

FALSIFIABILITY IN THE PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

PhD Student Gabriela-Mariana IONESCU

School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy (SCOSAAR), Romania
E-mail: gabrielaionescu13@gmail.com

Abstract: According to the almost general concept, a science has the sole purpose of constructing explanations (understood as objective causal descriptions). But this applies only to the natural sciences, because in the social field there are also subjective causes (called goals or final causes) that are generated by free will, so they are unpredictable. Consequently, the factual falsification required by Popper is not possible. The paper aims to examine this impossibility in a conceptual, methodological and instrumental way in order to identify an alternative that would save the testability in the social field. The „social object” used for this analysis is the phenomenon of social justice. In order to elucidate the proposed subject, social justice will be researched both from an institutional, formal and cultural perspective, which implies taking into account the axiological matrix of society.

Key words: social justice, procedural testing, factual testing.

JEL Classification: A14, B40, O10.

1. Popperian theory of falsification

1.1. The verifiability

The empirical test of the propositions proposed by the Vienna Circle (logical positivism or logical empiricism), that is the verificationism compares, from a semantic point of view, a predictive statement based on a theory/hypothesis about a given fact, with a descriptive statement about that factual, confirming or invalidating the predictive statement. We can formulate the following logical structure:

- T_F^j : the theory j about the class of factials F
- $E_{f_i}^{TF}$: predictive verbal statement about the factual i , where $f_i \in F$, with $i = \overline{1, n_T^F}$, on T_F
- $\bar{E}_{f_i}^{TF}$: descriptive verbal statement about the factual i , where $f_i \in F$, with $i = \overline{1, n_T^F}$

The verifiability process involves verifying all descriptive statements $\bar{E}_{f_i}^{TF}$ (in number of n_T^F) by semantic comparison with the corresponding predictive sentence. If the denoted (referential) of all descriptive statements coincides with the denoted (referential) of the predictive statement, then the predictive statement is believed to be true, and as a consequence, the theory (or hypothesis) on which the predictive statement was issued is true. Figure no. 1 presents the verifiability test procedure for the truth of a statement.

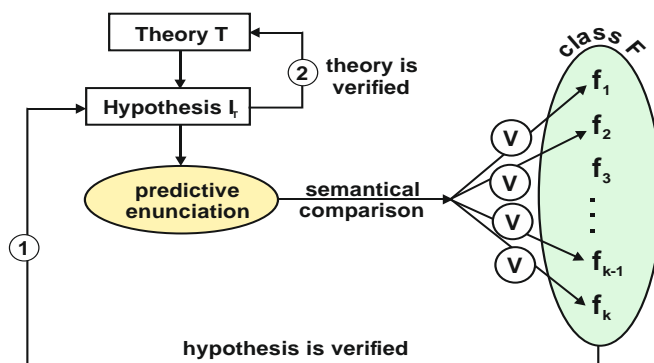


Figure no. 1. Functioning criteria for testing truth verifiability

Source: autor's work

Identified, from a logical-positivist perspective, as a strong empiricist principle (P. Goodfrei-Smith, 2003), the applicability of this verification test (criterion) can be examined from two points of view:

- a) from an ontological point of view verifiability refers to the completeness of the class of factual F . Indeed, verifiability presupposes, by definition, the exhaustion of the class of facts to which the predictive statement refers. However, there may be factuais from the reference class that happened millions of years ago or that will happen millions of years in the future. Both about the past factuais and especially the future factuais, there is no complete and certainly not accurate information. For this reason, there is no certainty on the completeness of the formation (constitution) of the F class. This makes the verifiability undermined in its ontological definition itself;
- b) from a pragmatic point of view the verifiability-refers to the pragmatic possibility of verifying class F of factuais even when the ontological problem has been overcome. If we admit that a theory only concerns future facts and that there is a criterion to ensure the completeness of the class of facts in question then the ontological question of verifiability does not exist. If a finite time horizon is not given (and being relatively short in relation to the life of the individual), then all possible facts cannot be verified, so the theory or hypothesis on which the predictive statement was issued cannot be verified from the perspective of the veracity attribute.

The social presence of cultural subjects capable of free will, the unpredictability of social phenomena are two of the specific elements that lead to the conclusion that verificationism as a method of scientific testing of the true is not acceptable at the level of testing the empirical facts but rather regarding the level of procedural tests.

1.2. The falsifiability

It is a type of empirical test of the statements introduced by Karl Popper (Popper, 1981). As in the case of verification, a predictive statement is compared with a descriptive statement on the same fact in order to get either the rejection of the predictive statement or the non-refutation (i.e. corroboration). The method does not require verification of all the facts in that class so that until a rejection occurs, the theory/hypothesis is considered true, but the truth is not definitive. There is no need for exhaustive testing of the theory/hypothesis (which is not even possible). Karl Popper proposed a test of truth to avoid the two vulnerabilities of verifiability (the ontological problem, respectively the pragmatic problem) (Popper, 2001).

The criterion proposed by K. Popper is called the falsificability criterion and assumes the following logical description:

- T_F^j : the theory j about the class of factuais F
- $E_{f_i}^{T_F}$: predictive verbal statement about the factual i , where $f_i \in F$, with $i = \overline{1, \infty}$, on T_F
- $\bar{E}_{f_i}^{T_F}$: descriptive verbal statement about the factual i , where $f_i \in F$, with $i = \overline{1, \infty}$

The falsification process no longer involves verifying all descriptive statements of the factuais from the factual class taken into account when the predictive statement was issued. This eliminates the need to build the class of fact F that was needed for the verifiability criterion. Also, this criterion no longer requires the exhaustion of the verification of all the facts to which the predictive statement refers (and, as a result, no longer requires the active, methodical search for these facts). Unlike the verifiability criterion, which was an active search criterion, the falsification criterion is a passive, waiting one. Specifically, the predictive statement is considered true since its issuance. Until this statement is invalidated by a factual (actually by a descriptive statement of that factual) of the factual class considered, it continues to be considered true. Any factual (in fact, any descriptive statement about a factual) that does not invalidate the predictive

statement is considered to corroborate it (do not verify it!) so this statement will continue to be considered true. With the first descriptive statement of a factual from the corresponding class of factials to which the predictive statement refers, which invalidates the predictive statement, the latter statement is considered false (or falsified in Karl Popper's terminology). In this case, the assumption on which the predictive statement was issued is considered to be false (falsified). Graphically, Figure no. 2 visualises how the falsifiability criterion works in testing the truth.

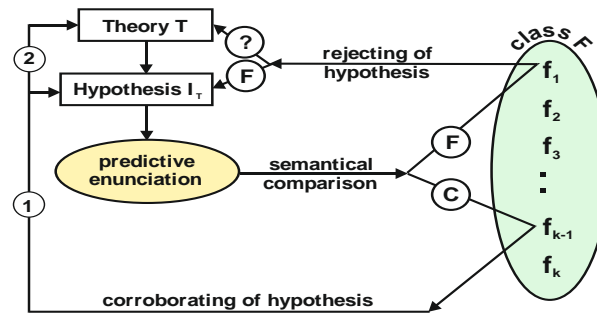


Figure no. 2. Functioning of the falsifiability criterion in testing the truth

Source: autor's work

In conclusion, the method proposed by Karl Popper is applicable in the field of natural sciences where predictions can exist, so we consider the falsificationism to be the only acceptable method of scientific testing of the truth.

1.3. Vulnerabilities of Popper theory in the natural sciences

The first identified vulnerability relates to the fact that in the field of natural sciences there is no certainty about ensuring the conditions of experimentation or observation of the fact in question as they were provided in the scientific theory/hypothesis. Even if the conditions of the scientific theory/hypothesis are complied with in the empirical experiment, we still need a hermeneutics (interpretative theory) to compare the predictive statement with the descriptive one. On this hermeneutics, the members of the scientific community will not easily agree.

The two identified vulnerabilities refer to the fact that there is no certainty about the invariance of the initial conditions, which makes the predictive statement no longer comparable to the descriptive one.

2. Impossibility of Popper falsification in the social field

2.1. Specific research objects of the social field

In the social field we consider that the social object is always an artifact (it does not exist, does not appear, does not disappear and does not change else than only through social action - individual or group), it is always the result of an intention, decision, action) in order to achieve a goal. The phenomenology of the social object is not a completely rational one (inferentially derivable from a rationality model) it is affected by free will (by the lack of calculation). Thus, the social object is an effect of the subject's action.

In the social field, the point of view of some economists (Dinga, 2016), expressed in the literature, about the inefficiency of causal relationship prediction is based on the following arguments:

- 1) the invariable initial conditions cannot be ensured, due to the presence of the subject in the economic process, the subject-object indiscernibility in the economic process appears;

2) the formulation (vagueness) of the concept of truth of economic propositions, the substitution of correspondence veracity with hermeneutical plausibility is not sufficient, we must continue with the notion of acceptability, with building a direct link between causal teleology and evaluation from the axiological point of view of the effect we want to achieve;

3) the existence of multiple causality, multiple effectiveness, which makes the analytical highlighting of causal relationships extremely difficult, lead to the conclusion that they can be recovered in the formulation of the individual prediction (simple cause - simple effect).

2.2. The necessary presence of the subject in the social object

A peculiarity of the social domain is that the social object is not a pure object (like it is the natural field), but it is generated by the subject and the generating subject is a structural component of the social object itself. It can be said that the subject is necessarily present in the social object. Thus, in this area, we should not talk about the social object but about the subject-object package (the SO package).

In the social field, the prediction can only be done in relation to the subject, we can talk about its behavior rather than about the object (the prediction can be about the subject object package. In the social field the subject cannot be separated from the object either from a cognitive perspective or from a praxiological one).

2.3. Confirmability as a principle of falsification in the social field

The criterion of confirmability (or confirmation) has also been proposed, in order to avoid the insurmountable problems raised by the verifiability criterion. Like the verifiability criterion and the falsifiability criterion, confirmability aspires to a factual test rather than to a logical (or grammatical) coherence of the statement in question. In contrast, however, to the two mentioned criteria, confirmability no longer refers to an effective test. In fact, confirmation could be considered as a potential test. The main coordinates of the proposed test of confirmation are as follows:

- testing target is still the *factual*, but *indirectly*, not directly. This refers to the fact that only one thing is "guaranteed" by means of confirmation, namely the ability of testing to produce a test result, whatever it may be;

- testing has a *potential* nature, not an effective one. Consistent with the fact that the test by confirmation does not test the factual but tests, to say so, the testability of the factual, it can be said that this type of testing is a potential one, which can be applied or can be not actually applied as well;

- testing is of a *second degree*. Indeed, by providing information on the possibility of a decisive test (in the sense that it is a test capable of producing a certain, non-ambiguous result), testing by confirmation is, as mentioned above, rather a test of testability.

Figure no. 3 shows the way in which the test of confirmability is applied in testing the truth of a statement.

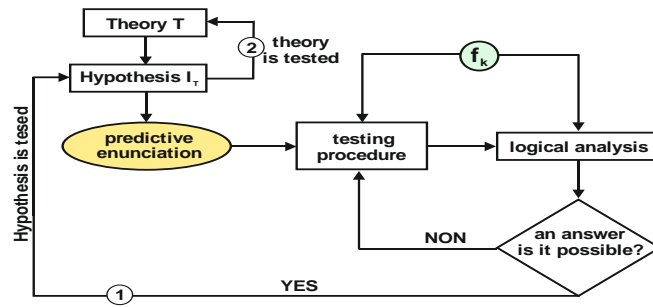


Figure no. 3. The functioning of the test of confirmability in testing the truth

Source: autor's work

The use of confirmation is advisable in cases where the realization of the experimental conditions for direct factual testing through the falsifiability criterion is impossible or liable to uncontrollable deviations from the conditions of the hypothesis (that is, from the conditions required by the predictive statement). The questionableness of direct factual test experiments by falsification makes it possible that in the natural field to disregard the result of an experiment. Even more, therefore, in the social field where the "procurement" of factials through observation, measurement and recording is more difficult and disturbed by many factors outside the control of the experimenter, it is necessary to use such a criterion to test factual truth by a secondary testing, i.e. by testing of testability. So, by applying the confirmability criterion, a non-ambiguous result is obtained with regard of testability itself. In other words, applying this criterion tells us that if we test directly the factual target in the predictive statement, it will certainly be a non-ambiguous result, either of corroboration (in Popper's language) or of invalidation of the prediction, but, of course, does not tell us what the result of direct testing will be. From a logical point of view, a procedural testing based on the confirmability criterion gives a direct response not to the hypothesis tested, but to the possibility of testing that hypothesis, ie. about the possibility of providing a non-ambiguous answer on the testability of the hypothesis.

3. A proposal to save testability in the social field

3.1. The social object in the field of social justice

The concept of social justice refers to a state of society in which two principles of social positioning of individuals are satisfied at the same time:

- a) the principle of *merit*: the adjudication of social values (economic, political, moral, etc.) in proportion to the merit (contribution to the generation and implementation of those values) - described by the positive law;
- b) the principle of *ought*: the adjudication of social values (economic, political, moral, etc.) on the basis of the justification conferred by the quality of human being (described by natural law)

The concept of the subject of social justice refers to the sustainable formation of the mix of the two fundamental principles, the principle of contribution, and the principle of solidarity. The two principles are not contradictory, they can coexist but are necessarily substitutable with respect to the whole, i.e. if the "participation" of a principle increases, the "participation" of the other decreases to the same extent as the "participation" of the first principle, and vice versa.

3.2. The specificity of testability in social justice

Considering the specificity of the social object and, moreover, the specificity of the object of social justice, factual testability is practically impossible (due to the presence of free will, therefore due to the possibility of modifying the "law of movement"). Testability should be of a procedural nature, a procedure having the following characteristics: 1) to ensure the ability to compare the descriptive statement with the normative or prescriptive statement (statement that will refer to what we can call the fairness of the distribution of the economic product); 2) to ensure the non-ambiguity of the comparison results (to be a certainty result). The predictive statement in social justice refers to the mix of the two principles (we propose an abbreviated name for this class of statements, namely MECSUSS statements), in addition, we specify that both prescriptive and descriptive statements are of the MECSUSS type. As a result, only a testability of the confirmability type is feasible.

3.3. A proposal for procedural testing in the social field

The paper proposes a model of procedural testing in the social field, graphically illustrated in Figure no. 4.

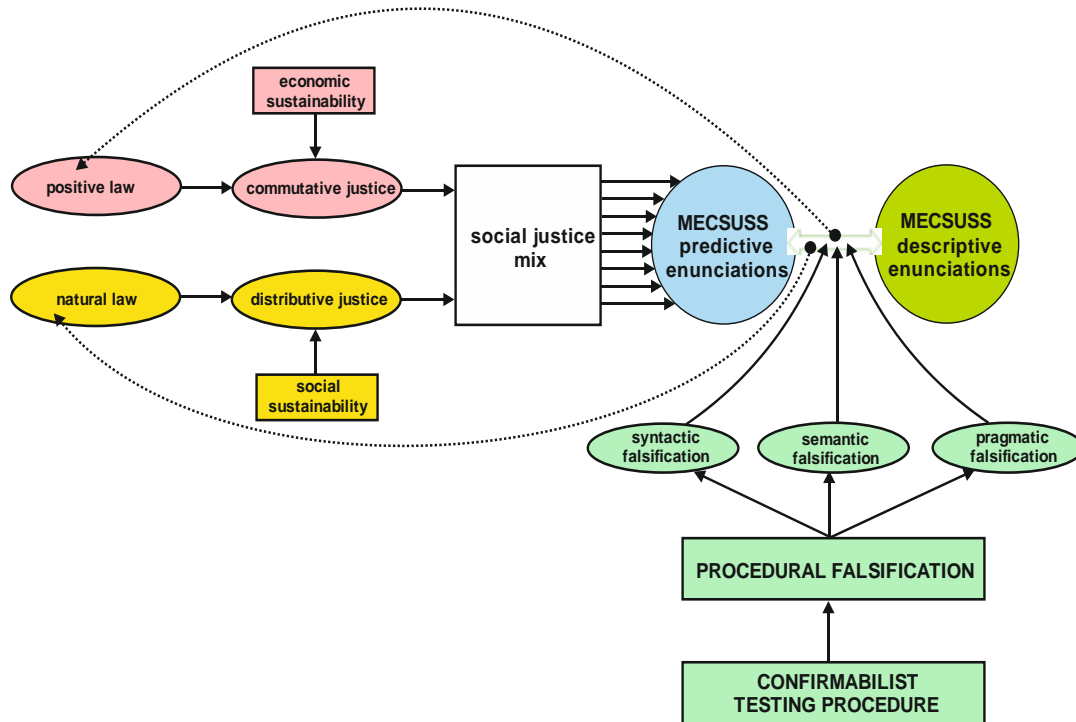


Figure no. 4. The functioning of the test of confirmability in testing the truth in the social field

Source: autor's work

From the analysis of the concepts presented in the paper, at this stage of the research, some conceptual and methodological aspects were developed in order to design a specific testing mechanism for the social domain. The following research of the author will include the presentation, argumentation and evaluation of particular elements of a procedural falsification procedure in the field of social justice.

References:

1. Dinga, E., 2015. *Predicție și predictorii în economie*. Workshop Cercetarea-protocoale și creativitate în cunoaștere, READ.
2. Dinga, E., 2016. *Elemente de modelare macroeconomică*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române.
3. Godfrey-Smith, P., 2003. *Theory and Reality. An introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
4. Popper, K., 1981. *Logica cercetării*. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.
5. Popper, K., 2001. *Conjecturi și infirmări*. Bucharest: Editura Trei.