

# Contribution of positivism to society philosophy essay



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Since the invitation of the term of ‘positivism’ in the late eighteenth century, this concept has been widely used and discussed. This method stresses on the use of quantitative evidence and is mostly used in the study of natural objects. As positivism provides people with a method to avoid speculation but to make scientific and reasonable prediction by the study of hard facts and scientific knowledge, the method is more and more used in the study of human society. The application of positivism in the study of society has brought many benefits and has promoted the development of society study. At the same time, there are some doubts about the ability of positivism to study society efficiently in the same way of studying natural objects. The essay is to critically discuss the contribution of positivism to the study of society.

## **A rejection of speculation**

Positivism is firstly used in the study of natural science. With the assistance of positivism, the natural sciences have experienced great development and changes. Many new discover and findings have been made. At that time, the study of human society is still at a stage of the study of the abstract ideas

and something metaphysical. The development of the society needs a better and deeper understanding about its nature and laws (Althusser. 1970). The study of society needs to be more regulated, systemized and scientific. The introduction of positivism has helped the study of science to get out of the old trap.

Personally, the most important contribution of positivism to the study of science is the rejection of speculation. The introduction of positivism in social study leads people to make studies and predictions based on empirical data and hard facts. People make law-like regularities based on the study of the hard facts and generalize the conclusion to a wider scope in society. Comte is the first one to bring up the idea of sociological positivism. Actually, he brought up this concept under the influence of Enlightenment. The introduction and expanding of science have shocked the world. Comte has studied the sciences and the circular dependence of theory, and then he brought up the first sociological version of positivism (Gordon. 1991). He suggested that the society has three stages. The first stage is the theological phase when people will get the knowledge and belief from God. Human society is governed by God and assessed in association with the divine world. People will take the doctrines and words of the church rather than the rational science. The second stage is called metaphysical stage. In this period, human will be aware of their innate rights and democracy and dictators should appear to defend the humanity rights. The final stage is the scientific one. It can also be called positive one (Craib. 1997). In this stage, the individual right will be most valued than in any other periods. Each one

should have the right to get what he or she with his or her free will and ability.

The doctrines and thoughts given by Comte are much different from the ones in modern sociological positivism. The theory is not absolutely right. The explanation and use of positivism are not fully developed in his work (Halfpenny. 2001). However, his brought up of positivism has made a great contribution. Personally, the meaningful important contribution of his version of sociological positivism is his appreciation of human right, the respect for objective natural rules and scientific knowledge. Positivism is born with a duty to fight against the past blind faith. It provides people with a new way to get to know the society and the world. At that time, it is a great fight against the dominion of people's mind by God and the church. He suggests that the effective way to evolutes from the inferior theological stage to the superior positivism stage is through the objective and scientific study of the past of the society and other things. In this way, positivism leads people to give up the reliance on God and the church for knowledge about humanity and the society and turn to the objective social disciplines. The study of society began a transition from speculation to reason and logic (Pleasants. 1997). The further development of positivism has more and more used hard facts and empirical data to fight against the metaphysics and speculation.

### **The deployment of scientific methods**

Another great contribution of positivism to the study of society is its supreme valuation of the use of scientific methods like statistic analysis to study the world and the society. In the field of positivism, all the knowledge is

generated based on the scientific study of past experience and data got in <https://assignbuster.com/contribution-of-positivism-to-society-philosophy-essay/>

observation (Rabinow. 2006). Hard facts and empirical data are more powerful than any fancies. The philosophers of positivism try to use the methods which are used to study natural sciences to study the science. They try to make laws for the changes and development in society, conduct experiment to mimic the situation in the real world and try to use different factors as alternatives to make prediction of the outcome.

One of the most important meanings of the use of scientific methods in the study of society is that it allows people to search for a reasonable casual explanation for the activities happen in the society. Otherwise, the social phenomena are most usually explained by the reasons of accident and the will of God or something else (Smart. 2001). Just as has been mentioned, speculation is common in that situation. The use of scientific methods can help people to analysis all the external and internal factors in a scientific manner and to explore the causal relationship between these factors and the arising of a specific outcome. There is one fact has to be aware that though positivism stresses much on the importance on the use of facts and statistics, that does not mean the study of society is the pure study of these things. The ultimate aim of the use of the scientific methods is to conclude laws based on the analysis result of the facts and the empirical data.

Another important contribution of positivism in the deployment of the scientific methods to study society is that, it helps to eliminate subjective thinking and opinions which may lead to bias in the outcome. One of the most obvious characteristics of the study of science is the objective attitudes and methods in the study. The application of these scientific methods in the study of social science, in a way, compels people to look directly at all the

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facts, no matter if the fact is pleasing or disgusting. Any lies which may make one feel better when looking at the facts can not exist in these scientific methods, as they can not be accounted as a statistical parameter (Cohen. 2007). The subjective opinions can not work to distort the outcome, as the objective data can not be influenced. That is why there are so many cruel but true social laws are discovered by positivism philosophers.

However, there are also some shortcomings in the use of the scientific methods. In a sense, the study of social science is more complex than the study of science. Most factors in the study of science can be clearly defined and measured. If not all the factors can be defined at present, they can be further completed as science develops. In the study of social science, many factors can not be clearly defined and measured. The factors are too complex to name them all (Ashley. 2005). The function of them is also very complicated. Too much reliance on the use of the scientific methods will lead to an extreme situation for the researchers. After all, social science is much different with natural science. People especially the researchers can not neglect that fact, or they may lose the ability to think about the society in a human way. To work like a machine will be a disaster.

### **The revealing of social law**

As has been mentioned in the last part, the ultimate aim of the use of the scientific methods are to discover the social laws hidden behind the diverse but similar social activities. Unlike the doctrine given by the church, the social laws given by sociological positivism are based on the numerous facts and data. Theses social laws are concluded not for the aim to guide people's behavior and life, but just to reveal the objective laws that are working in the

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society (Rashed. 2007). The revealing of the hardened social laws helps people to get to know about the nature of the society. In this way, the study of human society has get deeper from an abstract but superficial level to a concrete deep level. Durkheim is a great sociological positivism researcher in Europe. He has studied about the laws of social structure which will guide the evaluation of the society and determine the rise or fall of a certain society. Thus with the laws, it is possible to define if a society is healthy or not. The laws can also make the researcher to bring up reform or remedy for the society at stake.

The laws about the nature of the society are discovered by the researchers by the study of the hard facts and the empirical data. Then these laws are used in every branches of the human social science. Many reforms about the society and the making of new laws from then on are made under the guide of these social laws. For example, John Austin introduced his utilitarianism theory in his foundation of jurisprudence. He found that the origination of government laws and rules is not the social contract, but the utilitarian thinking of human being. Some pleasing masquerades about the nature of the society have been laid bare. That is no bad. As if the society is to develop, the development can not be made on basis of the lies. The Noble Lies of Plato is not likely to be beneficial in the modern society.

There is one thing very troublesome about the conclusion of laws in sociological laws. It is known that along with the development of sociological positivism, there have emerged many branches of this science. Different branches usually have different beliefs and different chosen of study method. The conclusions or the social laws they have made also differ much. <https://assignbuster.com/contribution-of-positivism-to-society-philosophy-essay/>

It is not justified to say who is right or who is wrong. The social science is more complicated and has many different possibilities. Even with the use of objective scientific methods, it is hardly to reach a single right law.

Personally, these laws can not be applied in every situation but should be used in consideration of the different context.

## **5. 0 Conclusions**

Overall, the introduction of positivism in the study of society is a great development. It has helped the study of social science to break the limit of abstract metaphysical methods. Positivism has provided the social science with a new way to perceive the world. The most important contribution of positivism is that it helps people to break the limit of mind by God and the church. People turn to the study of hard facts and data from past and experiment to get knowledge rather than only from the teaching the church. The use of the scientific methods, people can understand the society in a more reasonable way. The subjective bias is avoided in the study.

Sociological positivism researchers have also made many in depth laws based on the scientific study which provide people with more initiative to manage the society. However, there are many problems troubling the use of positivism in the study of society. To study society like a natural science is under great argument. Human society is much more complex and full of changes. Too much reliance on the scientific method but neglect the human thinking will turn to people into machines. The conclusions made will are not be reliable.