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DEPARTMENT: LAW

LEVEL: 100 LEVEL

COURSE CODE: GST 118

MATRIC NO: 19/LAW01/054

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 Publication .pages 86-95.

The success recorded in natural science in the eighteenth and nighteenth century was so enormous on the social and intellectual life of the then people of Europe that they started trusting the world of scientist and even sought their opinion on matters unrelated to science such as law and forensic evidence.

The socio-cultural milieu in which positivism grew is called the renaissance and the enlightenment period. It is a renaissance period because it marked a period when people started a revolution of return to their Greek heritage of using reason in matters of public concern and not the dictate of religion as it was in the age prior to this time. The aeon prior to the renaissance period was called the dark ages because it was the time religious belief reigned supreme. The words of the pope was the final authority on any matter, be it political social or intellectual. It was a time when men and women were burned at stake because the church has found them guilty of witch craft or sorcery, Diseases were said to be direct consequences of sin and idolatry, so the church waged severally wars to exterminate the heathens.

However, irrespective of the shortcomings of positivism, let us explicate on the idea of social science it birthed.

What is Social Science?

Social science is an area of study dedicated to the explanation of human behavior, interaction and manifestations, either as an individual in a society or collectively as a group; including the institutions, norms and mores such interactions created. Discipline in the social science include: sociology , psychology, economics, political science, archeology and back to early philosophers who wanted to study how society works such as St Augustine and the 14th –century historian Ibn khaldun; down to Karl Marx, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Emile Durkheim and a host of other social thinkers. However, it was Auguste Comte that is regarded as the father of social science.

The Problem of Reasons and Causes

To understand this problem with social sciences better, we need to understand that one of the essential features of science and scientific explanation is to provide a casual or correlational connection between an event and its cause. That is, to explain why event A is the cause of event B which is the effect. According to this account, for anything to be the cause of another, the cause and effect must:

1. Have an invariable or constant relation in the sense that whenever the alleged cause occurs, the effect must also occur,

2. be spatially contiguous, that is, the two events must occur in approximately the same location or at least be related by a chain of events that are spatially linked;

Francis Offor explains this point in the following words;

The principle of cause and effect states that for every event in the universe, there is a set

Of conditions such that if the conditions are all fulfilled, then the event invariably occurs.

Put differently, the principle states that for every event ‘B’ in the universe, there is always

‘B’ in the universe, there is always a cause ‘A’, such that ‘B’ can always be explained by

Reference to the activities of event ‘A’. This is the principle that underlines the method

Of explanation in science.

Offor goes further to assert that, “by employing the scientific method in social investigation, the social sciences seek to explain the cause of action involving human agents”.

The Problem of Human Person as Object of Study in Social Sciences

Another problem with the project of social science is that, according to Max Weber, methodology of science becomes inapplicable due to the fact that the object of study in social science is a man, a rational being with freewill, desires, emotions and other sentient features that come into play in his actions or reactions. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behaviour with which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws. Take for instance the law of demand and supply in economics which predicts that human as a rational being will buy less when the price is high and buy more when the price is low. It is on this basic assumption of rational behaviour that the law of demand and supply was formulated: The higher the demand, higher the price, but the higher the supply the lower the price. This is also referred to as Market forces.

Now, if a supposed scientific law is neither absolute nor hold quite often, should we continue to call it scientific law of economics?