

## **The Application of Post-Positivist Epistemology in Understanding the Problems of the Islamic World with an Emphasis on the Islamic Republic of Iran**

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### **1-Introduction**

The modern era's emphasis on culture and identity highlights the need to understand their impact on societies. A society can only be truly understood within its cultural and value framework. However, positivist approaches in the human sciences have obscured this understanding. The field of international relations, particularly concerning the Islamic world, is largely defined by two epistemological traditions: positivism and post-positivism. This article examines the purpose of post-positivism, arguing that positivist understandings have inadequately addressed the challenges facing the Islamic world especially the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **2- Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

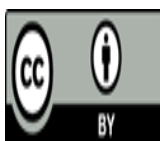
For a more detailed investigation of this issue, a combined approach of content analysis and qualitative research was employed. This article adopts Peter Winch's methodological perspective to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of Iranian society. Winch's insights and reflections provide valuable knowledge into social and human phenomena.

This research is based on a post-positivist approach. Post-positivists argue that human behavior is influenced by a myriad of factors, including culture, history, and individual experiences. This complexity

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necessitates an interpretive approach that values context and meaning over the search for universal laws or causal explanations typical of positivist methodologies. While positivism strives for objectivity through empirical verification and quantifiable data, post-positivists contend that complete objectivity is unattainable in social sciences. Researchers bring their own biases, perspectives, and cultural contexts into their work, which shapes their interpretations and findings. Post-positivism in international relations prioritizes interpretive understanding over predictive control. Rejecting the positivist model of mirroring the natural sciences, it emphasizes the humanities and social sciences' role in interpreting human phenomena and striving for emancipation from oppression. Central to this critique is the inherent unsuitability of applying natural science methodologies to the human world. Post-positivists value subjectivity, meaning, and interpretation over objectivity and empirical verification, viewing social science theories as interpretive frameworks rather than objective truths. This leads to a preference for interpretive over causal explanations. Peter Winch's work further underscores the philosophical basis of social science, highlighting a fundamental ontological and methodological difference between social and natural sciences rooted in the distinct natures of society and nature.

### **3- Discussion**

The central themes explored in this research for understanding Iranian issues are:

1. The Tradition of Positivism and Its Penetration into the Human Sciences;
2. The Meta-Epistemological Tradition in the Humanities and Social Sciences;
3. The Political and Cultural Relativity of Understanding Iran's Issues;
4. The Validity of the Persian Language and Proximity Magic;
5. National Identity Independent from the Government Cultural Credits;
6. Religious Culture Independent from the Government.

#### 4- Conclusion and Suggestions

This article epistemologically investigates the problems within Iran's political and cultural spheres. Since the Qajar era, and particularly since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, domestic intellectuals, Western statesmen, and influential international organizations have identified the most pressing issues facing Iran as authoritarianism, a lack of democratic processes, disregard for human rights, and the absence of a secular culture. This article argues that these diagnoses are rooted in a positivist epistemology that fails to adequately grasp Iran's complexities. Positivist epistemology, by modeling its methods on the natural and experimental sciences, cannot provide a true understanding of Iran's unique socio-political context. Therefore, only by employing a post-positivist epistemology, which considers Iran's specific political and cultural contexts, can we accurately identify and address its challenges. This article introduces Peter Winch, a post-positivist social philosopher, to the Iranian political science community and proposes his approach as a novel method for understanding and resolving Iran's issues. Winch argues that each society possesses unique social values and norms, and that researchers cannot fully comprehend a society without immersing themselves in its context.

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