

Critique of Multicultural Perspectives

Nyoman Dewi Pebryani

Introduction

Bryan Fay published a book titled "Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach," in 1996. His main argument, "a dualistic way of thinking [which] predominates [...] the philosophy of social science." (Pg. 223). Fay developed a new way to approach the philosophy of social science called multiculturalism. There is a growing development of social science in a multicultural approach, and Fay's premises contributed to the Multicultural Philosophy of Social Science. This essay will elaborate Fay's dialectical view and how multicultural approach should find a synergy and understanding, moreover, it also explains the incomplete statement of Fay by describing examples and the writer's own experience.

Critique of Multicultural Perspectives

Fay explained that a multicultural world stresses ethnic, gender, racial, religious, class and cultural differences – where people are keen to discover and protect their particularities – leads to a fragmentation of social knowledge (Fay, 1996). Because they are different, these cultural and social units often conflict with one another. Indeed, some of them will inevitably attempt to undermine or dominate the others. Dominant groups attempt to overwhelm weaker ones, and in the end seek to make the more vulnerable groups just like them. Therefore Fay explained, "in so far as they succeed they thereby annihilate

the differences between the groups. The natural impetus in a world of differences is thus toward the obliteration of these differences” (pg. 231).

Nowadays many countries in the world are culturally diverse; the term multiculturalism is used to describe a society where a variety of different culture coexists. Fay illustrates dualism in his book, by looking back at "how Jewish should relate to the dominant Christian culture of Europe" (Pg. 233). He adds that Jewish assimilation might lead to forgetting their roots, and those who refuse to assimilate, they tend to 'separate' themselves.

This illustration brings me back to my country's history, where Indonesia was being colonized by the Netherlands for 350 years. During the colonization era, power struggle and battle were inevitable. Indonesian people, the minority group, were faced with options to assimilate themselves with the oppressor, or separate themselves. Those who assimilated themselves adopted some vocabulary from the Dutch and worked with the Dutch. On the contrary, those who chose to separate themselves started to defend nationalism in a radical way. A war was again, inevitable until the Indonesian people could finally gain their independents. Similar to Fay's illustration on separatism, many Indonesians confront obstacles to defend their independents acknowledgment from the world.

Looking back again at the history, Indonesian people engaged the third party, a concept that fay ignored. Through the third party, which is United Nations, Indonesia gets the recognition in the world as an independent country. As the third party, United Nations works as a negotiator to mediate the conflicting parties. Fay does not talk about the necessity of third party; while he mentioned interactionism conceives of the relation of self

and other dialectically, purely interaction between two parties. Third parties play a role in reaching an agreement when two parties are not coincident, which Fay needs to add on his premises.

Fay asks, “[...] whether understanding others – particularly others who are different – is possible, if so, what understanding involves” (pg.5). Understanding others both could increase self-knowledge and help people accepting differences. Fay relates dualism with cultures, by focusing on Jewish's assimilation into European cultures. However, Fay has not discussed what happened when Jewish people return to their home country. The writer will bring this discussion to a reverse culture shock, to emphasize the fact that understanding is a continuous process. Reverse culture shock is the emotional and psychological distress suffered by people when they returned home after a number of years overseas, the longer the time spent abroad and the bigger cultural difference, the greater the reverse culture shock. Upon arrival in a foreign country, people tend to experience a honeymoon period where the new culture is exciting, fresh, and fun. Soon after however, as differences surface and mount, sojourners fall into the pit of culture shock Gradually, as one adapts to the new culture and accepts differences, they regain their emotional and psychological stability. For some, this experience is over in a matter of weeks, for others take months. Nonetheless, researchers maintain that if you have spent a significant amount of time in a foreign country, chances are that you have experienced some of the stresses common to culture shock.

Fay's premises on the importance of understanding self and others in dialectical view in accepting differences are overwhelming. However, it is important to add that understanding is an ongoing process, because changes occur continuously. The writer will

describe her own experience in dealing with cultural shock and reverse culture shock to illustrate the reasoning on understanding is a continuous process.

Being minority when living abroad urged the writer to accept differences, and expecting an understanding of the dominant culture. By starting to engage with other activities, it gave her space to interact and built understanding with others. However, after she had settled with the new environment, once she had to go back to her home country, there was an unpleasant reality of a reverse culture shock. Reverse culture shock is similar in definition to culture shock, but the adjustment process focuses on the difficulties of re-adapting and re-adjusting. It seems unusual, once she had to go back to her home country, she felt homesick for another home. It is because of the memory and engagement with the previous place or misses the people that have befriended there. Therefore, the process of understanding self and other is a continuous process. Fay's premises explained on the importance of understanding to accept differences, and it should be completed by adding statement that understanding is a continuous process that require sensitivity, responsiveness, and open mindedness. The most important aspects in the multicultural world are exploring the ways the human can positively respond to knowledge of, and interaction with those who are different.

Conclusion

Fay has deep thought regarding with social science, but the premises that he explained need to be completed. Fay tried to translate dialectical approach by combining and resolving the dualism of assimilationist and separatism into a coherent synthesis of interactionism between self and others. However, when the two parties (self and other) could not resolved the problem, the present of the third party is needed as negotiator nor mediator. Fay also explained in detail about the understanding in accepting differences, however it needs to be completed that understanding is a continuous process, a process toward understanding and re-understanding. All process requires openness to the possibility of learning from, responsiveness, intelligence sensitivity and open-mindedness to accept any difference.

References

Fay, B. (1996). Contemporary philosophy of social science: A multicultural approach.

Oxford, UK: Blackwell.