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## PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES: SOME REFLECTION ON POSITIVISM

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## ABSTRACT

In this, contemporary world we are more emphasis on knowledge based aspects. By a study of conservative social epistemology we acquired knowledge from social sciences, where the effects of social processes on individual reasoning and knowledge. It also explains how knowledge is justified, how social scientists come to know and what they know. The study of epistemology in philosophy is important because it helps us evaluate what we see or perceive, which extend our experimental knowledge. It helps us determine the true from false and helps us gain productive knowledge. Because its a rational and critical foundation of our society. In Social Sciences some of the disciplines like Anthropology, Philosophy, Law, Archaeology, Criminology, Education, Economics, Psychology, Linguistics, Political Science, History these are all interrelated to one to other and gives normative or value based knowledge to us. The leading philosophical ideas that have been applied to the social sciences emerged out of these social world. As a part of that, positivism is maintains reliable knowledge is based on direct, verifiable, observation or manipulation of natural phenomena through empirical or experimental issues. On the basis of that individuals constructing our personality and society. Positivism is the view that social phenomena ought to be studied using only the methods of the natural sciences. So positivism is a view about the appropriate methodology of social science, emphasizing empirical observation. In this background, this paper is mainly focused on positive philosophy and highlights the discussion of how philosophers of social science, have try to explains the methodological importance of positivism in knowledge widening phenomena in this century. Also to know about how social scientific knowledge will also give us an idea of some of the rethinking phenomena in social sciences in the modern world.

**KEYWORDS :** Epistemology, Social Sciences, Political Science, Philosophy,

## INTRODUCTION

Positivism is [a philosophical theory](#) that holds that all genuine knowledge is either positive and exclusively derived from [experience](#) of [natural phenomena](#) and their properties and relations or true by definition, that is, [analytic](#) and [tautological](#). Positivism adheres to the view that only

factual knowledge gained through observation, including measurement is trustworthy. Thus, information derived from [sensory experience](#), as interpreted through [reason](#) and [logic](#), forms the exclusive source of all certain knowledge. Verified data received from the senses are known as [empirical evidence](#); thus positivism is based on [empiricism](#). Sociological positivism 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 philosophy. The modern approach was formulated by the philosopher [Auguste Comte](#) in the early 19th century. Comte argued that, much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other absolute laws, so does society. This philosophy also confines itself to the data of experience and excludes a metaphysical speculations.

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 (Latin *positivus*) has been used in a similar sense to discuss law since the time of [Chaucer](#).

Positivism is a term which designates a philosophical tendency oriented around natural science and striving for a united view of the world of phenomena both physical and human, through the applications of the methods and the extension of the results whereby the natural sciences have attained their unrivaled position in the modern world. From the point of view of methodology the term 'positive' is conceived in polemical opposition to the metaphysical abstractions of traditional philosophy. Philosophy of science is positivism; Positivism is more a philosophy, method rather than a theory. It is that philosophy which preaches that the interpretation of the world is based on human experience. It insists on the application of scientific method of natural sciences to the study of social world.

It deals with the application of scientific method by natural scientists

and by the sociologists in understanding human-behaviour. The idea of positivism can be traced back to Bacon, Berkeley, Locke and Hume. Before Comte, Saint Simon also advocated positivism. He proposed scientific reorganization of society and promotion of science, since he believed that progress depended on it. The idea of positivism was present in an embryonic form in the mind of Saint Simon and Comte expanded this idea. Positivism brought a revolution or renaissance in the field of social science. It combined a belief in progress and a passion for serving humanity. It is based on the belief that a scientific analysis of history would show the way to cure for the ills of society.

The characteristics of positivism are:

- Science is the only valid knowledge. (b) Fact is the object of knowledge.
- Philosophy does not possess a method different from science.
- The task of philosophy is to find the general principles common to all sciences and to use these principles as guides to human conduct and as the basis of social organization.
- Positivism denies intuition, prior reasoning, theological and metaphysical knowledge.

## Auguste Comte

He was a [French philosopher](#) and writer who formulated the doctrine of [positivism](#). He is often regarded as the first [philosopher of science](#) in the modern sense of the term. He has founder of positivism, a philosophical and political movement which enjoyed a very wide different in the second half of the nineteenth century. Comte's ideas were also fundamental to the development of [sociology](#); indeed, he invented the term and treated that discipline as the crowning achievement of the sciences.

Influenced by the [utopian socialist Saint-Simon](#), Comte developed positive philosophy in an attempt to remedy the social disorder caused by the [French Revolution](#), which he believed indicated imminent transition to a new form of society. He sought to establish a new social doctrine based on science, which he labeled 'positivism'. He had a major impact on nineteenth-century thought, influencing the work of social thinkers such as [John Stuart Mill](#) and [George Eliot](#). His concept of *Sociologie* and [social evolutionism](#) set the tone for early [social theorists](#) and [anthropologists](#) such as [Harriet Martineau](#) and [Herbert Spencer](#), evolving into modern academic sociology

presented by [Émile Durkheim](#) as practical and objective [social research](#). This is perhaps unsurprising as both were profoundly influenced by the early [Utopian socialist Saint-Simon](#), who was at one time Comte's mentor.

Comte intended to develop a secular-scientific ideology in the wake of European [secularisation](#). In this discussion, Comte identified three stages were like (1) the [theological](#), (2) the [metaphysical](#) and (3) the [positive](#). The theological phase of man was based on whole-hearted belief in all things with reference to [God](#). God, Comte says, had reigned supreme over human existence pre-[Enlightenment](#). Humanity's place in society was governed by its association with the divine presences and with the church. The theological phase deals with humankind's accepting the doctrines of the church rather than relying on its rational powers to explore basic questions about existence. It dealt with the restrictions put in place by the religious organization at the time and the total acceptance of any "fact" adduced for society to believe.

Comte describes the metaphysical phase of humanity as the time since the [Enlightenment](#), a time steeped in logical [rationalism](#), to the time right after the [French Revolution](#). This second phase states that the universal rights of humanity are most important. The central idea is that humanity is invested with certain rights that must be respected. In this phase, democracies and dictators rose and fell in attempts to maintain the innate rights of humanity.

The final stage of the trilogy of Comte's universal law is the scientific, or positive, stage. The central idea of this phase is that individual rights are more important than the rule of any one person. Comte stated that the idea of humanity's ability to govern itself makes this stage inherently different from the rest. There is no higher power governing the masses and the intrigue of any one person can achieve anything based on that individual's free will. The third principle is most important in the positive stage. Comte calls these three phases the universal rule in relation to society and its development. Neither the second nor the third phase can be reached without the completion and understanding of the preceding stage. All stages must be completed in progress.

Comte believed that the appreciation of the past and the ability to build on it towards the future was key in transitioning from the theological and metaphysical phases. The idea of progress was central to Comte's new science, sociology. Sociology would "lead to the historical consideration of every science" because "the history of one science, including pure political history, would make no sense unless it was attached to the study of the general progress of all of humanity". As Comte would say: "from science comes prediction; from prediction comes action." It is a philosophy of human intellectual development that culminated in science. The irony of this series of phases is that though Comte attempted to prove that human development has to go through these three stages, it seems that the positivist stage is far from becoming a realization. This is due to two truths: The positivist phase requires having a complete understanding of the universe and world around us and requires that society should never know if it is in this positivist phase. [Anthony Giddens](#) argues that since humanity constantly uses science to discover and research new things, humanity never progresses beyond the second metaphysical phase.

#### Criticisms:

Historically, positivism has been criticized for its [reductionism](#), i.e., for contending that all processes are reducible to physiological, physical or chemical events, social processes are reducible to relationships between and actions of individuals, and that biological organisms are reducible to physical systems.

(i) Though, Comte claimed to be the father of positivism or scientific approach; he himself was not committed to it.

(ii) Prof Timasheff opines, Comte's sociological theories represent a premature jump from

the level of observation and inferences to the level of theory.

(iii) According to J. S. Mill, Comte's religion does not stand the test of rationalism because that can never be put into practice.

(iv) Comte's religion was born out of his "moral intoxication".

(v) According to Rollin Chambliss, Comte wanted to build a science of social phenomena. But instead of doing that he struggled to provide his projects of social reorganization. He built a Utopia instead of science.

Auguste Comte gave maximum importance to the scientific method. In spite of criticisms, his insistence on positive approach, objectivity and scientific attitude contributed to the progress of social sciences in general.

#### THE 20th CENTURY POSITIVISM

It differs from 20th century, which is also called as, 'Logical Positivism', 'Logical Empiricism', 'Neo Positivism'. It took shape in 1920's. It associated with the Vienna Circle. The proponents of Logical Positivism are, Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Otto Neurath, Ludwig Wittgenstein and many others.

Old positivism, new positivism the differences experiences between these inductive method and deductive logical analysis. There post positivist thinkers also influenced by many things. Earlier positivism emphasis on observation of facts. But later positivism they argued for logical analysis. Especially Ludwig Wittgenstein later associated with this.

#### DECLINE OF THE POSITIVISM

Especially the development of 1930's affects on the longer and meaning are pragmatic one. Which is also contemporary development of post behaviouralism. It was the period radical reductionism which aimed to assimilate social sciences to natural sciences by introducing unified language of science was suffered a setback as a result. After that the trend of post positivism made an important alteration in understanding positivistic method by proposing new theses of the theory-ladenness of observations, the impossibility of crucial experiments and so on. So when the arguments of post positivism came forward, gradually positivism reach a stage to little rejuvenation.

#### POST POSITIVISM

Post-positivism is a confusing term. It does not represent one school of thought, but includes philosophers and social scientists that have been strongly critical of Comte and 'logical positivism' of the Vienna Circle over the last four decades. For example, there are those who reject the positivist view that the aim of scientific investigation should be to find regularities between events, or laws that can be used to make society better; rather, they say, human behaviour cannot be determined by external laws and the investigation should be into the underlying causes of events. Then there are advocates of social inquiry by interpretation (Interpretive account). Some say there should be a strict separation between objectivity and all value judgements. Still others regard theories as catalytic agents that will overthrow, or replace the established order and create something new as through critical theory. There are

advocates of social inquiry into the actions of individual actors

(Methodological

Individualism) and of inquiry within a framework .

Positivism was about understanding the world so that we could predict and control it by changing laws. In a period of chaos in Europe, it was for order and unity. Post-positivism has renounced unity and represents 'methodological pluralism'. Yosef Lapid has described post-positivism as a 'loosely patched-up umbrella' of remotely related articulations. I am interested in looking at the context in which the new philosophy of science is seeking to establish itself. This context is radically different from the glory days of 'logical positivism' in the 1920s and 1930s. The Second World War ended in the defeat of fascism and set the stage for the economic and political reconstruction of Western Europe. Since the 1950s, we have seen an intensification of the ideological war, followed by the defeat of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern

Europe in the 1990s. The United States and West European countries have enjoyed an increasing degree of individual freedom and prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century. Countries of the former Communist bloc are rapidly moving towards that goal. This is reflected in the 'pluralism' of the post-positivist era. Also in the second half of the twentieth century, decolonisation has seen the emergence of a large number of new nations. First, it happened as a result of the withdrawal by the old colonial powers like Britain and France from Asia and Africa; then, in Europe and Central Asia when the Soviet Union disintegrated. The process has been chaotic. Political upheaval still continues in several parts of the world, but there is little doubt that the most important social and political phenomenon to emerge out of all this is democracy. There has been greater pluralism of ideas and political views in societies which are mature democracies: for example, the United States and West European countries. One need not go back more than

40 years to see this diversity in the movements opposed to the American role in Vietnam, nuclear armament, capitalism and free trade, environmental pollution and so forth. The main characteristic of these, and of the social phenomena like the Hippie movement in the 1960s, has been opposition to the 'established order'. Even as problems with the centrally planned economic system in the Soviet bloc were becoming increasingly obvious, and the system was collapsing, Marxist thinking continued to exercise considerable influence at university campuses and the thinking of many post-positivist philosophers. Clearly, a 'more precise formulation' of the vastly differing post-positivist philosophies is needed to understand them better. Debra Morris has provided an account that distinguishes post-positivism from its predecessor and suggests some common features within its components. According to Morris, post-positivism represents: (1) a determination to free theoretical speculation from strict dependence on confirming data (2) gives the theory

component 'a pride of place' and approaches science in a philosophical way, and (3) opens a

direct link to democratic theory.

The most simple and enduring definition of democracy is that of Abraham Lincoln, who described it as 'a government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. However, democracy in the second half of the twentieth century, both in aspiration and reality, has thrown complications. Different individuals and groups in each society have differing views about its meaning and how it would best serve the interests of citizens. Nationalist aspirations have given rise to an increasing number of conflicts. Spirited debates continue in established democracies about what kind of society there should be. Such debates cannot take place without 'democratic individuality' and

'perspectivism'. The former acknowledges the right of equal say for each individual, the latter allows underlying assumptions in the formulation and application of theory. The need for maintaining neutrality or distance from the objects of social inquiry does not come into it.

Having focused on the many differences, let us finally see what remains common between positivism and post-positivism. Rejection of metaphysical inquiry in favour of science was the most important feature of positivism. It remains among the foundations of modern social inquiry. The role of theory and science was always crucial for positivists. To Comte, positivism had practical value and the growth of science was for the benefit of humankind. Most post-positivist scholars would not deny that such reformist tendencies remain among their underlying objectives. Data collection and analysis are still part of social inquiry. The purpose of all these examples is not to deny that the two have significant differences. They do and their differences are well established. It is, however, time to move on from the debate that focuses on the criticisms of positivism towards a more coherent post-positivistic philosophy in social science.

### CRITICISMS

The principles of Positivism criticized by many thinkers for some of its arguments. Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and Habermas they were raised question about accuracy, unity of Science and complexion of human society. Not only in Natural Sciences and also in Social Science- Natural Sciences argues that even today also there is no accuracy. There is so many differences between to the study of natural sciences and social sciences. Because in the social sciences the individual and their emotions, feelings are completely different. Its not be in natural sciences. Nature didn't experimented with results.

### POST-POSITIVISM

There is no single word/term for post-positivism. No single arguments are not there. Their arguments was:

1. They rejected the unity of science. It divided into two categories.
2. Methodological pluralism, no single methodologies.
3. Avoiding strict dependence on data.
4. Subject matter of the study of sciences.

Social factors not to an investigating thing as same like in natural sciences. We cannot be rescued from the values, norms etc.

### USES/BENEFITS OF THE POSITIVISM

1. It led to the birth to the Social Science - only the efforts of it
2. Respectable place in social science
3. In research area-collection of data, observation
- 4 There are no differences in the logic of inquiry across sciences.
5. The research should aim to explain and predict.
6. Research should be empirically observable via human senses. Inductive reasoning should be used to develop statements (hypotheses) to be tested during the research process.
7. Science is not the same as the common sense. The common sense should not be allowed to bias the research findings.
8. Science must be value-free and it should be judged only by logic

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## CONCLUSION

During the first half of the 20th century, approaches developed across the social sciences that were strongly influenced by positivist ideas. Indeed, it could be said that the very notion of a social science was positivist in origin. Moreover, even after positivism's influence had waned in many fields, in the second half of that century, it continued to exist at the very least as a ghostly presence, serving as a recurrent target for attack in methodological disputes. I begin by briefly outlining the history of positivist ideas and the various forms they took, along with their implications for the practice of social science. Then I consider two distinct varieties of

'post-positivism'; one revisionist, the other much more radical. I conclude by considering in

what respects these moves beyond positivism represent progress, and whether anything can still be learned from it today.

## Plan

Auguste Comte

Criticisms:

THE 20th CENTURY POSITIVISM

DECLINE OF THE POSITIVISM

POST POSITIVISM

CRITICISMS

POST-POSITIVISM

USES/BENEFITS OF THE POSITIVISM

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