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Review of Chapter 8 of History and Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of Social Sciences and Applied Sciences

The success record in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was so enormous on the social and intellectual life of the people that they started trusting scientists and they even sought their opinion on other matters that are unrelated to science. This happened as a result of a change in the socio-cultural milieu of the time and this is why the belief in science or the application of science to any issue is called positivism.

The socio-cultural milieu in which positivism grew is called the renaissance and the enlightened period. It is called a renaissance period because it marked a period when people started a revolution of their 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 aeon prior to the renaissance period was called the dark ages because it was the time when religious belief reigned supreme. Disease were said to be direct consequences of sin and idolatry, the church then waged several wars to exterminate the heathens. Bertrand Russell said that “the period of history which is commonly called “modern” has a mental out look which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways. These two are most important: the diminishing authority of the church and the increasing authority of science.

Russell also states that “ emancipation from authority of the church led to the growth of individualism even to the point of anarchy. The minds of the men of renaissance and the scholastic philosophy and ecclesiastical government was associated with Discipline, intellectual and political.”

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 thought that the society behaves in a regular pattern much like material things and this behavior can be studied and be somewhat accurate predictions made. This is the beginning of social sciences. Positivism rejects theoretical speculations that are not based on facts of experience as a means of obtaining knowledge, modelled on empirical sciences which provides it with a methodology, positivism declares false, all proposition that could not be solved due to high degree of abstract nature. There are some problems with the conception of ideal knowledge seeking enterprise. These includes the fact that:

1. Observations are concept-laden
2. Observations are hypothesis-laden
3. Observations are theory-laden
4. Observations are value-laden
5. Observations are interest-laden
6. Observations are laden with culture- specific anthologies.

Social sciences 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 norms and more such interactions created. Social sciences seeks to employ the methods of science in the investigation of social phenomena taking the human person as object of study. One of the objectives of such endeavor is: understanding humans in both historical and cultural development context and factors responsible for such development or change.

Francis offor explains the points in the following words:

The principle of course and effect 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. Put differently, the principle states that for every event ‘B’ in the universe there is always a cause ‘A', such that ‘B' can always be explained by reference to the activities of event ‘A'. This is the principle that underlies the method of explanation in science. He goes on to explain that “by employing the scientific method in social investigations, the social sciences seek to explain the cause of action involving human agents".

Problems of human person as object of study in social sciences.

According to Max Weber “ methodology of science becomes inapplicable due to the fact that the object of study in social sciences 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 sciences is known to deduce their principles and laws. The Law of Demand and Supply is used as an example.