



FACULTY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES

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Lecture- 32



LECTURE 32:

Positivism Positivism is a philosophical theory stating that certain ("positive") knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations. Thus, information derived from sensory experience, interpreted through reason and logic, forms the exclusive source of all certain knowledge. [1] Positivism holds that valid knowledge (certitude or truth) is found only in this a posteriori knowledge. Verified data (positive facts) received from the senses are known as empirical evidence; thus positivism is based on empiricism.[1] Positivism also holds that society, like the physical world, operates according to general laws. Introspective and intuitive knowledge is rejected, as are metaphysics and theology because metaphysical and theological claims cannot be verified by sense experience. Although the positivist approach has been a recurrent theme in the history of western thought,[2] the modern approach was formulated by the philosopher Auguste Comte in the early 19th century.[3] Comte argued that, much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other absolute laws, so does society.[4] Etymology The English noun positivism was re-imported in the 19th century from the French word positivisme, derived from positif in its philosophical sense of 'imposed on the mind by experience'. The corresponding adjective (lat. positivus) has been used in a similar sense to discuss law (positive law compared to natural law) since the time of Chaucer.[5] Overview Antecedents[Positivism is part of a more general ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, notably laid out by Plato and later reformulated as a quarrel between the sciences and the humanities,[6] Plato elaborates a critique of poetry from the point of view of philosophy in his dialogues Phaedrus 245a, Symposium 209a, Republic 398a, Laws 817 b–d and Ion. [7] Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) popularized the distinction between Geisteswissenschaft (humanities) and Naturwissenschaften (natural sciences).[8] The consideration that laws in physics may not be absolute but relative, and, if so, this might be more true of social sciences,[9] was stated, in different terms, by G. B. Vico in 1725.[10] Vico, in contrast to the positivist movement, asserted the superiority of the science of the human mind (the humanities, in other words), on the grounds that natural sciences tell us nothing about the inward aspects of things.[11] Positivists Positivism asserts that all authentic knowledge allows verification and that all authentic knowledge assumes that the only valid knowledge is scientific.[12] Thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon (1760– 1825), Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) and Auguste Comte (1798–1857) believed the scientific method, the circular dependence of theory and observation, must replace metaphysics in the history of thought. [citation needed] Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) reformulated sociological positivism as a foundation of social research.[13] Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), in contrast, fought strenuously against the assumption that only explanations derived from science are valid.[8] He reprised the argument, already found in Vico, that scientific explanations do not reach the inner nature of phenomena[8] and it is humanistic knowledge that gives us insight into thoughts, feelings and desires.[8] Dilthey was in part influenced by the historicism of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886).[8] Antipositivism At the turn of the 20th century the first wave of German sociologists, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel, rejected the doctrine, thus founding the antipositivist tradition in sociology. Later antipositivists and critical theorists have associated positivism with "scientism"; science as ideology. [14] Later in his career (1969),[15] German theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg, Nobel laureate for pioneering work in quantum mechanics, distanced himself from positivism by saying: The positivists have a simple solution: the world must be divided into that which we can say clearly and the rest, which we had better pass over in silence. But can any one conceive of a more pointless philosophy, seeing that what we can say clearly amounts to next to nothing? If we omitted all that is unclear we would probably be left with completely uninteresting and trivial tautologies.[16] Logical positivism and postpositivism In the early 20th century, logical positivism—a descendant of Comte's basic thesis but an independent movement—sprang up in Vienna and grew to become one of the dominant schools in Anglo-American philosophy and the analytic tradition. Logical positivists (or 'neopositivists') rejected metaphysical speculation and attempted to reduce statements and propositions to pure logic. Strong critiques of this approach by philosophers such as Karl Popper, Willard Van Orman Quine and

Thomas Kuhn have been highly influential, and led to the development of postpositivism. In historiography In historiography the debate on positivism has been characterized by the quarrel between positivism and historicism.[9] (Historicism is also sometimes termed historicism in the German tradition.)[17] Arguments against positivist approaches in historiography include that history differs from sciences like physics and ethology in subject matter and method.[18] That much of what history studies is nonquantifiable, and therefore to quantify is to lose in precision. Experimental methods and mathematical models do not generally apply to history, and it is not possible to formulate general (quasi-absolute) laws in history.[18] In other fields[Positivism in the social sciences is usually characterized by quantitative approaches and the proposition of quasi-absolute laws.[In psychology the positivist movement was influential in the development of operationalism. The 1927 philosophy of science book *The Logic of Modern Physics* in particular, which was originally intended for physicists, coined the term operational definition, which went on to dominate psychological method for the whole century.[19] In economics, practising researchers tend to emulate the methodological assumptions of classical positivism, but only in a de facto fashion: the majority of economists do not explicitly concern themselves with matters of epistemology.[20] Economic thinker Friedrich Hayek (see "Law, Legislation and Liberty") rejected positivism in the social sciences as hopelessly limited in comparison to evolved and divided knowledge. For example, much (positivist) legislation falls short in contrast to pre-literate or incompletely defined common or evolved law. In jurisprudence, "legal positivism" essentially refers to the rejection of natural law; thus its common meaning with philosophical positivism is somewhat attenuated and in recent generations generally emphasizes the authority of human political structures as opposed to a "scientific" view of law. In the early 1970s, urbanists of the positivist-quantitative school like David Harvey started to question the positivist approach itself, saying that the arsenal of scientific theories and methods developed so far in their camp were "incapable of saying anything of depth and profundity" on the real problems of contemporary cities.[21] In 20th-century sociology In contemporary social science, strong accounts of positivism have long since fallen out of favour. Practitioners of positivism today acknowledge in far greater detail observer bias and structural limitations. Modern positivists generally eschew metaphysical concerns in favour of methodological debates concerning clarity, replicability, reliability and validity.[22] This positivism is generally equated with "quantitative research" and thus carries no explicit theoretical or philosophical commitments. The institutionalization of this kind of sociology is often credited to Paul Lazarsfeld,[23] who pioneered large-scale survey studies and developed statistical techniques for analyzing them. This approach lends itself to what Robert K. Merton called middle-range theory: abstract statements that generalize from segregated hypotheses and empirical regularities rather than starting with an abstract idea of a social whole.[24] In 21st-century sociology[Other new movements, such as critical realism, have emerged to reconcile the overarching aims of social science with postmodern critiques.[25][26] There are now at least twelve distinct epistemologies that are referred to as positivism.[27] Sociological positivis