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ASSIGNMENT

QUESTION: In not 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.

PILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (AND APPLIED SCIENCES)

Natural science in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century witnessed great success on the social and intellectual life of the then people of Europe that they started trusting the words of scientists and even sought their opinion on matters that were not related to science such as law and forensic evidence. The positive response to science was because 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. 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 to arrive at justified conclusions, and not the dictate of religion as it was in the age prior to this time; the Dark Ages.

Scientific approach to things grew out of philosophical approach to issues, but science was restricted to study of natural phenomena because it was only the material that was belief to behave in a regular and predictable way. However, August Comte thought otherwise, that society behaves in a regular pattern much like material things and this behaviour can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions made. This is the beginning of social sciences, especially sociology. August Comte is regarded as the father of sociology and social sciences in general till date. 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 many problems with this conception of ideal knowledge enterprise. The first problem is observation upon which the basic justification of positivism came in laden with error. These include the fact that: observations are concept-laden; observations are hypothesis-laden; observations are theory-laden; observations are value-laden; observation interest-laden; and observations are laden with culture-specific ontologies. However, irrespective of the shortcomings of positivism, let us explicate on the idea it birthed.

WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCE?

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 collective group; including the institutions, norms and more such interactions created. Disciplines in social science include sociology, psychology, economics, political science, archaeology and anthropology. The history of the discipline dates to early philosophers who wanted to study how society work. However, it is August Comte that is regarded as the father of social science. Social science seeks to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study. The objectives of such endeavour include:

(1), understanding humans in both historical and cultural development context and factors responsible for such development or change,

(2). being 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,

(3). Influencing human behaviour; grooming it towards a socially desirable conduct and channeling collective effort toward development,

(4). Discovering and manipulating if possible the laws governing most of human behaviour,

(5). Advancing beyond armchair philosophy, the knowledge about the characteristic temperaments and associated behaviour of a person or group, or that exhibited by those engaged in an activity.

THE PROBLEM OF REASONS AND CAUSES

To understand this problem with social science better, we need to know that one of the essential features of science and scientific explanation is to provide a causal or correlational connection between an event and its cause. Although explication of casualties goes back to David Hume, Ernest Nagel presents Hume’s exposition on the notion of causation in a bullet form. According to this account, for anything to be the cause of another, the cause and effect must:

(1). Have an invariable constant relation in the sense that whenever the alleged cause occurs the effect most also occur;

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

(3). Be temporarily related such that the cause precedes the effect in time just as the effect must follow contiguously from the causes;

(4). Having an asymmetrical relation in that the occurrence of the alleged cause must be 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.

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 or science becomes applicable because 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 action and reaction. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behaviour which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws. However, it has been observed, for example, even in scientific laws of economics, that these laws do not hold all the time since man does not behave rationally all the time.