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QUESTION: In not more than 2 pages, do a review of Chapter 8 of Temidayo Oladipo and Noah O. Balogun, History and Philosophy of Science: A Brief Survey. Ibadan: Hope Publications. Pages 86-95.

SUMMARY – CHAPTER 8

I want to start by doing justice to the definition or at least give a brief explanation on what Applied Science entails. According to the Collins dictionary, Applied Science is simply put as sciences that are put to practical use. It is also the discipline that deals with the art or science of applying scientific knowledge to practical problems.

Around the eighteenth and nineteenth century, people started to believe more in science and its efficiencies and even sought advice from scientists on matters not even relating to Science. This positive response was what gave way to the application of science to other matters to be called positivism. This period was named the renaissance and enlightenment period. The period prior to the renaissance period was called the dark ages because it was the time when all power, both political and religious was in the hands of the Pope. All decisions were made by him. However, people became enlightened and began to target the archaic methods of ruling through various forms of literature. These people were mainly intellectuals who saw the ruling manner as a threat to the happiness of humans and their survival. They also hid their views in art and music. This became known as the classical period of romanticism which gave rise to humanism and naturalism. Works of literature produced during this period were also regarded as classic.

Bertrand Russell put it more succinctly when he said “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 most important: the diminishing authority of the Church and the increasing authority of Science”. The scientific approach to things grew mainly out of philosophical approach to problems, but science was restricted to study of natural phenomena because it was the only material that was believed to behave in a regular and predictable manner.

Not until a French Philosopher called August Comte thought otherwise did science begin to evolve. He was of the opinion that society behaved in a regular pattern much like material things and that behavior can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions can be acquired. This was the beginning of social sciences. August Comte is regarded as the father of sociology and social sciences in general. Positivism does not condone the idea of theoretical speculations. Rather, it focuses on facts gotten from experience as a means of obtaining knowledge. However, there are problems with this mindset. Out of these problems is observation upon which the basic justification of positivism came, is laden with error. These include the facts that: Observations are concept laden, hypothesis laden, theory laden, value laden, interest laden, and most of all, observations are laden with culture specific ontologies.

What is Social Science?

Social science simply put is the scientific study of human society and social relationships. It is also regarded as a scholarly or scientific discipline that deals with such study, generally regarded as including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, and history. Social sciences aim to use scientific methods to carry out investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as an object of study. The main objectives of such endeavor include: understanding human beings in both historical and cultural development context and the factors responsible for the changes, discovering and attempting to manipulate laws concerning human actions and behavior, advancing the knowledge about the characteristic temperament and associated behavior of a person or group, or that shown by people engaged in an activity.

Another problem with Social sciences is that of Reasons and Causes. Firstly, it is mandatory that we understand that science is all about cause and effect. The principle of cause and effect corroborates that one must have an invariable or constant relation in the sense that whenever the alleged cause occurs, the effect must also occur. It also maintains that both events must likely happen at the same location or be related by a chain of events that are spatially linked. Also, they must be temporally related such that the cause precedes the effect just in time for the effect to take place after. Lastly, they must have an asymmetrical relation in that the occurrence must be in form of an actual event, which brings about the effect, and the effect must not be part of the original conditions that are necessary and sufficient for its own occurrence.

Also, The Problem of Human Person as an Object of Study in Social Sciences. Another issue with the project of social sciences as otherwise mentioned by Max Weber, methodology of science becomes inapplicable due to the erroneous fact that the object being studied is man, a rational being with freewill, desires, emotions, sentient features that all play an important role in his actions or reactions. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behavior with which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws. Take for instance, the law of demand and supply in economics which predicts that human as a rational being will buy less when the price is high and buy more when the price is low. It is on this basic assumption of rational behavior 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, these laws do not hold all the time because humans are not always rational beings. For example, some android or IPhone applications are of necessity to be able to effectively use these phones. Some applications might even force the user to update it, making the user to waste valuable money and data. The law of demand and supply therefore doesn’t work in this situation as is the norm these days.

Laying all of these problems out on the table, let’s not forget the impactful contributions that social science has made in various areas of the economy and the world at large. However, let us ponder this question. If a scientific law is neither absolute nor does it hold quite often, do we continue to call it scientific law of economics or desist from doing so due to the clear complications surrounding it?