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QUESTION:

In not more 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.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER 8.

Due to the success recorded in natural science in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, people of Europe started trusting the words of scientists and even sought the opinion of scientists on matters unrelated to science such as law and forensic evidence.

The positive response to science occurred due to the socio-cultural milieu of the time and it explains why the belief in science or application of science is called positivism. The socio-cultural milieu in which positivism grew are called renaissance and enlightenment period. It is called renaissance because people decided to embrace their Greek heritage of using reason in matters of public concern and not the command of religion.

Using the dictates of religion is referred to as the dark ages. Due to the things that occurred during the Dark Age, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle infiltrated literature and had the benefit of using reason to arrive at a justified conclusion. This became known as the Classical period of Romanticism. It gave rise to humanism and naturalism. This period led to the diminishing authority of the church and the increasing authority of science. Before science was restricted to studying natural phenomena only because it is believed that they behave in a regular and predictable way. This went on until a French social philosopher called August Comte reasoned otherwise. He said society behaves in a regular pattern just like material things. He also said the behavior can be studied and somewhat accurate predictions can be made. This led to the birth of social science with August Comte as the father of social science.

Positivism accepts only theoretical speculations that are based on facts of experience as a means of obtaining knowledge. Although, there are some problems that come with this conception of ideal knowledge seeking enterprise. One is observation. The reason of observation being a problem is because it is laden with error.

WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCE?

Social science is an area of study that deals with the explanation of human behaviour, interactions and manifestations, either as an individual or as a group. Some disciplines under Social science include; Psychology, Political science, Social science has the objective of influencing human behaviour, understanding humans and determining factors responsible for the development or change, being able to predict human behaviour, discovering and manipulating if possible, the laws governing most of human behaviour etc.

However, the philosophy of social science arouse out of the curiosity that the central focus of social science may be unachievable due to the methodological mismatch i.e. human beings are rational and different hence they might not react or behave in the same way

PROBLEM OF REASON AND CAUSE.

To understand this better with social science, we must know that one essential feature of science is to provide causal connection between an event and its cause. For something to be the cause of an event, there has to be an invariable relation in that whenever the cause occurs, the effect must also occur, they must be temporally related such that the cause precedes the effect in time and the effect must follow continuously from the cause and also, the effect must not be part of the conditions that causes its occurrence. Francis Offor asserts amongst other things that there are a set of conditions that must be fulfilled before the invariable occurrence of an event. He says further that by using scientific methods in social investigation, social sciences seek to explain the cause of action involving human agents.

Some people believe reason can be substituted for cause without any loss of meaning. However, there can be numerous reasons for someone’s actions but the notion of cause does not allow for such multiplicity of causal factors. Hence we cannot say reason is the same as cause. Therefore, some scholars like J.S Mill, Auguste Comte have argued that it is better to leave reason as motive, drive or intent and not cause but there are still some scholar that insist reason can be treated as cause an example is Robin Collingwood.

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PERSOM AS OBJECT OF STUDY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE.

This is another problem with the project of social science, the fact that the object of study in social science is man, a rational being that can make his own decisions, makes it difficult to determine a fixed reaction after things occur. For example, the law of demand which states that the higher the demand, the higher the price and vice versa and the law of supply which states that the higher the supply, the lower the price and vice versa. This is not applicable always and it has been proven by economists. This is because man does not always behave rationally although they do most times. Now since this scientific law is neither absolute nor held quite often, are we to continue calling it a scientific law of economics?