation of the physical world. In this case, philosophy becomes a way to achieve a deeper understanding of actual reality. Plato's idealism has contributed greatly to the development of Western philosophical thought. The concept of these ideal forms remains an important debate and study in the field of philosophy to this day (Aindi 2024).

The main ideas of Idealism are: (1) believing in the existence of God as the highest idea of the occurrence of this universe; (2) The world is a totality, a logical and spiritual unity; (3) True reality is spiritual; (4) Idealism believes that humans consider the spirit or soul to be more valuable and higher than matter for human life; (5) Idealism believes that knowledge is something that arises and is born from events in the human soul; and (6) According to idealism, the goal of education is to create humans with noble personalities and have a higher and ideal level of spiritual life and have a sense of responsibility to society. From these two realms it is clear that the ideal realm is one that contains absoluteness, truth, purity, and holiness. However, this realm is very different from what is seen, where in the mini universe perfection reigns, which does not need to experience change. This determination states that the realm of thought is higher than the worldly realm (Hariyasasti et al. 2025).

Idealism plays a crucial role in the development of science by emphasizing the importance of theories and concepts in understanding reality. Idealism is particularly closely related to nature and the environment, therefore, it produces two types of reality. First, there is visible reality, which is our experience as living beings in this environment, such as the coming and going of things, life and death, and so on. Second, there is true reality, which encompasses eternal and perfect qualities (ideas). The contribution of idealism to science is helping develop theories and concepts that can be

used to predict and explain complex phenomena (Sari, Chaeratunnisa, and Hidayat 2024). Thus, idealism plays a crucial role in the development of science by enabling researchers to develop abstract and universal theories and concepts, predict and explain complex phenomena, and develop broader and deeper knowledge about the real world.

Idealism plays a crucial role in providing normative and conceptual direction for the development of science, but it is often considered too abstract and speculative. This is because idealism places greater emphasis on ideas, reason, and human consciousness, thus neglecting empirical reality that can be directly tested (Yanuarti 2016). Consequently, science based on idealism is often difficult to implement in practical problem-solving, as it prioritizes logical conformity and moral values over factual evidence. Therefore, idealism needs to be balanced with other, more empirical and practical approaches to produce knowledge that is more applicable and relevant to the needs of society. In this way, we can develop science that is not only theoretical but also applicable in everyday life.

B. Realism in science

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322), a student of Plato, developed a school of realism that emphasized knowledge and values. Scientists brought this school of thought into the 21st century. Realism believes that reality does not depend on what we know, and that the scientific method is the best way to obtain an accurate description of what the world is like and how it works (Nawangsari et al. 2025). Realism is the idea that sensory objects are real and exist on their own, independent of other knowledge or awareness. Objects exist and cannot be recognized, but their nature remains unchanged. While objects and items may contain awareness, they are not created or modified by what the target audience already knows (Budiarti, Rahmadani, and Fauziati 2022).

Furthermore, this school of thought views nature as consisting of two types of realms: the material realm and the spiritual realm. Realist philosophy rejects the view that reality is merely a social construct or the result of subjective interpretation. Realism contrasts with idealism because realism views real evidence as concrete, while idealism only addresses the abstract nature of the human mind (Nawangsari et al. 2025). Realism posits that knowledge is acquired through sensation and abstraction. This understanding refers to using the human senses to discover knowledge. Through the five senses, humans can experience a wide variety of concrete things outside themselves, engaging in a process of abstraction, which is the process of capturing generic impressions and storing those impressions in perception (Sutono 2020).

The concept of realism in science emphasizes that reality exists objectively and independently of human perception or interpretation (Setyani n.d.). Scientific realism argues that scientific laws and theories are representations of objective reality that can be rationally investigated and explained. In the context of science, realism influences research approaches and methods by emphasizing the importance of empirical observation, experimentation, and hypothesis testing to understand existing reality. Thus, scientific realism enables researchers to develop more accurate and reliable knowledge about the real world (Ivanka 2025).

Realism plays a crucial role in the development of science by emphasizing that reality exists objectively and independently of human perception. This school of philosophy focuses on developing accurate and reliable knowledge about the real world

through observation and experimentation. In the rationalist view, human reason and reason have the ability to discover the fundamental principles that shape reality, such as the principles of logic and mathematics. This ability of reason can also be used to develop abstract concepts not directly visible in sensory experience, such as justice, truth, and goodness. However, in viewing reality, the rationalist school of philosophy also recognizes that human reason has limitations and limits (Basuki et al. 2023).

Realism does help us understand the world more accurately, but it sometimes focuses too much on facts alone (Setyani n.d.) This can lead it to overlook other important aspects such as the feelings, values, and social context that shape human experience. Furthermore, realism can lead us to view reality too simply, when in reality it is far more complex and dynamic. Therefore, realism needs to be balanced with other approaches to better understand the complexity of human experience and social reality.

C. Pragmatism in science

Pragmatism is a modern 20th-century philosophy, born in America. Its first proponent was Charles S. Pierce. This philosophy was later developed by William James and John Dewey. According to pragmatism, the nature of everything is relative and changeable. Meanwhile, Islam is a religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad as God's messenger to convey His message of truth. The essence of Islamic truth is absolute, while truth according to humans as seekers of truth is relative (Nurdin 2014). Pragmatism is based on the basic idea (Aqidah) of separating religion from life (secularism). This is evident in the historical development of the emergence of pragmatism, which is a further development of empiricism (Junaidi 2023). Thus, in an ideological context, Pragmatism means rejecting religion as a source of knowledge.

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Pragmatism plays a crucial role in the development of science by emphasizing that the truth and value of a theory or concept are determined by its practical results and benefits. With a focus on flexibility and results-based solutions, pragmatism offers a framework relevant to today's dynamic and complex society (Ramadan 2024). Thus, pragmatism enables researchers to develop knowledge that is applicable and relevant to practical needs. Knowledge generated through a pragmatic approach can be used to solve problems faced by society, thus having a significant impact on improving the quality of human life. Furthermore, pragmatism also enables researchers to develop knowledge that is flexible and adaptable to changes and complexities in science, making the resulting knowledge more effective and relevant in solving problems faced by society.

The advantage of pragmatism is that it has brought rapid progress to science and technology. Pragmatism has succeeded in grounding philosophy from the Tender Minded nature that tends to think metaphysically, idealistically, abstractly, and

intellectually. In addition to its advantages, this school also has weaknesses: Pragmatist philosophy is something real, practical, and directly enjoyable by humans. Therefore, pragmatism creates a materialistic mindset in society and pragmatism greatly deifies the ability of reason to meet life's needs. So, attitudes such as these lead to atheism (Hariyasasti et al. 2025). Realism does help us understand the world more accurately, but sometimes it focuses too much on facts alone. This can lead us to overlook other important aspects such as feelings, values, and the social context that shape human experience. Furthermore, realism also makes us see reality too simply, when in reality it is far more complex and dynamic. Therefore, realism needs to be complemented by other approaches so that we can understand reality more fully and comprehensively.

D. Positivism in science

Positivism, initiated by Auguste Comte, a 19th-century French philosopher, is a philosophical school that has had a significant influence on the development of modern science, particularly in the fields of sociology and scientific methodology. Comte's thinking has influenced not only the advancement of science but also perspectives on society and the role of philosophy in the contemporary era. The core of Comte's positivism lies in the application of the scientific method and empirical observation in the search for truth. His idea of positivism as the foundation of science has become the foundation for the birth and development of modern social sciences such as sociology (Syamsul 2020).

One of the main assumptions of positivism is the belief that social reality can be structured, observed, and measured through scientific methods, just as natural reality is studied in the physical sciences. Therefore, sociology, as the science of society, must also be built on the foundations of positivism to be objective and scientific. Scientific and quantitative approaches in sociology are heavily influenced by Auguste Comte's positivistic paradigm. Survey methods, statistics, and field observations are examples of the application of positivist principles in social research to discover patterns and laws concerning human society. Quantitative data such as population censuses are also often relied upon to make generalizations about the behavior of specific social groups (Maulana 2022).

The concept of positivism in science emphasizes that valid knowledge can only be obtained through systematic and objective observation and experimentation. Scientific positivism focuses on collecting empirical data and testing hypotheses to develop theories and concepts that can explain natural phenomena (Adnan et al. 2025). Thus, positivism enables researchers to develop accurate and reliable knowledge about the real world.

Positivism also emphasizes the importance of rigorous and objective scientific methods in developing knowledge. A positivist approach allows researchers to eliminate the influence of personal views, beliefs, or prejudices that could distort data or interpretations, thus ensuring that research findings are accurate, reliable, and represent the phenomenon being studied as objectively as possible (Abdullah and Hosaini 2024). Furthermore, positivism emphasizes the importance of verifying and validating research results through repeated experiments and observations (Boeriswati et al. 2025).

Positivism has made a significant contribution to the development of modern science because it emphasizes that valid knowledge can only be obtained through measurable and verifiable empirical facts. This view emphasizes the importance of

observation, measurement, and experimentation in producing objective knowledge free from metaphysical speculation. From positivism, a systematic modern scientific method was born, allowing the development of various disciplines such as physics, biology, psychology, and the social sciences to flourish with a strong and retestable database (Dawud 2019). Thus, positivism became the main foundation that drove the birth of modern science, which emphasizes not only theoretical truth but also truth that can be proven through empirical experience.

The influence of positivism is not limited to the development of science; it has profound implications for theology. This is due to the strict separation between science and religion that positivism so vigorously promotes, and this naturally gives rise to conflicts in understanding the reality, existence, and nature of God. Religion cannot be adapted to a modern scientific worldview, and theology cannot integrate scientific findings within the framework of religious beliefs (Nainggolan and Yosef 2024). Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply the influence of positivist philosophy on the development of modern science.

Positivism has played a crucial role in developing the modern scientific method, but it has several weaknesses. By focusing on empirical data and facts, positivism tends to ignore other important aspects such as human values, culture, and emotions. In the social sciences, this approach is often considered inappropriate because it ignores context and social life. Furthermore, positivism can be too rigid in explaining phenomena that cannot be directly measured, such as personal experiences or complex social dynamics (Hariyasasti et al. 2025). Therefore, positivism needs to be complemented by other approaches to understand reality more fully.

E. Similarities between Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Positivism

Despite their theoretical differences, idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism share several fundamental similarities that position them as influential philosophical foundations in the development of science:

1. Epistemological Orientation toward Truth and Knowledge Formation

   All four philosophical schools are fundamentally concerned with the pursuit of truth and the systematic development of knowledge. Each seeks to explain reality and human understanding of the world, although they differ in their epistemological assumptions regarding the sources, validation, and nature of truth.

2. Contribution to the Development of Science and Scientific Inquiry

   Idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism have each played a significant role in shaping the development of science by influencing scientific paradigms, research orientations, and the evolution of scientific thought across historical and contemporary contexts.

3. Reliance on Rationality and Logical Reasoning

   Despite methodological differences, all four schools employ logic and rational reasoning as essential tools for interpreting reality, constructing explanations, and evaluating knowledge claims within scientific and philosophical discourse.

F. Differences between Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Positivism

Although idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism all contribute to the development of scientific knowledge, they differ fundamentally in their assumptions about reality, truth, and scientific methods:

1. Idealism
   - Emphasizes ideas, consciousness, and mental constructs as the primary foundation of reality.
   - Reality is understood as fundamentally dependent on the mind or spiritual principles rather than material existence.
   - Knowledge is acquired through rational reflection, intuition, and philosophical contemplation, rather than empirical testing.

2. Realism
   - Emphasizes the existence of an objective reality that exists independently of human perception or cognition.
   - Reality is considered knowable through systematic observation of the external world.
   - Knowledge is acquired through empirical observation and structured investigation aimed at accurately representing objective reality.

3. Pragmatism
   - Emphasizes practical consequences and problem-solving effectiveness as the criterion of truth.
   - Reality and truth are understood as dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by human action and experience.
   - Knowledge is acquired through flexible experimentation and experiential inquiry, where methods are adapted to address specific problems rather than to discover universal laws.

4. Positivism
   - Emphasizes empirical facts, measurement, and observable phenomena as the sole legitimate sources of knowledge.
   - Reality is approached as governed by objective, stable, and discoverable laws.
   - Knowledge is acquired through highly structured, controlled, and systematic experimentation aimed at identifying generalizable patterns and universal scientific laws, while excluding metaphysical or subjective interpretations.

CLOSING

The conclusion of this study shows that idealism, realism, pragmatism, and positivism contribute to the development of science through different but complementary epistemological paths. Idealism plays a role in providing a conceptual and theoretical framework that guides scientific thinking, realism emphasizes the grounding of science in objective, researchable reality, pragmatism ensures the relevance of science through contextual and benefit-oriented problem-solving, while positivism strengthens the validity of science through systematic and measurable empirical methods. In synthesis, the development of science cannot be understood as the result of a particular philosophical school, but rather as an integrative process that connects theory, reality, practice, and empirical verification. The implication is that the development of science and science education in the future needs to adopt a pluralistic

philosophical approach so that science is not only methodologically sound, but also adaptive, innovative, and relevant in responding to the complex challenges of modern society.

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