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COURSE: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE (GST 118)

CHAPTER 8: PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES [AND APPLIED SCIENCES]

The area of natural science increased rapidly in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it also affected the social and intellectual life of people greatly that people started consulting advice unrelated to science. This was a result in change of social milieu which made the belief or application of science to be known as positivism. This period was known as the renaissance or enlightenment period. This period is known as the enlightenment period because people demanded for reasons behind public decisions rather than religious beliefs. Before this period, we had the period known as the dark age. In this age religion was held up in high esteem and the pope had the final authority. The church back then found ways to remove heathens in their midst through either the excuse of witchcraft and diseases. The intellectuals rebuked this age because it was not for the happiness and survival of humans. This brought about a lot of literature texts to increase their reasoning. In arts and music they were improvement also, these works were regarded as classic. We have founding fathers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. This led to the period of romanticism and further to naturalism and humanism. Betrand Russell says that the period known as modern has a mental outlook that differs from the medieval period. The two most important factors that marks this period are the diminishing authority of the church and increasing authority of science. Russell also suggests the removal of the authority of the church led to the growth of individualism and point of anarchy but the renaissance period expose the mind of men to scholastic and ecclesiastical government. Scientific approach out of knowledge that science studies things in a regular and predictable way. Comte, a French philosopher claimed that society can also be studied in the same manner. He is known as the father of sociology and social science. Positivism refutes any speculation that is not backed by experience as a way of gaining or acquiring knowledge. There are a lot of problems associated with positivism, the first is observation, the facts are observation is concept, hypothesis, theory, value, interest, culture-specific ontologies laden.

What is social science?

Social science can be defined as the study of human behavior, actions or manifestations either as a group or society. It includes disciplines such as sociology, archaeology, political science and so on. The founding father is considered Auguste Comte even though we had earlier philosophers such as St Augustine, Ibn Khaldun, Karl Max, Thomas Hobbes and a host of others. There are various objectives of social science. Problems arises in the study of human beings through scientific approach. This is due to the fact that human beings are conscious and do not act in a predictable a regular way.

Problem of reasons and causes

An essential feature of science is to find a connection between an event and its cause. Ernest Nagel present David Hume’s exposition of the notion of causation in a bullet which shows that for a something to be cause of another, cause and effect must: have a invariable relation, be spatially contiguous, be temporally related, and have an asymmetrical relation. For example, Mr. A punched a friend at the gym when he was asked he replied that he was angry. Note he can also punch his friends because he was happy or just teasing him. If reason can be many and causes cannot, to what extent can we take reasons as causes? That is why reason are referred to as motive rather than cause. For instance in this second example a man goes to the supermarket to buy canned beef therefore we can say buying canned beef is the cause and going to the supermarket the effect. What if he doesn’t find the canned beef and decides to buy soda drink. Another problem arise if reasons are causes, because the cause cannot precede the effect. Scholars like J.S Mill, T.M Newcomb and Auguste Comte support that reason is just motive or intent. But scholars like Robin Collingwood argue that reasons are causes.

Problem of human person as object of study in social sciences

Another problem in the scientific study of humans and their behavior is that human beings are rational beings. For example the law of demand and supply are assumptions caused to their rational nature. These laws sometimes do not hold because human beings are unpredictable. Another example that is common is that of android and iphone users. Some applications on these devices are meant to be updated and will force the users to update them. The law of demand and supply do not hold here as consumers do not have choice. Can these laws still be referred to as scientific laws?