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PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND APPLIED SCIENCES

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the success of natural science was so enormous on the social and intellectual life of the Europeans at the time that they started trusting the words of scientists and even sought their opinion on matters unrelated to science such as law and forensic evidence. However, the reason for this positive response to science was because of the socio-cultural milieu of the time which then brought about positivism-the belief in science or application of science to any issue. The socio-cultural milieu in which positivism grew is called the renaissance and the enlightenment period. It is called so because it marked a period when people started a revolution of return to their Greek heritage of using reason in matters of public concern and not the dictate of religion as it was in the age prior to this time.

The period before the renaissance period was called the dark ages because it was the time religious belief reigned supreme, the Pope was the final authority on any matter, be it political, social or intellectual. It was the time when men and women were burned at stake because the church had found them guilty of one thing or another. However, the intellectual community at the time saw this as a threat to human happiness and survival, so they started infiltrating literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at justified conclusion. This became known as the classical period of romanticism which then gave birth to humanism and naturalism, and works of art and literature produced at this time were also regarded as classic.

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 believed to behave in a regular and predictable way. August Comte, however, 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 and Comte is being regarded till date as father of sociology and social sciences in general.

Social science is an area of study 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 mores such interactions created. Disciplines in the social sciences include: sociology, psychology, economics, political science, archeology and anthropology. Social sciences seek to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study. The objectives of such endeavor include: (1) understanding humans in both historical and cultural development context, (2) being able to predict human behavior based on the pattern of behavior, belief system, etc., (3) influencing human behavior, (4) discovering and manipulating if possible, the laws guiding most of human behavior and, (5) advancing beyond armchair philosophy, the knowledge about the characteristic temperament and associated behavior of a person or group, or that exhibited by those engaged in an activity. However, the philosophy of social science arouse out of the curiosity that the central focus and the propelling motive of social science may be impossible or unachievable due to methodological mismatch. This suggests that there exists an incongruity in using methods of scientific enquiry to study human and his society. This stems from the fact that human beings do not behave in the exact way objects of natural sciences behave.

To understand this problem with social sciences better, we need to 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. According to this account, for anything to be the cause of another, the cause and effect must: (1)have an invariable or constant relation, (2)be spatially contiguous, (3)be temporally related and (4)have an asymmetrical relation. The principle of cause and effect according to Francis Offor, 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. There is also the view that the words ‘reason’ and ‘cause’ can be substituted for one another without any loss of meaning. However, one way to solve this problem is to accept that reasons are not causes but motive or intent.

Nonetheless, scholars like Robin Callingwood are of the opinion that reasons are not only causes but they are the ultimate causal power which lies in human and that ascribing causal power to inanimate things and objects in the physical world may be too naïve of us.

Another problem with the project of social science is that, according to Max Weber, methodology of science becomes inapplicable due to the fact that the object of study in social science is man, a rational being with freewill, desires, emotions and other sentient features that come into play in his action or reaction. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behavior with which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws.