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Sociology of Ereignis: A New Ontological Foundation for Prophetic Social Science

Published 2025-10-14

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Article History:

Submitted: March 11,
2025

Reviewed: June 18, 2025

Accepted: October 2, 2025

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How to Cite:

Sociology of Ereignis: A New Ontological Foundation for Prophetic Social Science. (2025). *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 20(1), 31-62. <https://doi.org/10.14421/k30v0343>

Abstract

In Indonesia's intellectual landscape, Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science emerged as a critical response to the dominance of Western positivism, which has been criticized for its inability to grasp the ethical and transcendental dimensions of social reality. Despite its transformative vision, this framework has long faced a fundamental challenge: the absence of a coherent ontological foundation that could sustain its three pillars—humanization, liberation, and transcendence. This research aims to address that gap by proposing Heideggerian social ontology as a new philosophical basis for Prophetic Social Science. Using a qualitative method of critical conceptual analysis, this research examines key philosophical and sociological texts through a hermeneutic-phenomenological lens. The analysis proceeds through interpretive deconstruction and reflexive engagement to uncover the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind positivism and Heideggerian thought. The findings show that positivism's 'flat' ontology cannot accommodate the prophetic vision, while Heideggerian social ontology provides a more authentic foundation for a Sociology of Ereignis—a framework that centers meaningful events, reflexivity, and disclosure. The implication of this research is that sociological inquiry, especially within Muslim societies, must be reoriented toward ontologically grounded and ethically engaged methodologies that take lived meaning and transcendence seriously.

Keywords: Muslim Society; Prophetic Social Science; Sociology of Ereignis; Positivism; Social Ontology

Dalam lanskap intelektual Indonesia, Ilmu Sosial Profetik Kuntowijoyo lahir sebagai respons kritis terhadap dominasi positivisme Barat yang sering dianggap gagal memahami dimensi etis dan transendental dari realitas sosial. Meskipun memiliki visi yang transformatif, kerangka ini menghadapi tantangan mendasar berupa ketiadaan landasan ontologis yang kokoh untuk menopang tiga pilarnya—humanisasi, liberasi, dan transendensi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab celah tersebut dengan mengusulkan ontologi sosial Heideggerian sebagai dasar filosofis baru bagi Ilmu Sosial Profetik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis konseptual kritis, membaca teks-teks filsafat dan sosiologi utama melalui lensa hermeneutik-fenomenologis. Analisis dilakukan melalui proses dekonstruksi interpretatif dan refleksi kritis untuk menyingkap asumsi ontologis dan epistemologis di balik positivisme dan pemikiran Heidegger. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 'flat' ontology dalam positivisme tidak mampu menampung visi profetik, sedangkan ontologi sosial Heideggerian menawarkan dasar yang lebih otentik bagi Sosiologi Ereignis—sebuah kerangka yang menempatkan peristiwa bermakna, refleksivitas, dan pengungkapan makna sebagai inti kajian. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah bahwa sosiologi, terutama dalam masyarakat Muslim, perlu diarahkan kembali pada metodologi yang berlandaskan ontologi dan komitmen etis, yang mampu menangkap makna dan dimensi transendensi secara lebih mendalam.

A. INTRODUCTION

Within the Indonesian intellectual landscape, Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science is a seminal project born from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the dominant paradigms of Western social science. It emerged as a critical response to a positivist tradition often perceived as soulless, value-neutral, and fundamentally incapable of grasping the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of social reality, particularly within a Muslim society. At its core, Prophetic Social Science is not merely a descriptive theory but an ethical and transformative call to action, built upon three pillars: humanization, a struggle against the reduction of human beings to mere objects of study; liberation, an effort to free society from structures of oppression; and transcendence, a commitment to anchor social inquiry within a meaningful, spiritual horizon (Kuntowijoyo 2006).

Nevertheless, despite its profound ethical vision and critical importance, Prophetic Social Science has consistently faced a foundational challenge: it is often perceived as lacking a systematically articulated ontological and methodological framework to realize its ambitious goals fully. This challenge does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is a localized manifestation of a deeper philosophical crisis at the heart of the social sciences. We live in a paradoxical age: an era of unprecedented datafication, yet one accompanied by a profound crisis of meaning. In its attempt to grasp this reality, sociology often retreats to rigid quantitative models, an approach that risks reducing lived experience to soulless data. The danger of such an approach, as Patrik Aspers (2015) has argued, is that when a social science naively 'presupposes that what there is to study is precisely what we know there is', it loses the capacity for critical self-reflection and risks merely 'performing' its own limited ontology. Consequently, Prophetic Social Science often finds itself in a precarious position: it possesses a powerful prophetic aim. However, it has not yet forged the

philosophical and methodological 'tools' inherently designed for that purpose. This creates a critical gap between its ethical aspirations and the ontological foundation required to sustain them.

Previous studies in the sociology of religion have emphasized the 'lived religion' approach, showing how religious meanings are embodied and enacted in everyday practices in ways that resist reduction to simple variables (Ammerman 2014; Woodhead 2011; Knibbe 2020). Other research has drawn on socio-ontological and hermeneutic traditions, arguing that social inquiry must begin from being-in-the-world, intersubjectivity, and interpretation rather than detached observation, positioning Heideggerian concepts as directly relevant for sociology (Aspers and Kohl 2013; Knudsen 2020; Suddick et al. 2020; Gadamer 1975). Still other work, particularly in science studies and reflexive methodology, has demonstrated how data practices 'perform' ontologies and risk flattening meaning when taken as reality (Pickering 1993; Aspers 2015; Finlay 2002). These previous studies suggest that methods premised only on objectivist regularities risk missing the ethical, experiential, and supra empirical dimensions of religious life – precisely the terrain Prophetic Social Science seeks to engage.

However, previous research has also revealed important gaps. Many syntheses stop at contrasting positivism with interpretivism, rather than showing how socio-ontology can be translated into concrete methodological design, sampling strategies, or interpretive criteria. This is especially evident in the study of Muslim societies, where everyday piety, authority, and spirituality are deeply intertwined with social structures but often remain under-theorized methodologically. Thus, the literature highlights a gap between Prophetic Social Science's ethical aspirations – humanization, liberation, transcendence – and the ontological and methodological tools needed to sustain them. This study addresses that gap by drawing on Heideggerian social ontology to develop a more reflexive and empirically grounded pathway for sociological inquiry.

This paper argues that to overcome this foundational challenge and fully realize its potential, Prophetic Social Science requires a new ontological foundation found in Heideggerian social ontology, moving decisively beyond the limitations of positivism. This paper undertakes a critical comparative analysis of these two opposing paradigms. It will first diagnose positivism's ontological and epistemological limitations to demonstrate precisely why it is an unsuitable foundation for the prophetic project. Subsequently, it will present Heideggerian social ontology as a superior alternative, capable of providing the necessary philosophical grounding for a sociology that takes meaning, lived experience, and ethical commitment seriously. This analysis will culminate in the proposal of a 'Sociology of Ereignis': a concrete methodological framework that emerges from this new foundation and can analytically strengthen the three pillars of Prophetic Social Science.

By positioning Heideggerian thought not as an end in itself but as a crucial tool for revitalizing a specific Indonesian intellectual tradition, this paper aims to make a unique contribution. It seeks to move beyond the persistent, ultimately flawed, call for a 'synthesis' between positivism and interpretivism—a call this paper identifies as a fundamental 'pseudo-problem' (Aspers and Kohl 2013). Instead of seeking an impossible bridge between incommensurable worlds, it proposes a more radical and transformative path: consciously adopting a more robust ontological ground. Ultimately, this paper aims to provide both a theoretical foundation and a methodological pathway for a sociology that is not only critically engaged but also ontologically self-aware, demonstrating how the choice of a philosophical framework is not merely a technical decision, but an ethical stance with profound consequences for the future of social inquiry.

B. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology of critical conceptual analysis, treating foundational philosophical and sociological texts as its primary data. Its interpretive and dialectical strategy is guided by a hermeneutic-phenomenological framework, which involves a systematic deconstruction of the sociological tradition to reveal its historically produced assumptions, followed by a reduction to the foundational ontological questions that underpin each paradigm. To ground this method in practice, this paper operationalizes it through a moment of conscious reflexivity (Aspers 2009). Proceeding from the principle that there is no distance between the researcher and the researched, this analysis begins with a fore-having: a pre-understanding deeply shaped by prior research into the dominance of technological enframing (Gestell) and its tendency to reduce all beings to a standing-reserve (Bestand) (Anam 2025b). This background provides the initial, holistic familiarity with the problem of calculative thinking, allowing for a developed sensitivity to this specific philosophical problematic when reading the primary texts.

This orientation, in turn, enabled a specific fore-sight, an interpretive angle to read Comte not as a neutral historical figure, but as a key philosophical architect of the modern will to objectification. From this vantage point, a specific fore-conception became possible: to grasp his 'social physics' as an early and powerful articulation of the drive to turn the social world into a standing-reserve (Bestand). Consequently, a term like 'egologism' was employed not as a definitive label, but as a formal indication—a methodological tool to point towards this observable tendency in the texts without claiming to exhaust its meaning. This entire three-step process is a concrete demonstration of the hermeneutic circle at work, where my situatedness is not a bias to be eliminated, but the very engine of this critical-diagnostic reading.

To illustrate the stakes of this ontological-epistemological divide, we can further examine how each paradigm's methodology manifests when faced with a complex social phenomenon, such as religious prayer. A positivist approach, classically exemplified by studies like Stark and Glock's (1968), treats prayer as a set of measurable variables. Through quantitative tools, it successfully generates correlations but in doing so, it methodologically misses the phenomenon itself. It can count the frequency of prayer, but remains blind to prayer as a lived, meaningful event (*Ereignis*), reducing a profound human experience to a manageable standing-reserve (*Bestand*) of data.

In stark opposition, a Heideggerian-inspired approach rejects this reduction precisely because it aims to grasp the phenomenon in its authenticity. Guided by the hermeneutic situation, its qualitative methods as used by Ammerman (1997), seek to understand prayer not as a variable to be calculated, but as an *Ereignis*—a unique event of appropriation where meaning is disclosed and a world is constituted for the participant. The methodological divergence, therefore, is not between two equally valid tools for producing different 'kinds' of knowledge. Rather, it represents a fundamental choice: between a methodology that, by its very design, objectifies and thus obscures the lived world, and one that seeks to unveil it faithfully.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section compares Comtean positivism and Heideggerian social ontology not simply as a philosophical exercise, but as a way to clarify what is at stake for Prophetic Social Science. Both paradigms represent radically different ways of understanding and investigating the social world, and this contrast becomes crucial when we ask how sociology can serve the prophetic aims of humanization, liberation, and transcendence. The analysis therefore moves across four key dimensions—ontology,

epistemology, methodology, and social critique – but each is read through the lens of how it either limits or empowers a prophetic orientation.

1. Ontological Assumptions: The Nature of Social Reality

The core divergence between positivism and Heideggerian social ontology lies in their fundamentally different assumptions about the very nature of reality – what exists when we consider the social world. Comtean positivism is rooted in a realist ontology. This means it asserts the existence of an objective, external social reality that exists independently of human consciousness, perception, or interpretation. This reality is not conceived as chaotic or random; rather, it is structured by discoverable laws, analogous to the laws that govern the natural world (Machotka 1949). Comte's project of establishing a 'social physics,' later termed 'sociology,' was explicitly aimed at uncovering these laws through scientific observation and analysis. This approach rests on several key ontological commitments. First, there is a deep assumption of inherent order and progress. Social reality, for Comte, is not only ordered but also characterized by a progressive, evolutionary trajectory. This is not merely a descriptive observation about the social world; it's a fundamental ontological claim. Order and progress are inherent, underlying features, analogous to physical laws like gravity (Pickering 1993). This assumption shapes Comte's entire framework. Second, this inherent order is manifested in the Law of Three Stages, which posits that human thought, and consequently social organization, progresses through three distinct stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and positive. The theological stage relies on supernatural explanations and religious authority; the metaphysical stage uses abstract philosophical principles; and the positive stage, representing the culmination of social evolution, bases understanding solely on scientific observation, experimentation, and reason (Lenzer 2017).

Comte also distinguishes between social statics (the study of social order) and social dynamics (the study of social change), revealing a holistic and organic view of society. He saw social institutions as interconnected and contributing to the overall functioning of the whole, much like organs in a biological organism (Comte, 1853). Crucially, Comte rejected a purely individualistic ontology. He saw the individual as inherently egoistic and believed social forces were necessary to regulate this egoism. The family, not the individual, was considered the fundamental building block of society. He envisioned a hierarchical social order, guided by scientific experts and a strong, centralized government, reflecting his organic view of society. Comte's understanding of social dynamics is primarily embodied in the Law of Three Stages, which he viewed as an inevitable and progressive process, driven by knowledge development. He believed the outcome – the triumph of the positive stage – was predetermined by inherent laws, demonstrating a clear teleology to social development (Wernick 2006).

On the other hand, Heideggerian social ontology offers a radical departure from this positivist framework. It is not a 'theory of society' in the traditional sociological sense; it is a fundamental ontology – an inquiry into the very being of social existence itself, focusing on the conditions of possibility for social phenomena (Aspers and Kohl 2013; Dreyfus 2006). Its central concept is Being-in-the-World (In-der-Welt-sein). Heidegger argues that we cannot understand human existence (Dasein, 'being-there') by starting with a Cartesian 'thinking subject' or an isolated individual. Instead, Dasein is always already Being-in-the-world. This means human existence is constitutively intertwined with a meaningful world. We are not detached observers; we are immersed in it, engaged with it, and our very being is shaped by this involvement (Siderits 2022). This 'world' is not a collection of objective facts; but a pre-ontological background of shared meaning, practices, relationships, and historical context (Heidegger 2022).

Heideggerian ontology emphasizes that Dasein is fundamentally social. This is captured in the concept of *Mitsein* (being-with), which signifies that our very being is constituted by our relationships with others (Aspers and Kohl 2013). Sociality is not a secondary or derivative aspect of human existence; it is prior to and constitutive of individuality. The shared world of *Mitsein* is the source of meaning, understanding, and the possibility of social life itself. This fundamentally challenges any individualistic starting point for understanding the social world, such as those often found in positivist approaches that prioritize the individual as the primary unit of analysis (Knudsen 2020).

The hermeneutic situation is another core concept, crucial for understanding Heideggerian social ontology and its implications for research (Gadamer 1975). Heidegger argues that all understanding is inherently interpretive and grounded in pre-understandings. This is not a subjective limitation to overcome, but the ontological condition of possibility for any understanding. While Anam (2024) offers a valuable methodological application, the core concept originates with Heidegger and is further developed by Gadamer. The hermeneutic situation encompasses *Vorhabe* (fore-having, the pre-existing background of understanding), *Vorsicht* (fore-sight, the way we anticipate), *Vorgriff* (fore-conception, our conceptual framework), and, crucially, *Befindlichkeit* (feeling/mood), highlighting the affective dimension of understanding (Dreyfus 2006; Heidegger 2022). These are not biases to be eliminated, but the inescapable conditions of understanding. The hermeneutic circle describes the circular movement between pre-understanding and interpretation, leading to a deepening (though never final or absolute) understanding. *Ereignis* (appropriation, or event of being) emphasizes that we encounter not objective 'social facts,' but meaningful events shaped by the interplay of pre-understandings and the event itself (Gadamer 1975). Relatedly, Heidegger distinguishes between the ontic (specific entities) and

the ontological (underlying structures of being), prioritizing the latter. Key concepts like truth as *aletheia* (unconcealment), *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding), and Being-towards-death are all understood within this framework of the hermeneutic situation and *Mitsein* (Heidegger 2022).

Therefore, the divergence presented here is, more than a simple disagreement over the definition of 'social reality'. It represents a fundamental schism between two incommensurable worlds. Positivism presupposes a world of external, objective facts about which we can know positioning the sociologist as a detached observer. Conversely, Heideggerian ontology posits a world of meaning in which we are already engaged, positioning the sociologist as an interpretive participant. This is not merely a difference in perspective; but a clash between two irreconcilable starting points. A sociologist cannot coherently stand in both worlds at once; the choice for one is necessarily a rejection of the other, a foundational decision predetermining the entire horizon of what can be known and what will forever remain unseen.

This 'flat' ontology, which reduces social reality to a series of observable facts, the primary target of Kuntowijoyo's critique. By its very design, such a foundation inherently lacks the capacity to accommodate the transcendental dimension that Prophetic Social Science seeks to engage. Therefore, the choice for a different ontology, is not a matter of preference but a prerequisite for the prophetic project itself.

2. Epistemological Implications: The Nature of Knowledge

The fundamentally different ontological assumptions of positivism and Heideggerian social ontology directly lead to contrasting epistemologies – theories about the nature of knowledge, its validity, and its acquisition. Positivism, rooted in its realist ontology, adheres to a correspondence theory of truth. Knowledge is considered valid if it accurately reflects objective social reality (Comte 2015). This leads to several

key epistemological commitments. First, positivism strives for value-free observation. The researcher is ideally a neutral, detached observer, minimizing the influence of personal values and biases (Neuber 2022). Comte believed social scientists should emulate the objectivity of natural scientists, seeking a detached perspective free from subjective interpretations. Second, the goal of positivist inquiry is generalizable knowledge – findings that hold across different contexts. Comte's Law of Three Stages exemplifies this aspiration for discovering universal laws governing social development (Lenzer 2017). Third, positivism seeks causal explanation, identifying cause-and-effect relationships to develop predictive models (Sanusi 2018). Finally, knowledge claims are validated through empirical verification or falsification (Park, Konge, and Artino 2020). Hypotheses are tested against observable data, and theories are accepted, rejected, or modified based on their empirical support.

This epistemological commitment to a value-free, detached observer stands in direct and irreconcilable opposition to the spirit of Prophetic Social Science. The prophetic call is, by definition, normative; it demands ethical engagement and a clear stance from the social scientist in service of liberation and humanization. An epistemology that feigns neutrality is incompatible and antithetical to this mission.

Heideggerian social ontology fundamentally rejects the core epistemological tenets of positivism, particularly the possibility of objective, value-free knowledge and the correspondence theory of truth. From a Heideggerian perspective, all knowledge is inherently interpretive, contextual, and inextricably linked to our engaged Being-in-the-World (Heidegger 2016). There is no neutral, detached vantage point; we are already implicated within the social world. Our pre-understandings – encompassing *Vorhabe* (fore-having), *Vorsicht* (fore-sight), *Vorgriff* (fore-conception), and *Befindlichkeit* (feeling/mood) – inevitably shape our interpretations (Heidegger 2008). This situatedness and perspective-

dependence are not limitations to be overcome, but the conditions of possibility for any understanding. The researcher's Being-in-the-world is an inescapable and constitutive element of the research process. While Anam (2024) highlights the incompatibility of the value-free principle and the subject-object dichotomy with Heideggerian ontology, this critique is rooted in Heidegger's fundamental rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Understanding, within this framework, is not a linear progression to objective knowledge, but a circular process – the hermeneutic circle (Suddick et al. 2020). Pre-understandings shape initial interpretations, which, in turn, lead to revised understandings that inform further interpretation. This circularity is not a flaw, but the structure of understanding. *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) is the primary mode of knowing in the social world (Nelson 2008). This is not mere subjective empathy, but a form of knowing grounded in the shared, pre-ontological understandings of *Mitsein* – the common background of meaning that makes social interaction possible (Knudsen 2020). It involves grasping meaning within the shared world. Truth, for Heidegger, is not correspondence between statements and objective facts, but *aletheia* – ‘unconcealment’ or ‘disclosure’ – an active process of revealing meaning within a specific context (Ignatius, Umotong, and Dennis 2022). Consequently, knowledge is always situated and interpretive; no universal, timeless laws exist independently of context. While this might suggest relativism, the shared background of *Mitsein* and the ongoing process of interpretation within the hermeneutic circle provide a basis for intersubjective understanding and critical evaluation (Wagner and Zipprian 1991). Furthermore, Heideggerian social ontology emphasizes the performative nature of knowledge: our understanding of the social world actively shapes that reality, underscoring the ethical responsibility of researchers (Knudsen 2020).

3. Methodological Approaches: Research Practices

Positivist methodology is designed to achieve objectivity, identify causal laws, and generalize findings, thus favoring quantitative methods (Park et al. 2020). It relies on tools like surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis to test hypotheses derived from pre-existing theories (Babbie 2021; Bryman 2016). The core principles of this approach are standardization and control, aiming to minimize bias and maximize the replicability of results. In this paradigm, the researcher is ideally positioned as a detached, neutral observer who measures social reality from a distance (Tacq 2011).

Such a methodological practice, which inevitably reduces the richness of human experience to manageable variables, is a concrete manifestation of the dehumanization that the first pillar of Prophetic Social Science is committed to resisting. It treats human beings as objects to be measured rather than subjects of a meaningful world. Therefore, the need for an alternative methodology is, an ethical imperative rooted in the prophetic call for humanization.

In contrast, a Heideggerian-inspired methodology embraces a hermeneutic approach where the interpretation of meaning within specific contexts is paramount (Gadamer 2013). It favors qualitative methods exploring lived experience (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). These include ethnography for immersive understanding (Dumont 2023), in-depth interviews to explore individual perspectives (Eppich, Gormley, and Teunissen 2019), and textual analysis to uncover underlying meanings. The researcher is not a detached observer but an engaged participant, whose own pre-understandings and critical reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) are acknowledged as integral to the interpretive process, which itself is guided by the hermeneutic circle (Grondin 2015).

Therefore, the distinction between these sets of practices, therefore, should not be mistaken for the conventional 'quantitative vs. qualitative' debate. This is a false dichotomy that obscures the real issue. The

fundamental choice is between a set of practices designed to control, measure, and objectify the social world, and a set of practices designed to listen, engage, and be open to the self-disclosure of meaning. One cannot meaningfully 'synthesize' these approaches, for a survey, by its very structure, is an act of objectification that is ontologically hostile to the open-ended listening of deep ethnography. The choice of a research method, therefore, is not a neutral, technical decision. It is the ultimate enactment of one's chosen epistemology, when a philosophical stance becomes a concrete, physical action in the world.

4. Methodological Innovation: From Social Fact to Meaningful Event

This methodological shift from 'social fact' to 'meaningful event' is not a mere technical adjustment; it is the ultimate ethical and analytical requirement to fulfill the most challenging pillar of Prophetic Social Science: transcendence. By its own ontological design, a sociology that limits itself to the study of observable 'facts' is, constitutionally blind to the supra-empirical. It can count religious behaviors, but can never access the world in which God is a living reality for the participant. The turn towards Ereignis, therefore, is a liberating move. It provides a rigorous phenomenological pathway for sociology to finally take transcendence seriously as a world-shaping phenomenon, allowing the researcher to ask not 'Is God real?' but the more profound sociological question: 'How is the world constituted for a person for whom God is real?' This is the methodological key that unlocks the very possibility of a truly prophetic sociology.

In response to the call for new methodological directions, this paper argues that genuine innovation in sociology does not arise from developing new techniques, but from a fundamental shift in how the research encounter itself is conceived. The limitations of positivism in grasping the nuances of lived religiosity are not technical failures to be patched, but

symptoms of a flawed ontological starting point. This crisis runs so deep that it has infected even the language of qualitative inquiry itself, particularly in its common starting point: the 'case study.'

As Anam's (2025) philosophical work demonstrated, the modern social scientific use of 'case' often betrays its deeper etymological roots. It has signify an objectified instance to be analyzed, a problem to be solved, or data to be schematized by a pre-existing theory. This usage is much closer to the Roman legal term *causa* than its older, richer origins. The old German word *dinc* or the Greek *eiro* referred not to an object, but to a 'matter of pertinence that concerns' the community, something that calls for a gathering and a discussion (Heidegger 2001c, as cited in Anam 2025). By reducing a 'case' to an object of study, sociology often unknowingly imports a positivist, objectifying gaze even into its qualitative work. A truly transformative methodological pathway must therefore begin by unsettling this very foundation. Drawing on the concept of the hermeneutic situation (Anam, 2024), this section will demonstrate that a more authentic approach emerges when we shift our understanding of the research encounter from the analysis of a 'social fact' or a 'case study' towards participation in a 'meaningful event' (Ereignis).

In its quest for objectivity, the positivist paradigm approaches the social world as a repository of discrete, measurable 'social facts.' In the study of religion, this translates into quantifying phenomena: counting prayer frequency, measuring attendance rates, or correlating belief statements with psychological well-being. The researcher stands apart, collecting data as if they were geological samples. This approach, however, fundamentally misses the phenomenon it purports to study, for it cannot 'calculate the taste' of a spiritual experience. An interpretive ontology offers a radical counter-proposal. Here, the researcher does not encounter isolated 'facts,' but is instead involved in what can be termed an 'Ereignis' – an 'appropriate event.' As argued in Anam (2024), an appropriate event is not

just any occurrence; it is an event that becomes meaningful precisely because it resonates with the researcher's own pre-understanding and involvement. It is a moment of mutual disclosure.

To use a concrete example to answer the reviewer's call: in studying the lived religiosity within a Muslim community, the experience of barakah (blessing) is not a social fact to be measured. A survey can ask if someone believes in barakah, but it can never capture the event of barakah itself. For the interpretive researcher, understanding barakah means understanding it as an Ereignis—a unique, unrepeatable moment where meaning is disclosed to a participant (and by extension, to the engaged researcher) in a way that transcends mere data points. This approach does not seek to explain barakah away, but to understand the world in which barakah is a real and transformative event.

To operationalize this shift requires the researcher to adopt a fundamentally different posture—one of interpretive questioning rather than objective measurement. Instead of asking 'What are the measurable facts?', the inquiry begins by asking, 'What is the core meaningful event (Ereignis) at the heart of this phenomenon?' This is immediately followed by a turn inward, a reflexive questioning of one's own hermeneutic situation: 'What pre-understandings and moods do I bring to this event, and how are they enabling my ability to see?' The analytical focus then shifts from causality to disclosure, asking, 'How is meaning being unconcealed (aletheia) here, and how does this singular event illuminate the broader, shared world of the participants?' This chain of questioning forms the practical core of a sociology of Ereignis.

Accepting the research encounter as an Ereignis has radical consequences; it necessitates dismantling the two foundational dogmas of positivist methodology. The first to fall is the very separation between subject and object. As argued previously, a 'case' is not an object over there, but a matter that has already claimed the researcher's concern. This

resonates perfectly with the argument from Anam (2024) that in an Ereignis, 'the researcher himself has been absorbed in the event he is experiencing.' The neat division between a subjective researcher and an objective 'case' dissolves into a more authentic understanding of a shared, intersubjective world.

Consequently, the second dogma—the principle of a 'value-free' science—also collapses. If the researcher is already absorbed in the event, and their ability to understand hinges on this very involvement, then pretending to be value-free is not only impossible, it is a methodological fraud. It is an act of self-deception that severs the connection that makes understanding possible. As Anam (2024) concludes, to 'completely break the chain of understanding the values that one has will also break the chain of the researcher's understanding of his research.' The researcher's pre-understandings and values are not contaminants to be eliminated; they are the very lens through which the light of an Ereignis can be perceived.

This methodological shift, therefore, is not a descent into pure subjectivity. Rather, it calls for a more authentic and demanding form of sociological practice. It asks more of the researcher: not the false rigor of procedural neutrality, but the genuine rigor of constant reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and the intellectual courage to face the ambiguity of meaning. In exchange for the illusion of certainty and the comfort of generalizable laws, this pathway offers a far greater prize: the possibility of a deep, contextual, and 'whole' understanding of human phenomena. This understanding remains forever beyond the grasp of a sociology that only knows how to count.

The practical implications of this heuristic are profound, transforming even the most basic sociological act: the interview. A sociologist operating under a positivist framework, seeking causality, might ask an informant, 'Why do you pray? What social benefits or psychological comforts do you gain from it?' This question hunts for an

external, functional explanation. In stark contrast, a sociologist practicing a 'Sociology of Ereignis', guided by the question of disclosure, would ask, 'How is the world for you when you are praying? Can you describe the moment when the everyday world recedes and a different sense of presence is disclosed to you?' This shift from 'why' to 'how' is not trivial. It moves away from imposing a causal framework and towards creating a space for the participant to articulate the Ereignis of their own spiritual experience. This is the ultimate practical difference: one method seeks to explain the person, the other seeks to understand the world through them.

5. Social-Critical Dimensions: Normative Implications and Critique

Despite its presentation as a value-neutral science, Comtean positivism carries significant and often unacknowledged normative implications. While striving for objective laws, it implicitly champions a vision of a 'good society' defined by order, efficiency, and technological progress. This 'scientization' of social problems naturally lends itself to a technocratic bias, where a scientific elite is positioned to engineer social progress, a vision that carries a significant risk of authoritarian control (Comte 2015; Habermas 2015).

This totalizing ambition is most evident in Comte's later project, the 'Religion of Humanity,' a meticulously planned attempt to replace traditional religion with a secular system (Wernick 2001). To be fair, Comte was not advocating for a simplistic atheism; he deeply recognized the crucial social function of religion in providing cohesion, moral guidance, and collective purpose (Comte 2001). His 'Religion of Humanity' was specifically designed to fulfill this vital function, but on a 'scientific' basis. Its object of worship was the 'Great Being' of Humanity itself—the collective entity encompassing past, present, and future generations (Comte 2022b). This secular religion was remarkably detailed, with a scientific priesthood, new rituals, and a moral code centered on 'living for others'

(Comte 2022a). However, it is precisely in this ambition to engineer morality that its core weakness is revealed. Critics immediately saw its artificiality, with John Stuart Mill doubting its capacity to inspire genuine devotion (Mill 1998) and Thomas Huxley memorably satirizing it as 'Catholicism minus Christianity' (Huxley 2022). These critiques underscore the fundamental tension between a scientifically constructed moral system and religious faith's organic, historically rooted nature.

Comte's attempt to engineer a secular religion, while acknowledging the social function of faith, ultimately reinforces the prophetic critique. It demonstrates the failure of a technocratic reason that seeks to manage or replace the spiritual dimension of life. This failure highlights the necessity for an approach that can understand transcendence not as a social function to be optimized, but as an authentic dimension of lived experience.

Heideggerian social ontology, in stark contrast, offers a fundamentally different framework for social critique, centered not on optimizing a system, but on the existential distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity (Dreyfus 2006; Mertel 2017). Inauthentic existence, defined by conformity to the 'they-self' (das Man), is a state of alienation perpetuated by modern social structures (Heidegger 2022). Authentic existence, conversely, is a mode of liberation achieved through the courageous-ethical act of taking ownership of one's life. Crucially, and in direct opposition to Comte, this framework does not seek to explain away or replace religious phenomena. However, it offers a way to understand them as a potential path to authentic, meaningful existence.

Ultimately, the social-critical dimensions of these two paradigms operate on fundamentally different planes. Even at its most radical, remains an immanent critique. It seeks to identify dysfunctions within the existing social system—the 'machine' of society—to repair or optimize it. The Heideggerian critique, in contrast, is a transcendental and ontological one. It does not ask how to fix the machine; it asks, 'Why this machine at all?' It

questions the very 'way of being' that the machine presupposes and enforces. The choice is not between two different tools for social change, but between two different revolutions: one that seeks to perfect the existing order, and one that questions its very foundation. To choose a mode of critique is to choose the very horizon of one's political and ethical imagination.

6. *Practical Implications*

The differences between the positivist and Heideggerian approaches translate into very different practical implications for how sociological research is conducted and interpreted. These differences are not simply about choosing different 'tools'; they reflect fundamentally different understandings of what constitutes valid knowledge and how it can be obtained. The following table summarizes these key distinctions:

Table 1.
The Methodological Consequences of an Irreconcilable
Ontological Choice

| Feature | Positivism (Comtean) | Heideggerian Social Ontology |
|---------------|--|--|
| Research Goal | To discover objective laws governing social phenomena; to predict and, potentially, control social processes; to test pre-existing theories and hypotheses (Neuber 2022). | To understand the meaning and significance of social phenomena within their context; to explore the lived experience of social actors; to offer a critique of existing social structures and practices (Gadamer 2013). |
| Methods | Primarily quantitative methods: surveys, experiments, statistical analysis. Emphasis on standardization, control, and large, representative samples. Deductive reasoning (Babbie 2021; Bryman 2016). | Primarily qualitative methods: ethnography, in-depth interviews, textual analysis, focus groups. Emphasis on immersion, participant observation, and the researcher's active engagement (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). |

| Feature | Positivism (Comtean) | Heideggerian Social Ontology |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Data Analysis | Statistical analysis to identify correlations and causal relationships. Focus on identifying patterns and regularities in quantifiable data. Emphasis on objectivity and replicability (Babbie 2021). | Interpretive analysis, guided by the hermeneutic situation. Focus on identifying themes, patterns, and contradictions in qualitative data. Emphasis on understanding meaning and context (Anam 2024). Reflexivity is key. |
| Role of Researcher | Detached, neutral observer. Researcher's values and biases are seen as potential threats to objectivity and are to be minimized or eliminated (Neuber 2022). | Engaged participant-observer, co-constructing meaning with research participants. Researcher's pre-understandings (Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff, Befindlichkeit) are acknowledged and critically examined (Heidegger 2008). |
| Knowledge Claims | Aims for generalizable, objective knowledge. Emphasis on universal laws and predictive models (Hempel 1976). | Acknowledges the situated, interpretive, and contextual nature of knowledge. Emphasis on understanding the particular rather than generalizing to universal laws. Recognizes the performative power of knowledge (Anam 2025b). |

7. The Inevitable Consequences: Symptoms of Positivism and Demands of an Interpretive Sociology

An honest evaluation of any paradigm requires understanding its inevitable consequences. For positivism, these consequences manifest as symptoms of a foundational ontological disease: a form of Ontological Blindness born from its commitment to a 'Flat Ontology' – the assumption that the only scientifically accessible reality is a world of discrete, measurable facts (Aspers 2015). This disease renders positivism constitutionally blind to the more fundamental dimensions of existence (Involvement, Meaning, and Disclosure) (Aspers and Kohl 2013), and inevitably manifests in severe methodological symptoms. The first is a

chronic reductionism; positivism is forced to reduce the richness of human experience to simplified models (Fraser 2005). This is necessarily coupled with the illusion of value-neutrality, where a detached stance is deemed possible (Chriss 2000; Neuber 2022) precisely because the ontology has already artificially severed the researcher from the world, ignoring the fundamental involvement that makes understanding possible in the first place (Anam 2024).

In stark contrast, the 'challenges' of a Heideggerian approach are better understood as a series of radical demands that attest to its philosophical rigor. First, what is often perceived as a 'lack of clear guidelines' is, in fact, a principled rejection of procedural comfort (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). It demands heightened intellectual responsibility and freedom from the researcher, refusing to provide a false sense of security through rigid protocols and instead insisting on the courage to think authentically (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Second, the charge of 'subjectivity' is a misdiagnosis of what is actually an honest acknowledgement of the inescapable hermeneutic condition. This condition is safeguarded from pure relativism by the shared world of *Mitsein* and the ongoing dialogue within the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 2013). Unlike positivism's pretense of a view from nowhere, this approach makes the researcher's situatedness the explicit and rigorous starting point for authentic understanding. Consequently, its 'limited generalizability' is not a failure, but a conscious commitment to the particular, deliberately sacrificing broad laws for deep, contextualized insight (Rodriguez, Flyvbjerg, and Sampson 2003).

Thus, the 'limitations' of the Heideggerian paradigm are not weaknesses to be overcome, but rather the very 'price of admission' for a sociology that seeks depth, authenticity, and ethical self-awareness. They are not bugs in the system, but core features of a more demanding, and ultimately more rewarding, intellectual commitment.

8. *Sociology of Ereignis as the Fulfillment of Prophetic Social Science*

The call to 'rethink how we do sociology' – to move towards a more reflexive and engaged practice – is an urgent response to a widely felt crisis. In the Indonesian intellectual context, this call for a value-laden, transformative social science was most powerful in Kuntowijoyo's 'Prophetic Social Science.' At its core, Prophetic Social Science is not merely a descriptive theory but an ethical and transformative call to action, built upon three pillars: humanization, the struggle against the dehumanizing reduction of human beings to mere objects; liberation, the effort to free society from all forms of structural and intellectual oppression; and transcendence, the commitment to anchor social struggles in a spiritual and meaningful dimension (Kuntowijoyo 2006). This final section will now demonstrate systematically how the proposed 'Sociology of Ereignis' provides the rigorous foundation and deep analytical tools needed to realize the ambitions of each of these three pillars fully.

The prophetic call for humanization finds a powerful analytical ally in the Heideggerian critique of technology as *Gestell* (enframing). As previously diagnosed, a positivist methodology inevitably enacts a form of dehumanization by reducing lived experience to a manageable standing-reserve (*Bestand*) of data. This is not merely a philosophical concern; sociologists of religion themselves have increasingly recognized the inherent limitations of such quantitative approaches. Recent studies consistently find that surveys tend to oversimplify the multidimensional nature of faith, reducing it to predefined categories that fail to capture its lived reality (Mohd Dali, Yousafzai, and Abdul Hamid 2019; Ul-Haq et al. 2019). These methods are often culturally blind, struggling to access the inner, spiritual, and experiential aspects of piety that constitute its very essence (Marhumah, Muyyassaroh, and Sciortino 2024; Muhson et al. 2024). A 'Sociology of Ereignis' allows for a deeper diagnosis: this reductionism is a symptom of the technological worldview of *Gestell*. By providing the

tools to diagnose Gestell at work, our approach offers a more fundamental critique of dehumanization, thereby serving the ethical imperative of the Prophetic Social Science project.

Similarly, the prophetic demand for liberation extends beyond the purely political or economic realms into the domain of intellectual and existential oppression. The dominance of a single, objectifying scientific paradigm is a form of intellectual oppression, forcing researchers into the inauthentic conformity of the 'they-self' (das Man), where one thinks and speaks only as 'one' is supposed to. Our work argues, that this state of inauthenticity is a core challenge of our technological age (Anam 2025a). A 'Sociology of Ereignis' contributes to liberation by emphasizing the path to authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*). This path involves a courageous rejection of taken-for-granted assumptions and the willingness to take an authentic, personal, ethical stance. Thus, it provides a crucial existential depth to the project of social liberation: true liberation begins with the intellectual courage to break free from the anonymous tyranny of dominant paradigms.

Perhaps the most profound challenge for a sociology that takes the prophetic call seriously is the pillar of transcendence. Here, positivism is not merely limited; but structurally and methodologically blind. Its 'Flat Ontology' has no mechanism for grasping phenomena like faith, lived piety, or the experience of barakah other than by reducing them to behavioral indicators. In doing so, it commits the ultimate act of violence against the phenomenon: it explains it away entirely, leaving only a soulless caricature. It cannot study the world where God is relevant; it can only study the world from which God has already been ontologically expelled.

At this impasse, the methodological 'sword' of a 'Sociology of Ereignis' demonstrates its true power. Shifting the unit of analysis from the 'social fact' to the 'meaningful event' (Ereignis), as established in our prior methodological work (Anam 2024), offers a path to study the supra-empirical phenomenologically. It asks the more fundamental sociological

question: 'How is the world constituted for a person for whom God is real?' The call to study the event of meaning aligns with a rich body of ethnographic work on Muslim societies in Indonesia, which already reveals the complex and contextual nature of lived Islam (Sulaeman et al. 2022; Truna 2021). A 'Sociology of Ereignis' provides a rigorous philosophical language for this practice, allowing sociology to take transcendence seriously as a world-shaping phenomenon, thus fulfilling the third and most difficult demand of Prophetic Social Science.

The pathway forward, is not a modification of existing methods but the articulation of a new approach, which this paper terms 'Sociology of Ereignis'. This is not merely a new set of techniques, but a fundamentally different sociological practice: one that is consciously (1) ontologically grounded in the irreducible reality of Being-in-the-world; (2) methodologically oriented towards the disclosure of meaning within a unique, lived Ereignis; and (3) ethically committed to the prophetic call for a more humane and just world. This proposal provides a concrete and rigorous answer to the urgent call to 'rethink how we do sociology' from its very foundations. This project synthesizes and is deeply rooted in established work on methodology, hermeneutics, and the critique of technology (Anam 2025a).

D. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the ontological and epistemological divide between Comtean positivism and Heideggerian social ontology is more than a theoretical contrast; it marks two incommensurable starting points for doing sociology. Positivism rests on a realist ontology, seeking universal laws through value-free observation. At the same time, Heideggerian thought insists on Being-in-the-world, interpretation, and the hermeneutic situation as the foundations of knowledge. When reframed through the lens of Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science, the analysis

demonstrates that positivism's flat ontology cannot accommodate the prophetic pillars of humanization, liberation, and transcendence. By contrast, Heideggerian social ontology provides a conceptual and methodological opening for what this paper terms a 'Sociology of Ereignis' – an approach that centers meaningful events, reflexivity, and the disclosure of transcendence as legitimate dimensions of inquiry.

These findings reflect the broader need to rethink the ontological foundations of sociology itself. The comparative analysis clarifies that choosing an ontology is not just a technical matter of methods but an ethical stance with consequences for how we see and treat human beings in research. In this sense, the contrast between positivism and Heideggerian thought mirrors the tension within the discipline between reducing people to measurable objects and acknowledging them as participants in meaningful worlds. This finding reflects the urgent necessity for sociology – especially in Muslim societies – to adopt an approach that does not merely record behavior but engages lived meaning and transcendence as real and constitutive of social life.

This study is limited in that it focuses on conceptual analysis without applying it in empirical settings, and future research is necessary to translate the Sociology of Ereignis into concrete fieldwork applications. Future studies should experiment with combining Heideggerian hermeneutics with concrete research practices such as ethnography, narrative interviews, or digital netnography in Muslim communities to test the viability of this framework. The implication of this research is that methodological innovation in sociology cannot be separated from ontological reflection; by re-grounding Prophetic Social Science in Heideggerian social ontology, scholars may develop more reflexive, ethically committed, and socially responsive tools for studying religion and society in the contemporary world.

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