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HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

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CHAPTER 8 – PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

The 18th and 19th century recorded great success in the natural scientific field that affected the social and intellectual life of the Europeans; this made them trust scientists even with matters that had nothing to do with science, example: law and forensic evidence. The change in socio-cultural milieu of the time was as a result of the positive response in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Positivism was the name given to the belief in or application of science in any issue. It grew in the renaissance and enlightenment period. It was called the renaissance period because this was the time when people started a revolution of return to their Greek heritage of using reason in matters of public concern and not the dictates of religion as it was in the dark ages.

It was called dark ages because religious belief reigned supreme. The Pope was the leader and he had a say in every matter, be it political, social or intellectual. If the church found anyone guilty of witchcraft and sorcery, they were burnt. It was also believed that diseases were sent by god as a punishment for sin and idolatry. The intellectual community at that time saw this as a great threat to human survival so they slowly infiltrated literature with the benefits of using reason to arrive at any conclusion just like Socrates, Aristotle and Plato. This became the classical period for romanticism. Romanticism gave rise to humanism and naturalism, and works of art and literature produced at this time were also regarded as classic. Bertrand Russell puts this more terse 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 so many ways. of all these, there are two most important: the diminishing authority of the church and the increasing authority of science. Russell also holds that “the emancipation from the authority of the church led to the growth of individualism, even to the point of anarchy.

What is social science

It is an area of study dedicated to the explanation of human behavior, interaction, manifestations, either as an individual in a society or collectively as a group including the institutions, norms and mores such interactions created. It can also be defined as the scientific study of human society and social relationships. Some philosophers in social sciences are: August Comte, Karl Max, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Jurgen Habermas etc. The disciplines under social science include: Anthropology, Archaeology, Economics, Geography, History, Political science, Psychology ETC

Social sciences seek to employ the method of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as the object of study. This course is studied in order to:

- Understand humans both historically and cultural development
- Being able to predict human behavior

- Be able to influence human behaviour
- Discover and manipulate if possible, the laws governing most human behavior and Advance beyond armchair philosophy.

The philosophy of social science arose out of the curiosity that the central focus and propelling motive of social science may be impossible due to methodological mismatch. In other words, there exists an uncertainty in using the method of scientific enquiry to study humans and the society. The uncertainty is based on the fact that human beings do not behave in the exact way objects in natural sciences do. A stick is an unconscious being so it may behave in a regular and predictable way when pushed. However, man as a conscious and rational being may not behave in the manner.

THE PROBLEM OF REASONS AND CAUSES

In order to understand the problem of social sciences, one needs to understand that one vital characteristic of science and scientific explanation is to provide a causal or correlational connection between the event and the cause. This means that it tries to explain why event C is the cause of event D which is effect. Ernest Nagel presents David Hume's exposition of the notion of causation in bullet form which is endangering to this analysis. According to this account, for anything to be the cause of another, the cause and effect must:

- Have an invariable or constant relation in the sense that whatever the alleged cause occurs, the effect must also occur.
- Be spatially contiguous
- Be temporally related such that the cause precedes the effect just in time as the effect must follow continuously from the cause and
- Have an asymmetrical relation in that the occurrence of alleged cause must be actual event, which brings about the effect, such that the effect must be part of the original conditions that are necessary and sufficient for its own occurrence.

Francis Offor stated 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. He further states that, "by employing scientific methods in social investigations, the social sciences seek to explain the cause of action involving human agents.

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PERSON AS OBJECT OF STUDY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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 scientist features that come into play in his actions or reaction. All these factors undermine the notion of predictability of behavior with which natural science is known to deduce their principles and laws.