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SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOOMACY

GST118: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

ASSIGNMENT: REVIEW

In not more than two pages, do a review of Chapter eight of Temidayo D. Oladipo and Noah O. Balogun, *History and Philosophy of Science: A Brief Survey*. Pages 86-95.

PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (AND APPLIED SCIENCES)

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the people of Europe began to acknowledge natural science; leading to the enormous successes recorded in natural science on the social and intellectual life of the Europeans. Scientists won credibility among the people and their opinions on matters irrelevant to science were sought eg in law. This positive response to science occured because of change in the socio-cultural environment. Therefore, the belief in science or application of science is called **positivism**. Positivism strived in a socio-cultural era called the Renaissance and Enlightenment; a period when people began to return to using reason in matters of public concern and not religion as done in the dark ages. As a result of the people’s trust in science, it began to have more authority than the church (the reigning authority).

Science only dealt with natural phenomenon because they behaved in a regularized and predictable manner. However, later on, August Comte, a French social philosopher came up with the idea that society behaves in a regular pattern like material things and such behaviour can be studied and accurate predictions can be made. This gave birth to social science, making Comte the father of social sciences.

Strongly modelled on empirical sciences which provides it its methodology, positivism does not accept any theory or proposition that is not based or verified on/by experience (as a way of gaining knowledge). A lot of problem have been deduced from this concept; first of the many is observation. This is so because observations are loaded with concepts, hypothesis, theories, values, interests, and culture-specific ontologies.

Social science is an area of study which deals with explanations of human behaviour, interactions and exhibitions either as an individual, or institutions; such include sociology, psychology. It aims at using scientific methods to examine social phenomena, with the human as an object of study. The discipline has several objectives, one of which being to predict human behaviour through factors that influence their behaviours particularly in economic and political activities. As a result of the nature of philosophy, Philosophy of social science emerged because it feels that the main motive of social science will be impossible to achieve as both science and social science have different methodologies. It will be difficult to use scientific methodology to study humans and society as humans and natural phenomena do not behave alike.

The problem of social science has been half-noted above. To further understand its problem, one has to know that one of science’s essential feature is to provide correlational connection between the event and its cause i.e why A is the cause of B, the event/effect. Let’s begin with the Problem of Reason and Cause. Based on David Hume’s exposition, the criteria for cause and effect are;

* Both must have constant reletion; i.e whenever the cause occurs the effect must also occur.
* Both must occur in the same position or by related chain of event that are spatially connected.
* Both must be relate temporarily; i.e effect must follow the cause.
* Both must have an asymetrical relation; i.e what happens after the cause must be the event which leads to the effect, but the effect must not be part of the conditions that nececitated its occurrence.

In the course of applying scientific methods in social sciences, such criteria has to be used. The problem now is that applying such criteria to human activities may not work out as easy as it will for natural phenomena. This is mainly as a result of the unregular pattern of behaviour of humans in opposition to the regularized pattern of natural phenomena. In the case of human activities, the reason for the cause of an event could be many, so how do we know the true cause of the event? A solution to this problem is to accept that the reason is not the cause but are mere motives. However, some scholars disagree to the opinion that reason is a mere motive and not the cause.

Another issue raised against the project of social science is the fact that the object of study is a man. Man has certain factors such as rationality, desires and emotions which reduces the notion of him having a predictable behaviour, which natural science uses to formulate laws and principles. Even the social scientist (eg economists) knows that the unpredictable behaviour of man makes it hard to form principles and theories to enhance their explanations. For instance the law of demand. A simple theory was formed from the observation of man’s response to goods and services which is influenced by certain factors like price. The theory itself still has exceptions meaning that it is merely built on assumptions.