Mohamed Kheider University

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

English Division

Teacher: Dr. Betka Rezig Nadia   **Level: MASTER 1 (Civ and Lit)**

Course 1: Social Sciences Research: A Historical Overview

In the present lesson, we present a chronological overview of the main phases through which social sciences research developed and how Positivism and Anti-positivism emerged.

Phase1

The history of human research goes back to the 3rd century BC when philosophers began to challenge human

thinking and establish their own rules and principles. Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates

suggested that the fundamental nature of being and the world can be understood more accurately through a process

of systematic logical reasoning called "Rationalism".

Rationalism views reason as the only source of knowledge and proposes that truth is not sensory but rather intellectual and

deductive, often derived from a set of principles that Aristotle called: the law of non-contradiction. Ex: The Agency Theory.

Phase 2

The next major shift in scientific thought occurred during the 16$_{th}$ century, when British philosopher Francis Bacon

 (1561-1626) suggested that knowledge can only be derived from observation in the real world. On this basis, Bacon

emphasized knowledge acquisition as an empirical activity instead of reasoning and developed "Empericism" as an

 influential branch of philosophy. Bacon's works led to the popularization of inductive methods of scientific research.

 consisting of systematic observation, measurement, and experimentation

Empiricism continued to clash with rationalism throughout the Middle Ages, as philosophers wanted to reach more valid

knowledge.

The French philosopher Rene Descartes was rationalist while Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton attempted to follow the

philosophy of nature which gave birth to Natural Sciences. Galileo (1564-1642) was perhaps the first to state that the laws

of nature are mathematical and contributed to the field of astronomy through and innovative combination of

experimentation and mathematics.

Phase 3

In the 18th century, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant sought to resolve the dispute between empiricism and rationalism in his book "Critique of Pure Reason" where he proposed that experience is subjective. His ideas led to the development of German Idealism which inspired many research fields like critical social theory.

At about the same time, French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857), founder of the discipline of sociology tried to combine rationalism and empiricism in a new doctrine called: POSITIVISM. He suggested that theory and observation depend on each other because theories may be created through reasoning but if they are not checked through experimentation, they can not be authentic. This emphasis on verification could separate the modern science from philosophy and metaphysics and developed the scientific method as the primary means of theories validation.

Comte's ideas were expanded by Emile Durkheim who considered positivism as a foundation for social research.

Phase 4

In the early 20th century, strong accounts of positivism were rejected by interpretive sociologists or the so called (anti-positivists) belonging to the German idealism school of thought. Positivism was equated with quantitative research methods such as experimentation without any philosophical commitment, while anti-positivism employed qualitative methods such as unstructured interviews and participant observation (like in psychology)

In the mid-to-late 20th century, both positivist and anti-positivist schools of thought were subject to criticism and change.

Phase 5

Critical research (also called critical theory) propounded by Max Horkeimer and Jurgen Habermas in the 20th century was established on the basis of considering social inequality and was in favor of people's continuous attempt to change their social circumstances challenging all possible constraints. Critical research attempts to uncover and criticize alienating conditions by analyzing oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in modern societies and seeks to eliminate causes of domination.