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`QUESTION: In not more than 2 pages, do a review of Chapter 8 of Temidayo D. Oladipo and Noah O. Balogun, History and Philosophy of Science: A Brief Survey. Ibadan: Hope Publications, pages 86-95.

CHAPTER 8: Philosophy of Social Sciences (and Applied Sciences)

Success was recorded for natural science in the 18th and 19th centuries and as thus people sought ways to include it into their social and intellectual aspects of life. The positive response to science happened as a result of a change in the socio-cultural milieu of the time and this explains why belief in science or its application to any issue is called positivism. The period in which positivism grew was enlightenment or renaissance period. The period before that was called the Dark Ages where the Church was supreme and the Pope’s say was final. The infiltration of literature brought about the classical period of Romanticism and this period gave rise to humanism and naturalism and works of art produced during this period were called classic.

Science was restricted to study the phenomena because it was only the material that was believed to behave in a regular and predictable way. This was not until a French social philosopher called August Comte thought otherwise. He was of the opinion that society behaves in a regular pattern much like material things and this behaviour can be studied and somewhat predictions made. He is regarded as the father of sociology and social sciences in general. Positivism declares false all propositions that could not be solved or verified by experience such as metaphysical statements due to a high degree of abstract nature. Observation is the first problem and it is laden with error with the facts that include: (i) Observations are concept-laden, (ii) Observations are hypothesis-laden, (iii) Observations are theory-laden, (iv) Observations are value-laden, (v) Observations are interest-laden, (vi) Observations are laden with culture-specific ontologies.

Social science is an area of study dedicated to the exploration of human behaviour, interaction and manifestations, either as an individual in a society or collectively as a group including the institutions, norms and mores such interaction created. August Comte is regarded as the father of social science. Social sciences seek to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study. Some objectives include: (i) to understand human behaviour and change both historically and culturally, (ii) to be able to predict human behaviour based on belief system, social norms and other factors in relation to economic and political activities, (iii) to influence human behaviour to groom it towards development etc.

The philosophy of social science arouse out of the curiousity that the central focus and the propelling motive of social science may be impossible or unattainable due to methodological mismatch. In other words, it’s simply saying that man is a conscious and rational being and may not behave in the same laid down pattern.

The Problem of Reasons and Causes: Francis Offor explains that the principle of cause and effect states that for every event in the universe, there is asset of conditions such that if the conditions are fulfilled then the event invariably occurs. This is the principle that underlies the method of explanation in science.

The reason for something can be many but the cause of something cannot be. A way to solve this problem is to accept reasons are not causes but motive and intent. August Comte, J.S. Mill, T.M. Newcomb have argued on whether it is not better to leave reason as motive, drive or intent and not cause. Robin Collingwood argues to the extreme that reasons are not only causes but they are the ultimate casual power which lies in human and that ascribing casual power to inanimate things and objects in the physical world may be too naïve to us.

The Problem of Human Person as Object of Study in Social Sciences: another problem with the project of social science according to Max Weber is man, a rational being with free will, desires, emotions and other sentient features that can alter his actions or reactions.

This problem states that the actions of man are unpredictable as they can change anytime due to different factors. An example is the Law of Demand and Supply which states that the higher the supply the lower the price. Man being filled with insatiable wants does not necessarily follow this rule. This problem is also worsened by capitalists who have been able to manipulate consumer behaviour to the point that it is doubtful that these laws hold anymore. Therefore the use of man poses as a very big problem in the field of social science study.