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In not more than 2 pages, do a review of Chapter 8 of History and Philosophy of Science: A Brief Survey.

Chapter 8: Philosophy of Social Sciences (And Applied Sciences)

In this chapter, the recorded success of natural science in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was mentioned. It was stated that it was so enormous on the social and intellectual lives of the people in Europe then, that they started trusting the words of scientists and even sought their own opinion on matters unrelated such as law and forensic evidence. The response to science was positive and it happened as a result of change in the socio-cultural milieu of time. This explains why belief in science or application of science to any issue is called positivism from then on.

Socio-cultural milieu which positivism grew is called renaissance and the enlightenment period. It is called this because it marked the 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 referred to as the dark ages because it was the time when religious beliefs reigned supreme. Words of the Pope were final authority on any matter, whether political, social and intellectual. That was the time people; both men and women were burned on a stake if the Church found them guilty of witchcraft or sorcery. Even diseases were said to be consequences of sin and idolatry, leading to the Church waging several wars to exterminate the heathens. However, the intellectual community at that time saw this as a big threat to human happiness and survival. They started to infiltrate literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at justified conclusion as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle used to do. The Greek had hidden worldviews in arts and music too. It then became known as the classical period of romanticism. This gave rise to humanism and naturalism, and works of art and literature produced at the same time were also referred to as classic. Bertrand Russell said that, “the period of history which is commonly called “modern” has a mental outlook which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways. Of these, two are the most important; the diminishing authority of the Church, and the increasing authority of science. Discipline, intellectual, moral, and political, was associated in the minds of the men of the renaissance with the scholastic philosophy and ecclesiastical government.”

The scientific approach to things grew out of the philosophical approach to issues, but science was restricted to study of natural phenomena because it was only the material that was believed to behave in a regular and predictable way. Until a French social philosopher called August Comte thought otherwise. He had the opinion that the society behaves in a regular pattern like material things and this behaviour can be studied and have accurate predictions made. This shows the beginning of social sciences, especially sociology and August Comte is seen as the father till today.

In this chapter, positivism is said to reject theoretical speculations not based on facts of experience as a means of obtaining knowledge. There are a lot of problems with these conceptions of ideal knowledge seeking enterprise. The first problem is observation upon which the basic justification of positivism came is laden with error. There are six facts of these positivism laden problems.

In the same chapter, the writers also looked upon social science. Here social science is said to be a area of study that explains human behaviour, interaction and manifestations either as an individual in a society or collectively as a group including the institutions, norms and more; such interactions create. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science and so on are disciplines of social sciences. Philosophers such as St. Augustine and the 14th century historian Iba Khaldun; down to Karl Marx, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Emile Durkheim and others wanted to study how the society works.

Social sciences seek to understand humans in both historical and cultural development context and factors responsible for such development or change. It endeavours to be able to predict human behaviour based on the pattern of interaction, belief system, social norms and other factors influencing human behaviour, especially in relation to economic and political activities. It also endeavours to advance beyond armchair philosophy, the knowledge about the characteristic temperament and associated behaviour of person or group, or that exhibited by those engaged in an activity.

In this chapter the problems of reasons and causes were discussed. According to this account, for anything to the cause of another, the cause and effect must have an invariable or constant relation in the sense that whenever the alleged cause occurs, the effect must also occur. It also must 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. Robin Collingwood argues to the extreme that reasons are not only causes but they are ultimate causal power which lies in human and that ascribing causal power to inanimate things and objects in the physical world may be too naïve of us.

Finally, in this chapter, the problem of human person as object of study in Social Sciences was discussed. And according to Max Weber methodology of science becomes inapplicable due to the fact that the object of study in social science is man, a rational being with freewill, desires, emotions and other sentient features that come into play in his actions or reactions. However, it has been observed even by economists themselves that these laws do not hold all the time since man does not behave rationally all the time. In fact, in recent years, capitalists have been able to manipulate consumer behaviour to the point it is doubtful if these laws hold any longer. If a supposed scientific law is neither absolute nor hold quite often, should we continue to call it scientific laws of economics?