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A REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE:
A BRIEF SURVEY

This chapter of the book is about the philosophy of social sciences and applied sciences. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the success of the natural science was immense on the intellectual life of the people of Europe. This made them trust the words of the scientists and the people even sought the opinions of the scientists on matters that are not related to science such as forensic evidence and law. Science received a positive response and it was as a result of a change in the socio-cultural milieu of that time and this is the reason why the belief in science or application of science to any issue is called positivism from then on.

The renaissance period marked a period when people started a revolution of return to their Greek heritage. It was about using reason in matters of public concern and not the dictate of religion as it was in the age prior to this time. In the previous period, the words of the Pope has the final authority on any issue or matter, be it intellectual, social or political. Diseases were said to be the consequence of idolatry and sin so the church waged several wars to exterminate the heathens. At that time, the intellectual community saw this as a big threat to human survival and happiness. They began to infiltrate literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at justified conclusion just as Aristotle, Plato and Socrates used to do. In music and arts, there were hidden Greek world views. This is known as the classical period of romanticism. Romanticism gave rise to naturalism and humanism and the works of literature and art 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 that are most important are 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. Discipline, intellectual, moral and political was associated in the minds of the men of the Renaissance with the scholastic philosophy and ecclesiastical government”.

Science was restricted to the study of natural phenomena and this is because it is only the material that was believed to behave in a predictable and regular way. A French social philosopher called August Comte had a different opinion about this. He was of the opinion that society behaves in a regular pattern much like material things and this behavior can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions made. This is the beginning of social sciences, especially sociology. Comte is being regarded till date as the father of sociology and social sciences in general.

Social science is an area of study that is 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 more such interactions created. Some of the disciplines in social sciences include: sociology, psychology, economics, political science, archaeology and anthropology. Social sciences seeks to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study. The philosophy of social science rose out of the curiosity that the central focus and the propelling motive of social science may be unachievable or impossible 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 stem from the fact that human beings do not behave in exact way objects of natural sciences behave.

To understand the problem with social sciences better, we need to know and understand 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. 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. The principle states that for every event ‘B’ in the universe, there is always a cause ‘A’, such that ‘B’ can be explained by reference to the activities of event ‘A’. This is the principle that underlies the method of explanation in science. According to Francis Offor, “by employing the scientific method in social investigation, the social sciences seek to explain the cause of action involving human agents”.

