

Chapter 4

Critical Theory: The Human Being Takes the Stage Again

Derya Guler Aydin
Hacettepe University, Turkey

Itir Ozer-Imer
Hacettepe University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Based on the historical developments in the philosophy of science, it can be claimed that the method of social sciences is mainly dominated by the method of the natural sciences. Social sciences, especially, economics have been affected by the method of physics. From a critical viewpoint, this study aims to scrutinize the method of social sciences by taking into account the concept of devaluation of human beings. The study puts forward that mainstream economics devalue human being at the level of its methodology by excluding the real creator of value from the analyses and by disregarding social and historical factors. The study demonstrates that by taking into consideration the neglected cultural, political and historical factors in addition to the economic ones, the critical theory includes human being and his/her values in the analyses, and hence, it unifies scientific knowledge with human behavior, which is the intentional behavior behind all economic decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Epistemology, within the framework of its own criteria, deals with the demarcation between science and non-science. According to the positivist approach, philosophy is an unscientific task since it contains relative knowledge, and the aim of science is to achieve objective results. Within this context, positivist theory of knowledge argues that reality can only be produced through sense experiences. Therefore, as suggested above, positivism considers metaphysical factors as unscientific. With modernity, the God-centered universe has been transformed to the human-centered universe, and reason and science have come to the fore. Scientific progress has continued its development in the rationalist and empiricist line, which is appreciated as the source of knowledge. Empiricism, which comprises sense, perception, observation, and experiment, has gotten ahead of rationalism with the prominence of the criteria of reality and universality in the theory of knowledge. Accordingly, scientific propositions should be verifiable (Hollis & Nell, 1975). In this context, positivism has, in fact, influenced social scientists as a theory of knowledge that includes both naturalism and empiricism.

The development of the social sciences in the modern period has been to imitate the method of the natural sciences, in other words, to maintain a framework based on experimentation, observation and confirmation like in the natural sciences. With Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who is accepted as the founder of sociology, positivism was thought to be the only method of natural and social sciences, and developments in the philosophy of science proceeded from the line of methodological monism. According to positivism, sciences may differ according to their fields; for example, a physicist investigates the matter, a biologist examines the plant, while a social scientist scrutinizes topics based on the human being. Although the research subjects are different, scientific knowledge can be produced by a single method.

Social sciences, which take the human being as the basis, are aware of the abstract value of the human being. However, for the social scientists, who adopted the positivist method, the application of methodological monism has been in the form of explaining the human being's abstract, immeasurable values within the framework of the concrete, physical and biological existence, and they have even proceeded by reducing these values to a concept such as social physics. A similar concept called social engineering, which is used in sociology, and the atomistic individual, who represents the individual of the neoclassic school are the concepts adopted within this context. According to the positivists, social sciences should produce knowledge by experiment and observation, while taking into account the

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