

# The Study of Factors Affecting the Creation of Cognition Based on Power-Knowledge Point of View

**Abdollah Rasekhi**

Department of Law and Political Science, Takestan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Takestan, Iran

Email: rasekhi1352iran@gmail.com

Received 26 November 2015; accepted 14 February 2016; published 17 February 2016

Copyright © 2016 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Various factors are influencing the creation of cognition so that “Mannheim” refers to economic interests and the insight of groups and social classes, “Weber” to the economic system and the interests, and also “Foucault” in his theory of power-knowledge refers to the power. Among the above factors, the power can have the greatest influence on the creation of cognition. So for “Foucault”, the power can lead to the development of knowledge through structures, institutions and discourses. On the other hand, the knowledge as a complement to the power can maintain and expand this latter. But it should be noted that the Knowledge itself can also cause cognition in people by giving them awareness and understanding about things. It seems therefore that cognition is also affected by Power. In this article, we will try to assess a cognition created by the correlations of Power and in the meantime try to learn about other factors that influence the creation of cognition. Hence, this article can help considerably to revise the foundations of Epistemology, as well as to present the specifications of the probable future ideas all in reviewing and reconstructing the sociology routes and appropriate use of present and past experiences and cognitive capacities.

## Keywords

**Cognition, Power Knowledge, Interests, Instrumental Wisdom**

---

## 1. Introduction

Knowledge and power are two correlated factors that are influencing each other. “Foucault” (1980) has expressed for the first time the theory of power-knowledge in this regard because “Foucault” power and know-

ledge influence each other. But in addition to the power that affects the knowledge, there are other factors that influence the knowledge as well. In this regard, different theories have been proposed by other scholars. So that “Karl Marx” (1977) emphasized on the dialectical thought and power. “Sigmund Freud” (1905) looked human from the point of view of the interrelationship between man’s unwanted and unconscious sexual desires and his complex cognition. “Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche” (1901) investigated the interrelationship between knowledge and the power will. The phenomenology and existentialism approaches appeared to look the mankind as the source of the existence. “Hermeneutics” (1960) also emphasized on the single, isolated and sporadic features of the historical events. We must say here that knowledge-power relationship has been formerly considered as an external relationship, so that knowledge and power were seen as two separate categories in three ways: First, knowledge as creator of power that “Francis Bacon” (1960) and others paid attention to. Second, power is limiter of knowledge that thinkers such as “Karl Popper” (1945) analyzed this. Third, knowledge causes to get rid of power which was studied mainly in the “Frankfurt” (1968) school.

Regardless all studied factors and influencing the cognition, the power as one of the most important factor influencing the cognition is less recognized to date. The importance of Power in establishing the cognition is to the extent that power is considered as the necessary condition for the creation of knowledge. Therefore, the main question is that how Power creates the knowledge? In this article we revisited the theory of “power-knowledge” in relation to the cognition with a “constructivism” approach. The basic hypothesis of this paper is the principle that the power led to the cognition through by the structures. This paper discusses the use of new methodologies for identifying, emphasizing the relationship between subject and object, paying more attention to the position of social political institutions and emphasizing the inter subjectivity. Studying the sociology of cognition, epistemology and constructivism aspects of Cognition are the objectives of this paper.

## 2. School of Constructivism

Constructivism point of view is included in the methodological approaches framework and is raised in sociology, psychology and international relations fields. Constructivism has the ability to study the Cognition, the relationship of ideas with the reality, the conditions of knowledge creation and the relationship of knowledge with the culture. Constructivism as a way of understanding and a thought school, studies the way of cognition the world by the “observer” as well. Constructivism can only be understood by highlighting the concept of ontology and epistemology. In ontology the nature of existence and the nature of reality arise. In epistemology also the cognition and its source as well as the share of cognizant in the contribution to the process of cognition are discussed. According to “Giambattista Vico” (1725) the cognition is created by the cognizant. Contemporary constructivists in following Socratics, try to highlight the process and the how of cognition creation so to reconcile the agent with the structure. In contemporary times the interaction between human and the environment plays a fundamental role in the process of cognition and ideas creation (Stewart, 2013: p. 18).

According to constructivists, the material world exists, only there are subjects and agents that are manipulating that reality. Therefore, all discourse analysts are placed in this framework. In the framework of constructivism theory the emphasis is more put on the beliefs and knowledge. The beliefs led to the creation of meaning and the knowledge to the creation of norms. In constructivism, knowledge is highly normative and is formed based on a set of values and the belief is related to the meaning. In the experimental thinking, first the knowledge comes and then the human mentality about the world is formed. But in constructivism, first the human mentality about the world is formed and then the knowledge is to come. Therefore, receiving the knowledge means a mere representation of the reality (Martin, 2011: pp. 189-191). The purpose of knowledge is to show how theories come to “coherence” and the main function of coherence is to realize the truth in framework of theory. Our theories form actually the field of the totals. Opposing and attacking the totals is seen in the post-modern and Adorno thinking so that they are opposed to the idea of reaching to the truth via totals. Totals will take us to constructivism about the realities and will reduce or put down the contradictions implied in the reality and will lead to a Coherent image of the world in our eyes (McKinnon, 2011: pp. 35-38).

According to the constructivists, objectivity is the product of the community. Constructivists replaced the Objectivism by the representation. Representation is another aspect of epistemology and has a great influence on the formation of new theories in political sciences that we can point out to several cases here: Interpretation instead of absolutism in politics, stopping the separation of the subjects from the values in the debates, rejecting of non-considering role subject in the construction, rejecting of separating the objective issues from the subjective

ones, the fading of rationality role in theorizing.

In “Foucault” debates which are constructivist we’re dealing with a world of knowledge. Values are important in the creating of worldviews. Values are also creating the realities. There is interrelatedness between value and fact. Our theories about the world are created under social conditions. In this perception of science, the social sciences issues are meant. Science is known as a concept that will become important at the justification and discovery matters and we arrive ultimately to the social network of science in which there are as a whole a general set of expectations, talents, social contexts and supports (Boghossian, 2010: pp. 78-88). According to constructivism approach, human activities give form to the structures, social institutions and social relations. Constructivism deals with contract, rules and norms. Social reality is considered as a built matter.

Concerning constructivism and the relationship between the cognitions and ideas we can say that constructivism normally offers the first relationship in this regard by using the concept of mutual integration and interaction, as such keys can bring the structure and the power into the field of engagement and interaction. The constructivism school expresses the way how the reality (cognition) is formed. According to constructivism school, the world is constructed in “us”. Cognition is the result of mind’s inaction and the world is the result of mind’s active participation. History and identity construct the world in the framework of society and reaches to the cognition. Social issue is a social constitution. Cognition is a subjective issue and has a social basis and appears in the collectivity. Accordingly, we can talk about the creation of a reality in the framework of the social issue which is reflected in the cognition. In the constructivism approach a connection between the reality and mind is established. If we want to criticize the constructivism school, we can say that the contemporary realities are affected by our values and not constructed by them and the knowledge (social sciences) is associated with social conditions. Also the constructivism has over passed the structuralism but is not taking the agency seriously.

### 3. Power-Knowledge Theory

Power can be associated with several factors, including the knowledge. Power and knowledge can be synergistic with each other. This way, the Power leads to the knowledge expansion and knowledge leads to the maintenance and increase of the Power. Foucault in his theory of Power-Knowledge, first deals with the discourse practice and the influence of power in the creation of knowledge. Power technology has a collection of scientific discourses. Discourse reflects the thinking and the episteme. Discourse plays a role in the creation of knowledge materials, subjectivity, social relations and conceptual perceptions. Power techniques such as interviewing, counseling, confession and discipline are through discursive practices (Foucault, 1979: pp. 234 & 236). Therefore, discourse is affecting the knowledge through by power—power is evaluated as a distributive issue. Power never has been in the hands of one person and is not similar to a commodity but power acts as a net-organization. In Foucault thinking the meaning of network has no center and establishes links immediately. Power is applied on free people being in the position of choosing with the aim of influencing the selections and forming the actions. Power has a collection of strategic positions which are running throughout the social system. Power is a mean by which the forms of dialogue and knowledge production occurs (Foucault, 1980: pp. 82-97).

In terms of analyzing the power according to “Foucault” we could say that he finds the power as the force which affects the fields. Force can be structure, interests and influence. “Foucault” was looking for tactics, tools and functions of power and the network of relationships that was reigning on them. Whereas “Giddens” believes that power is an ability that comes by structures of domination. The power is related of the human agency. Power and conflict, such as power and interests realization, are relatively linked to each other and this linkage is random (Giddens, 2013: pp. 68-69). Power existence is dependent on the institutions and the relationships between people. Man gains his interest through by power, too. “Foucault”, considers the power not only in the relation with the mechanisms and formal structures, but as expanded in all aspects of the social fields. Power appears when being used also it shows itself as through by certain norms reflected within silence, empty spaces and visualizing the imaginations and the words. “Foucault” does not exclude the larger centers of power, but believes that we cannot limit the power. But for Weber the power is included in the organization. Here we can say that the power comes from the institutions. Power brings the people under domination and imposes restrictions on them. Power forms the knowledge’s and perceptions and defines the objects captured territories. “Foucault” continued and expanded the issue of decentralization the cognitive agent initially raised by “Ferdinand de Saussure” (2006) and “Claude Levi Strauss” (1973). And this way, decentralization of the cognitive agent became a substantive and methodological phenomenon. Therefore, History was made in the form of cognitions in the

power fields through which human agents were detected. “Foucault” put also the idea of freedom against the idea of political rationality, suggests his argument by analyzing the critical theory from the instrumental wisdom. The idea that the power is an important part of everyday social interaction is an important part of the critical theory narration about the power which influences the thoughts and desires of the people through the action of collective forces and social arrangements.

In connection with power and knowledge there are two cases: first, power and knowledge are in a correlative state. In causality, one is creating the other, but in the correlative, the companion is considered, meaning the emergence of one in the other. Second, in framework of solidarity, power and knowledge are associated with each other and construct a field which is an entire constitution beyond the focal point. Power produces knowledge, power and knowledge directly imply one another. Power relations emerge with the creation of an area of knowledge associated with it. Whereas knowledge is in need of power relations but it involves at the same time in the creation of power relations as well. Knowledge gives continuity to the power effects and reinforces them. Power is the arena of showing the facilities and the arena of representation. Any power needs a form of knowledge to act. Power applies through knowledge. Power comes from the collection of impersonal meanings including institutions, norms, rules and discourse and has a structure that has an undeniable link with knowledge.

What is important for “Foucault” in the field of history is to consider the positive basis of knowledge which is close to the methodological approach. He considers the ideas as they are realized meaning that that as they are realized in the framework of power-knowledge relations. “Foucault” emphasizes that knowledge is indivisible of the regimes in power. “Foucault” transfers the structure’s function to the episteme. Episteme forms the knowledge. According to “Foucault” there is a relationship between the human sciences and the episteme reigning over every period of time. According to Foucault, the episteme is a subjective priority which let us enter the intellectual disciplines. Intellectual disciplines make the realities. According to Foucault in the power-knowledge relation, things get statement in language and action. Language is doing in history and statement is in the discourse. Knowledge-power establishes link between the statement and the doing. Hence, he relates the knowledge to the power and sees the evolution of both together. For “Foucault”, we, as agent, are intertwined with knowledge and the knowledge itself is involved with the outside world in other hand.

#### 4. The Relationship between Cognition and Power-Knowledge Theory

Cognition means understanding and comprehending or perception things. Social conditions lead to the creating of social cognition. Social cognition is constructed by the people’s ways of talking and thinking about the reality and plays a role in the formation of social facts. Epistemology is the research of the facilities, limitations and structures. In the sociology of cognition it is spoken from two kinds of cognition: First, rational elements and identifiers; second, emotional and valuable elements.

“Foucault” like “Nietzsche” sees the cognition in the form of a will which related to power; so that power produces the materials and practices of the reality. Individual and his cognition are the products of this productive process. Changing forms of power can only be explained in the light of power relations. Institutions such as state, religion, family, political parties, associations, labor organizations, educational institutions and medical centers are some forms of organized relations of power. According to “Weber” also the power and interest in the society and human history causes the importance of ideas. Thus, the power, capacity and capability are resulting from of interests and institutions and are leading to the cognition. We can say that the Power is the expansion of a general spirit in the discourse contexture and social mutual relations. Discourse is at the service of power in society. Discourse is on an active link with reality, reality is within the social processes and social construct. Discourse is the reflection of practical trend during what process the attribution of meaning and meaning order are getting stable over the time and take the form of related cognitive, social and institutional order. Man is involved in a hidden discourse of domination, power and resistance. According to Giddens the Cognition is understood through discourse awareness and practical awareness. Legislation, financial resources and power are the motives of cognition (awareness) sources.

“Foucault” raises in the archeology how certain knowledge or certain discourse is formed in specific periods of societies’ history. He meant that every period has some coordinates based on its historical features and knowing these coordinates helps to recognize the Cognition and the knowledge and discipline practices of that time. What we see in the name of religious and artistic rituals, civil rights and moral rules are actually all the rules and instruments of domination and power genealogically opinion, which changes from one form to another.

Also according to Weber, the awareness about a given historical period to another historical period and about a society to another society is different, and these differences are causing changes in the issues forms which lead to the discipline in the contents of awareness. For “Mannheim” also the birth and development of any given cognitions done in a defined social space, cognition is dependent on interests, social conditions of the initial link, and the social existence. Cognitions are determined selectively by specific historical and social circumstances of each group, layer and classes in society. Intentions and motives, prejudices, imaginations, interests saving and ambitions are involved in the existential and interest linkage. In here we can say that cognition is dependent on time and location. Culture, economy, values, ethnicity and occupation are influential in the creation of cognition. People in groups and social classes have a certain insight. The relationship between power and knowledge or domination & awareness and knowing the human in their various forms are the key concepts of theoretical process of sociology of cognition. So that knowledge is understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, and publishing and how to express the political, economic and institutional regime of producing the truth. The truth is analyzed inside the power and with the dominant epistemology methodology (Foucault, 1988: p. 12). Subject identifiers and objects of cognition and the ways of cognition are considered as the fundamental implications of power and knowledge and their historical transformations. Applying power, creates, organizes and uses tools for cognition, and creates spaces where knowledge is formed. Knowledge also supports the power in turn.

“Foucault” vision must be placed in the critical tradition of Kant. His project is to theorem the critical history of thinking as Kant was defining. There is a relationship between the infinite discussion of “Foucault” and the transcendental theory of Kant. In the framework of Kant’s transcendental theory, the experience of individual with the world is considered that it construct the world. It seems that this thinking has affected the “Foucault” vision. There are two points in Kant’s transcendental theory: first, the sense which is leading to experimental sense, second, understanding that leads to understanding the categories. Categories are things that come to mind. Philosophical work of “Kant” was collecting rationalism and empiricism. For “Kant” the originality comes with understanding and we obtain little experiences of the world. Understanding is a criterion maker; meaning that making a general framework for everything. “Foucault” says also that we come from simple things of our life to the construct and this is the episteme. The vision of “Foucault” is similar to “Kant’s” one. So that he removes the intellectual relationship of understanding and replace it by the empirical discipline of construct instead. Here are two objections to the epistemology of “Kant’s” view: First, although “Kant” is logical, but he has not considered the boundaries between primary and secondary issues categories, because he did not understand the secondary categories. Second, “Kant” believes that the assumptions are innate. However, it is sometimes said that the verifications are innate, whereas we cannot say that they about assumptions are innate. “Kant” says, innate assumptions, are related to the inherent wisdom and categories without relationship with the outside don’t exist in the wisdom. While we have no innate assumptions in the meaning of inherent wisdom and this is similar to Plato saying which is faulty. “Kant” and “Descartes’ believe that innate concepts are rational. Therefore same objection holds for “Foucault” as well. Objection seen for “Foucault” is that in his view, knowledge is the product of power. And this is despite the fact that both are related, but the power is not the cause of knowledge (cognition), but can be reason of cognition existence.

In evaluating and criticizing the “Foucault” viewpoint that the knowledge is created in the relations of power, we can say that this is meaning that the power is infrastructure and the knowledge (cognition) is superstructure. Meaning that knowledge is the only motive engine of power and it is itself affected of power. But the base is not power even though the power has affects. In addition to structure and power, other factors such as interests and the influence are affecting and the base can be the experience and wisdom. Power is not the cause of knowledge (cognition), but knowledge (cognition) is affected from the power. It can be said in criticism of the episteme that episteme is same as structure, and it cannot be infrastructure. In other words, the episteme is effective in the creation of cognition but cannot directly lead to the creation of cognition.

## 5. Conclusion

Cognition is an internal and subjective event. Some, such as “Mannheim” and “Weber” see the cognition as the result of interests and the instrumental wisdom, and some other such as “Foucault” see the cognition as the result of power and the mechanisms of discourse. According to “Foucault”, ideas are derived from the basic that is described based on the relationship between power and knowledge. But it should be noted that the ideas appear

positively in the framework of a positive basis of knowledge and in the form of discourses in the language and are affairs that occur in practice. Power constructs the reality and the cognition is the product of this procedure. Mind, cognition and the history have interrelationship. Cognition is a regular system of production practice, regulation, division of and reconstruction of discourses. Power is the relations between the forces which exist in the social procedures and economic production. According to the power-knowledge theory, subject becomes cognizant by the effect of knowledge construction, and the extent of its effectiveness on the cognizant increases. The power leads to cognition through the economic, political and cultural structures as well as institutions, discourses, practices and forces. Here, we can say that in addition to the structure, influence and power other factors such as community, interests, benefits, instrumental wisdom, communication, awareness, experience and practice are effective in creating cognition.

## References

- Boghossian, P. (2010). Epistemic Relativism. In Bernecker and Pritchard (Eds.), *A Companion to Epistemology* (pp. 78-88). London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79*, (Ed. Colin Gordon). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1988). The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom. In J. Bevaner & D. Rasmussen (Ed.), *The Final Foucault* (p. 12). Boston, Mass: MIT Press.
- Giddens, A. (2013). *Sociology* (7th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, D. J. (2011). *Elementary Science Methods: A Constructivist Approach (What's New in Education)*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- McKinnon, C. (2011). *Issues in Political Theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, C. M. (2013). *Teaching and Learning with Technology: Beyond Constructivism*. London: Routledge.