

# POLI 343

# Introduction to Political Research

## Session 3-Positivism and Humanism

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*[godsonug.wordpress.com/blog](http://godsonug.wordpress.com/blog)*

# Positivism

When we want to show that knowledge exists we want to show that experience plays an important role in that. The demonstration of knowledge through experience is the basis of the concept of positivism.

Empiricism was not a single strand of thought i.e. it was not monolithic. Its followers split into different schools of thought including the positivists and the humanists.

Positivism as a variant of empiricism stresses that valid knowledge is obtained through experience and sensations derived from an external objective reality.

# Positivism

This means that for any knowledge to be scientific, it must be gathered through a rigorous observation of events or phenomena from which general laws about reality can be constructed. It also implies that scientific inquiries are directed towards external objective realities. To engage in a scientific endeavour therefore means the acceptance of the scientific method and the object of scientific inquiry is the external objective reality and not subjective beliefs and values.

# Positivism ; Coût'd:

The acceptance of the scientific method of enquiring knowledge is also an acceptance in a belief in scientism. According to John Wellmuth, scientism is a belief that science and the scientific method are the only reliable natural means of acquiring knowledge. The implications of a belief in scientism are: (a) that every branch of scientific endeavour is co-existent with the entire field of knowledge (b) that although the various fields of science differ in their techniques, they all accept the same methodological principle which include the following approaches of the scientific method, namely careful observation, hypothesis formulation, experimentation, verification and theory formulation.

# Positivism

Positivism asserts the primacy of observation in assessing the truth of statements of fact and holds that metaphysical and subjective arguments that are not based on observable data are meaningless. Positivism is an epistemological (philosophy of knowledge) perspective and philosophy of science which holds that the only authentic knowledge is that which is based on sense experience and positive verification.

# Positivism

Though the positivist approach has been a 'recurrent theme in the history of western thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present day' the concept was developed in the early 19th century by the philosopher and founding sociologist, [Auguste Comte](#). As an approach to the philosophy of science deriving from [Enlightenment](#) thinkers like [Pierre-Simon Laplace](#) (and many others), Comte saw the [scientific method](#) as replacing [metaphysics](#) in the history of thought, and observed the circular dependence of theory and observation in science.

# Positivism

Sociological positivism was later expanded by Émile Durkheim as a foundation to social research. At the turn of the 20th century the first wave of German sociologists, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel, rejected the stricter elements of the doctrine, presenting anti-positivist sociology.

The point at issue about the scientific method is that what matters most in any scientific endeavour is the method by which knowledge about any aspect of reality is acquired.

# Humanism

The phrase "The scientific method" thus refers to a regular series of steps which begins with observation. The scientist rejects as unproven any conclusion not supported by observed facts. In the process of thinking one major precept is a refusal to be content with any one answer to a problem. Scholars do this often especially when another scholar offers an answer to an existing problem. The other scholar will examine the answer very critically in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the answer. When an answer is rejected, scholars propose an alternative because it is not proper to leave a vacuum in a controversial discussion.



# Humanism

Humanism as a variant of empiricism arose as a result of the criticism leveled against positivism. The criticisms of the humanist school emphasize an existential reality of social life i.e. social life and its institutions should be analyzed in terms of the shared realities and actions of individuals as they understand them. The humanists attack the applicability of the scientific method to the social sciences and sociology in particular. The American Humanist Association explains in straightforward terms, exactly what the modern Humanist philosophy is about.

# HuwaYisw ;CoYt'd:

They summarize the basic ideas held in common by both Religious and Secular Humanists as follows:

- ❖ Humanism is one of those philosophies for people who think for themselves. There is no area of thought that a Humanist is afraid to challenge and explore.
- ❖ Humanism is a philosophy focused upon human means for comprehending reality. Humanists make no claims to possess or have access to supposed transcendent knowledge.

# HuwaYisw ;CoYt'd:

- ❖ Humanism is a philosophy of reason and science in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, when it comes to the question of the most valid means for acquiring knowledge of the world, Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation, and altered states of consciousness.
- ❖ Humanism is a philosophy of imagination. Humanists recognize that intuitive feelings, hunches, speculation, flashes of inspiration, emotion, altered states of consciousness, and even religious experience, while not valid means to acquire knowledge, remain useful sources of ideas that can lead us to new ways of looking at the world. These ideas, after they have been assessed rationally for their usefulness, can then be put to work, often as alternate approaches for solving problems.

# Huwa Yisw ; Co Yt' d:

- ❖ Humanism is a philosophy for the here and now. Humanists regard human values as making sense only in the context of human life rather than in the promise of a supposed life after death.
- ❖ Humanism is a philosophy of compassion. Humanist ethics is solely concerned with meeting human needs and answering human problems--for both the individual and society--and devotes no attention to the satisfaction of the desires of supposed theological entities.
- ❖ Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanists recognize the existence of moral dilemmas and the need for careful consideration of immediate and future consequences in moral decision making.

# HuŵaŶisŵ ;CoŶt'dŵ:

- ❖ Humanism is in tune with the science of today. Humanists therefore recognize that we live in a natural universe of great size and age that we evolved on this planet over a long period of time, that there is no compelling evidence for a separable "soul," and that human beings have certain built-in needs that effectively form the basis for any human-oriented value system.
- ❖ Humanism is in tune with today's enlightened social thought. Humanists are committed to civil liberties, human rights, church-state separation, the extension of participatory democracy not only in government but in the workplace and education, an expansion of global consciousness and exchange of products and ideas internationally, and an open-ended approach to solving social problems, an approach that allows for the testing of new alternatives.

# HuŵaŶisŵ ;CoŶt'dŵ:

- ❖ Humanism is in tune with new technological developments. Humanists are willing to take part in emerging scientific and technological discoveries in order to exercise their moral influence on these revolutions as they come about, especially in the interest of protecting the environment.
- ❖ Humanism is, in sum, a philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure of being part of new discoveries, seeking new knowledge, exploring new options. Instead of finding solace in prefabricated answers to the great questions of life, Humanists enjoy the open-endedness of a quest and the freedom of discovery that this entails.