

Comte's Positivism

Positivism

- As a philosophical ideology and movement positivism first assumed its distinctive features in the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who named the systematized science of sociology.
- It then developed through several stages known by various names, such as Empiriocriticism, Logical Positivism and Logical Empiricism and finally in the mid-20th century flowed into the movement known as Analytic and Linguistic philosophy. In its basic ideological posture, positivism is worldly, secular, anti-theological and anti meta-physical.

Positivism

- 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.

Positivism

- 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.

Positivism

- 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

- 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

- (a) Science is the only valid knowledge.
- (b) Fact is the object of knowledge.
- (c) Philosophy does not possess a method different from science.
- (d) 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.
- (e) Positivism denies intuition, prior reasoning, theological and metaphysical knowledge.

- Comte used positivism as a weapon against the negative philosophy prevalent before the French Revolution. That negative philosophy was more concerned with emotional than practical questions.
- Comte regarded such speculations as negative, since it was neither constructive nor practical.
- As an alternative, Comte invented 'positivism' which remains concerned with the questions about how things are in reality.

- Comte's positivism is described in several ways. One salient point is that it is scientific. Science should not be confused with empiricisms or mere collection of facts.
- Comte believed that the whole universe is governed by natural laws and these laws could be learned through the method of science.

- Positive knowledge is based on experience and considers only real phenomena. Comte did not deny the existence of unknown, but positivism was no way concerned with the supernatural.
- Chambliss has presented the essence of Comtean positivism in the following words, “positivism is not fatalistic, or optimistic or materialistic. It is concerned with the real, rather than fanciful, useful rather than all knowledge.”

Apart from the above, there are also some other characteristics:

- 1. All Scientific knowledge must be based on direct experience of a reality or direct observation is the surest way to acquire scientific knowledge.
- 2. The direct experience of a reality could be understood by La certitute, i.e. the unity of scientific method. This implies that the different branches of study are distinguished by their object of study not by their method.

- 3. The concept of unity of scientific method requires La precise, i.e. a common scientific goal of formulating testable theories. It also implies that there are no value judgements in scientific enquiry.
- 4. The positivist view science as containing the principle of La utilize i.e. all scientific knowledge must serve some useful purpose. It should be used as a tool for social engineering.
- 5. Positive knowledge is La relative, which means that scientific knowledge is unfinished because there is no absolute knowledge in science.
- Lastly, science gives prediction and from prediction comes action.

Criticisms:

- (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 John Stuart 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 reorganisation. 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.

-

- THANK U