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History, Science and the Social Sciences: The Relationship of Humanities to Other Knowledge Domain

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ABSTRACT

History is about people in society, their actions and interactions, their beliefs and prejudices, their pasts and presents. `People in society' mean people as individuals, groups, institutions, communities, states and nations. History is to society what remembered experienced is to an individual, which was further seen as `a social necessity'. Historians turn to the social sciences for insight into behaviour, making history to be a vigorous evolving discipline able to absorb the best of both scientific and humanistic thought.

Further afield, history provides imaginative range apart from being an inventory of assets. Similarly, history puts into consideration the way societies have changed through a period of time including the significant continuities ideas and values which exist that are important to the society. However, the study of history traditionally, develops particular historical understanding of the importance of humanities as a subject matter of human behaviour bringing about a precedent and prediction.

This paper therefore made use of secondary sources to gather information on the relationship and interaction of history with other disciplines such as science and social sciences and show how historians cut through the diversity of experience and behaviour that characterize human activity and to make judgments as to why people are likely to have behaved as they did.

***KEY WORDS**:* Interactions, Assets, Judgments, Humanistic thought. People.

INTRODUCTION

History is the interpretation and analysis of the human past which enables the study of continuity and change overtime possible. As Gardiner (1978) argued, history is an act of both investigation and imagination that seeks to explain how people have changed over a period of time. It is a means to understand the past and present, because historians use all forms of evidence to examine, interpret, revisit and reinterpret the past (Cannon (1980]. To a very large extent, the different interpretations of the past alert people to the sheer variety of human mentality and achievements as it provide imaginative range including an inventory of assets. Earlier, Fritz (1956) posited that the way in which people identify and interact with one another is by large a consequence of history, which shapes and condition individuals and societies.

History, apart from being a source of precedent and prediction is also a bridge to other disciplines in order to fully grasp the understanding of other humanities and the sciences (Brown, (1990).

When Marwick (1989) speaks of history as a `social necessity' it means history provides a critique of the myths `that pervade society. It has a crucial corrective function in that by removing myths, it can act as the conscience of society.

HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

In recent years, scholars have tried to incorporate history into a scientific frame with the dominant strategy with positivism to resolve problems of interpretation and consciousness by relegating history to the margins of social analysis (Marrow & Brown (1994), as expressed by Marrow:

> "Knowledge about history is held to have no significance for the evaluation of the validity of theories and to be largely peripheral for the discovery of better strategies".

Fogel and Elton however bring out some of the different ways in which historians approach their study. To Fogel he sees `traditional historian' as making an attempt to portray the entire range of human experience to capture all of the essential features of the civilizations they were studying, and to do so in a way would clearly have relevance to the present. They were continually searching for `synthesizing principles' that would allow them to relate in a meaningful way the myriad of facts that they were "uncovering".

In their analysis, he maintains that historians turn to the social sciences for insights into behaviour. But they recoil from its analytical methods because these threaten history's intrinsic qualities' its literary art; its personal voice and its concern with the countless subtle questions that are involved in the notion of individuality.

To Fogel he believes that this is the result of the way traditional historians evaluate evidence. They use a `legal model' which is well suited to examining specific events and individuals but which is suspicious of statistical evidence and scientific method.

Therefore `cliometricians' like Fogel would like their study of the past to be based on explicit models of the human behavior. In addition, they believe that all historians use behavioural model in relating the facts of history to each other. The difference is that for traditional historians these are implicit, vague and incomplete. They allow historians to cut through the diversity of experience and behaviour that characterize human activity and to make judgments as to why people are likely to have behaved as they did.

Carr (1987) emphatically contended that history was social science because historians like scientists seek generalizations that help to broaden the understanding of the subject. Historical generalizations were often related to lessons to be learned from other historical occurrences. Between history and social sciences, four distinctions are worth examining; these concern experimental data generalization, value judgments and communication. Social scientists do, in greater or lesser degree conduct experiments in the form, principally of opinion samples, or studies of behaviour patterns and responses to controlled stimuli of small groups. Historians of course, make extensive use of social surveys, census returning and so on conducted in the past by `pure' or applied `social scientists' and they may as well derive a great deal of benefit from participating in controlled surveys conducted in their own time.

However, debates about theory and methodology in the social sciences have long been concerned about the extent to which scientific principles may be applied to the study of social phenomena. The `problem of using history to understand the social world is that social phenomena do not lend themselves very well to the central aims and assumptions of science as expressed by Collingwood, (1946), Moore, (1966) and corroborated by Hosbawn (1987).

For one, the notion that historical processes and events may be `isolated' and tested as if they were physical properties and processes understates substantially the possibility that the factors that led to one sequence of events and outcomes were completely unique, and that they can therefore never be compared or replicated again.

Similarly, another issue concerns the extent to which facts may he treated in isolation from the norms, assumptions, and values used in giving them meaning as Morrow and Brown (1994) argued.

Flyvberg (2001) contested that an attempt to emulate the natural sciences in the social sciences are problematic in the sense that scientific inferences about human behaviour can never approximate the `context dependent factors that determine human motivation.

Flyvberg observed that the problem in the study of human activity is that every attempt at a context free definition of an action, that is, a definition based on abstract rules or laws will not necessarily accord with the pragmatic way an action is defined by actors in a concrete social situation.

In adoption it is to be noted that though in reality the social scientists far more regularly urges models and theoretical constructs than does the historian, and that these constructs are nearly always of a more abstract character than the historian would be prepared to accept.

Underlying this fact, is a foundational belief that historical narrative can be incorporated into a scientific frame, in which the inherent bias of historicist thinking is eliminated while still maintaining the context of past events as argued by Popper (1997). Poppers case against 'historicist' explanation stains from the distinction he makes between historical accounts that look for regularities and innumerate facts in some kind of causal fashion" and those that argue that `unique events may be the cause of other events.

SCIENCE AND HISTORY: INCOMMESURABLE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Much attention has been given to the meaning of science over the years by educational scientists. However, such definition varies from one scientist to another. Whilst some scientist viewed the definition from the perspective of its methods or processes that is what scientist do, others examine the meaning of the concept in terms of its product that is knowledge in the form of facts, concepts, law and theories. Kuhn (2000) sees science as the study of physical world, the study of the physical and natural world and phenomena especially through the usage of systematic observation and experiment. This same view had earlier been expressed by Honey and Sorrenson (1977) when they claimed that science is a structure knowledge having the inquiry processes.

Other scientist in the like of Wilson (1998) sees sciences as a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes explanations and predictions about the universe. In a closely related understanding, science also refers to a body of knowledge itself which can be explained rationally and applied reliably. The incommensurability of science and history rests upon a particular understanding of each, such that an empiricist philosophy of science and a positivist methodology were representative of scientific inquiry, (Curtis & Koivisto, (2010). The issue of whether to take a scientific or a historical approach to forming a knowledge of the social world is often represent consisting in a choice between developing universally applicable general laws, through a type of grand theory or seeking to understand particular unique historical events: The former approach is nomothetic: the discovery for study of general scientific laws. The latter is the idiographic; the study of particular facts or processes. Hollis and Smith while drawing distinction in the philosophy of social science between positivism and interpretivism postulated that; the former demands that social explanation find objective general laws determining the object under study, the latter seeks a form of intuitive or sympathetic understanding from the inside. Therefore, a key difference is in the goals of the two approaches the development of general laws seeks a kind of knowledge that is universally applicable to all times and places, while ideographic inquiry is concerned to understand each concrete particular as temporally and spatially unique event. As argued by Carr, the idea that human societies may be studied as if they were boned by the laws of physics underplays the notion that the subjects of history are conscious of their surroundings and of their past and that their consciousness may affect the course of history.

Carr further observed that, in science, drama repeats itself over and over again because the dramatic personae are creative unconscious of the past or inanimate objects. In history however, the drama cannot repeat itself because the dramatic personae are already conscious of the prospective denouncement: the essential condition of the first performance can never be reconstituted.

Though Carr conceded that historians cannot predict exact events in the future, he argued that historical generalizations can supply information useful to understanding both the present and the future. In his argument, a central issue of concern was the enlightenment faith in the idea that society and history could be explained (and ordered) through the application of science and reason. Where natural scientists collected observation about physical processes and properties, he argued that the "Modem historian' aimed to establish through the `events of history'.

It is instructive to note that, the early positivists of the eighteenth century enlightenment such as Henri de Saint-

Simon and August Comte, wrote of the opinion that a science of society that could explain the underlying mechanics of historical development was both desirable and achievable.

Be that as it may, in the Kuhnian - inspired critique that science itself is a process that evolves in historical time and that its method and aims change with the knowledge and problems of the day placing the development of science itself in historical context, sporting out how scientific knowledge did not accumulate uniformity, but was subject to periodic crisis and reconstitution. His work undercut the perception of science as a unified undertaking that successively reveals new layers of reality. Kuhn challenged the positivist position that scientific theories should be discarded because of failure to live up to empirical observation.

Along the same line, in the argument that history itself is not a monolithic discipline when the enlightenment positivists originally disparaged traditional approaches to history, historians initially sought to defend their approach by claiming that it was not scientific or objective or alternatively that its methods should not be judged by the same standards as the physical sciences. There have been recurrent attempts to merge theoretical concepts and historical analysis so as to put an end to issues of epistemological and intellectual relativism, historians have been repeatedly drawn back towards scientific concepts but rather than being incommensurable approaches, science and history need each other. Such notion of science need not necessarily be those of empiricism and positivism.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the interaction between history and science and social sciences connection with the relationship of humanities to other knowledge domain that, at the heart of the scientific method is the notion that explanation about social and natural phenomena may be established on the basis of a methodology that adheres to principles of validity and reliability (Woodhouse & Chimbowu, (2005). Questions about validity concern the ability of concepts and methods to measure what they intend to measure (Peters, (1998).

Reliability is the principle that `applying the same procedure in the same way will always produce the same measure even when it is applied by different people. (King, Keohane & Verba (1994).

Therefore, the basic aim of relationship of humanities to other knowledge domain is to structure social inquiry in a way that is oriented towards the generalization of insights about social phenomena (Johnson, (2006).

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