Name: EMENYONU Nanita Chizomam

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Assignment

In not more than 8 pages, do a review of Chapter 8 of History and Philosophy of Science: A brief survey (pages 86-95)

This chapter talks about social science and it starts by explaining the history of social science.

Back in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the then people of Europe started believing the scientists and even sought their opinion on matters unrelated to science, on their social and intellectual life. The 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. It is called 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. Before this period, there was *the Dark ages* and it was the time religious belief was supreme. In this time, the words of the Pope were the final say on any matter. It was also the time when men and women were burned immediately because the church found them guilty of crimes like witchcraft and diseases were said to be the direct consequence of sin and idolatry. In this dark age, the church waged several wars to exterminate the heathens.

This dark age however led to the classical period of *romanticism* because the intellectual community at that time saw the Dark age as a big threat to human happiness and survival. In this period, they started infiltrating literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at justified conclusion just as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle used to do. Romanticism gave rise to humanism and naturalism, and works of art and literature produced at this time were also regarded as classic. According to Bertrand Russell, ‘the period of history which is commonly called (modern) has a mental outlook which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways’. The two most important ways are the diminishing authority of the church which led to the growth of individualism, even to the point of anarchy and the increasing authority of science.

Positivism rejects theoretical speculations that are not based on facts of experience as a means of obtaining knowledge. However, there are a lot of problems with this conception of ideal knowledge seeking enterprise because the observation upon which the basic justification of positivism is weighed down with error. The observations are seen to be concept-laden, hypothesis-laden, theory-laden, value-laden, interest-laden or laden with culture-specific ontologies.

Scientific approach to things grew out of philosophical approach to issues, but science was restricted to study of natural phenomena because it was the only material believed to behave in a regular and predictable way. However, August Comte, a French social philosopher objected that because he was of the opinion that society behaves in a regular pattern and this behavior can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions made. This is how social sciences came about especially sociology and Comte is regarded as the father of sociology and social sciences in general.

What is social science?

Social science is an area of study dedicated to the explanation of human behavior, interaction, either as an individual or as a group, norms and mores such interactions created. Disciplines in the social sciences include sociology, psychology, political science, economics, anthropology. Some social science philosophers include St Augustine, Ibn Khaldun, Karl Max, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Emily Durkheim etc., however 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, in order to understand humans in both historical and cultural development. Also, they want to be able to predict human behavior, influence human behavior, discover and manipulate the laws governing most of human behavior and be able to know about the characteristics or associated behavior of a person or group.

However, the motive of the social science may not be possible or achievable due to methodological mismatch. There is a problem in using method of scientific enquiry to study human and his society because human beings do not behave in the exact way objects of natural sciences behave. Below I’ll explain problems faced in studying social science.

Problem of Reasons and causes

To understand this problem, we have to understand an essential feature of science which is to provide a casual or correlational connection between an event and its cause. Nagel presents Hume’s exposition of the notion of causation in a bullet form. According to him, for anything to be the cause of another, the cause and effect must (a) have an invariable or constant relation so that whenever the alleged cause occurs, the effect must also occur, (b) be spatially contiguous, i.e. The two events must occur in approximately the same location, (c) be temporally related so that the cause precedes the effect in time just as the effect must follow continuously from the cause, and (d) have an asymmetrical relation in that the occurrence of the alleged cause must be the actual event, which brings about the effect, such that the effect must not be part of the original conditions that are necessary and sufficient for its own occurrence.

Francis Offor concludes this by saying that ‘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.’ This is the principle that underlies the method of explanation in science. Offor goes further to explain this involving human agents. Some explanations present that the words, ‘reason’ and ‘causes’ can be substituted for one another without any loss of meaning. However, a problem is arrived at because the notion of cause as explicated before does not allow for such multiplicity of casual factor for a single effect. A way to solve this problem is to accept that reasons are not causes but motive or intent. Scholars like J.S. Mill, T.M. Newcomb and August Comte have argued on whether it is better to leave reason as motive or intent and not as cause. However, Robin Collingwood insists that reasons can be treated as causes because he believes that reasons 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. There is also another problem given to us and it will be stated below.

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 because 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 behavior with which natural science is known to deduce their principle and laws

In conclusion, Chapter eight tries to explain how social science came to be and then it explains social science that is; the definition, the disciplines and social science philosophers and then the problems faced in carrying out to the objectives of social science.