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ASSIGNMENT: 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.

This Chapter talks about Philosophy of Social Sciences and Applied Sciences. The positive response of science is as a result of a change in the socio-cultural milieu of the time and this explains why belief in science or application of science to any issue is called positivism from then on. The socio-cultural milieu in which positivism grew is called the renaissance and the enlightenment period. The aeon prior to the renaissance period was called the dark ages because it was the time religious belief reigned supreme. Diseases were said to be direct con sequence of sin and idolatry, so the Church waged several wars to exterminate the heathens.

However, the intellectual community at the time saw this as a big threat to human happiness and survival. So they started infiltrating literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at justified conclusion just as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle used to do. In arts and music were hidden Greek worldviews too. This became known as the classical period of romanticism which gave rise to humanism and naturalism, and works of art and literature produced at this time were also regarded as classic. Bertrand Russell puts this more succinctly when he 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. Furthermore, Russell holds that ‘emancipation’ from the authority of the Church led to the growth of individualism, even to the point of anarchy.

August Comte who is being regarded till date as father of sociology and social sciences in general was of the opinion that society behaves in a regular pattern much like material things and this behaviour can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions made. Positivism rejects theoretical speculations that are not based on facts of experience as a means of obtaining knowledge. Modelled on empirical sciences which provides it with a methodology, 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. There are a lot of problems with this conception of ideal knowledge seeking enterprise. First of these problems is observation upon which the basic justification of positivism came is laden with error.

Social Science is an area of study dedicated to the explanation 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 interactions created. Although, the history of the discipline dates 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. Social sciences seek to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study.

However, the philosophy of social science arouses out of the curiosity that the central focus and the propelling motive of social science may be impossible or unachievable due to methodological mismatch. In other words, there exist an incongruity in using method of scientific enquiry to study human and his society. The incongruity stems from the fact that human beings do not behave in exact way objects of natural sciences behave.

One of the essential feature of science and scientific explanation is to provide a causal 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. But first what does the principle of cause and effect mean?

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 a cause “A”, such that “B” can always be explained by reference to the activities of event “A”. This is the principle that underlies 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.” To make this clearer, let us imagine Mr A makes this statement upon seeing some of his friends who demanded to know why he punched one of them at the gym. The man says: “I punched him because I was angry.”

Nearly everybody will agree that the reason why the man punched his friend is because he was angry. In other words, anger is the reason or the cause for punching his friend. This explanation pretends the words “reason” and “cause” can be substituted for one another without any loss of meaning, even when we see causation from purely mechanistic angle as presented by Nagel above. If the reason for something can be many but the cause of something cannot be, to what extent can we take reasons as causes? One way to solve this problem is to accept reasons are not causes but motive or intent. Thus some scholars like J.S. Mill, T.M. Newcomb and Auguste Comte have argued on whether it is not better to leave reason as motive, drive or intent and not cause. Nonetheless, there are some other scholars who insist that reasons can be treated as causes. One of such scholars is Robin Collingwood who argues to the extreme that reasons are not only causes but they are the 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.

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 man, a rational being with freewill, desires, emotions and other sentient features that come into play in his action or reaction. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behaviour with which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws. It is on the 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. 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.