

Philosophy as the study of results of special sciences

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Abstract: *There is not unanimity amongst philosophers as what philosophy actually studies. Various schools of thought exist. As a consequence one school of thought represented by Herbert Spencer states that philosophy is not an individual science but that it studies the sumtotal of the truths of the individual sciences, giving a kind of universal truth arrived at by means of and through a systematic synthesis of various sciences. This then forms the subject – matter of this journal article.*

Keywords: *philosophy, special sciences, sumtotal of truths, universal truth, and systematic synthesis*

I. Introduction

Due to different backgrounds, different schools of thought and differences in training and perspectives, differences have also occurred in the way philosophers have viewed what philosophy stands for and the delineation of its subject – matter. As a consequence philosophy is designated variously by various philosophers for various reasons. Be it as it may and thus amongst other views /perspectives, philosophy may be viewed as:

- a. logical analysis;
- b. the study of concepts;
- c. logical syntax of scientific language;
- d. thinking which seeks to discover connected truth about all available experiences; and
- e. **the study of the results of the special sciences.**

This latter aspect constitutes the focal point of this journal article. The argument is here advanced that philosophy is viewed not as an independent science but rather as the integrative study of the results of the special sciences. This article, therefore, is intended to concisely analyse this contention.

II. The purpose of the article

The main aim here is two – fold to:

- (a) *examine* the contention and
- (b) *identify and explain* the positivistic view which supports this philosophical point of view.

III. Philosophy as results of special sciences

To understand this subject, let us examine the following pertinent observations:

3.1 Writers and scholars relevant to the subject

The under mentioned writers and scholars amongst others are relevant to this discussion:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Herbert Spencer• S. P. Robbins | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Johannes Kepler• De Genzo | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isaac Newton• E. Schwella |
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3.2 Basic systems theory

According to *Hodge, Anthony and Gales* (1996:12-13), institutions consist of parts that function together as an integrated whole in order to reach institutional objectives. These authors refer to this concept as holism, and describe the related principles of synergism as follows: ‘the sum of the interaction of the component parts of the organisation working together is greater than the effect of the parts working separately’. It is important to remember that these parts do not operate in isolation, but within a particular environment, which, in an organizational context, is described by *Hall* (1996:206_ as all phenomena external to the organisation that are a potential or actual influence on the organisation. *Griffin* (1993:47 – 48) describes a system as an interconnected group of elements functioning as a whole and consisting of four primary components: inputs, transformation

processes, outputs and feedback. He further defines open systems as systems that are in interaction with the environments within which they function. *Robbins and De Cenzo* (1995:18) describe the systems approach as a theory that views an organisation as a set of interrelated and interdependent components.

Open systems and closed systems

A distinction can be made between open systems and closed systems: The latter can be described as organisations that operate in isolation without interacting with their external environment, while the former are dynamic, self – sustaining organisations in continuous interaction with the external environment in order to acquire the necessary input resources to be transformed into outputs in the form of goods or services (Greenberg & Baron 1995:10; Hodge et al 1996:12 ; Robbins and De Cenzo 1995:18; Erwin Schwella et al 1997:14). As Hodge, Anthony and Gales (1996:14) state, organisations, that operate in isolation ‘run out of energy’ or experience a lack of resources which results in a state of entropy or decline; they can even cease to exist or to function. Open systems, on the other hand, acquire energy in the form of input resources from the external environment and enter a state of negative entropy, or positive growth.

Relationship of social system and the environment

Managers must therefore be sensitive to the environment within which public organisations operate and must be proactive dealing with opportunities and threats emanating from that environment. In this regard, the following consequences of the open-systems perspective are identified (Hodge et al 1996:122).

- Managers should have and make use of information pertaining to the environment
- Organisations are flexible and can adapt and react to environmental conditions

3.3 Philosophy as integrative study

According to the positivistic view, philosophy has not an independent field of study. Philosophy is regarded as an *integrative and synthetic* study. That is to say philosophy summarizes the results of the special sciences. The positivistic view regards the individual sciences as the elements or componental parts from which man constructs his knowledge of the universe or macrocosm. Each individual science deals with a particular aspect of reality. For example, psychology is the study of human behavior and experience. Since experience is of special importance to philosophy, it will be very useful in this connection. In another example, all the mature or natural sciences such as botany, physics, zoology, mathematics, and chemistry study nature. By nature we mean an empirically observable reality which exists independently of human activity.

Arnold Brecht (1967:59-60) says: Modern science, as ushered in by men like *Francis Bacon* [1561 – 1626], *Galileo Galilei* [1564 – 1642], [1643-1727] in the natural sciences and, more than a hundred years before them, by *Niccolo Machiavelli* [1469 – 1527] in the social sciences, has tended to reach its generalized synthetic propositions not priori from reason, from religion or from the depth of convictions, but by inductive reasoning from observed individual facts. This movement has led up to, and culminated in, scientific method as presently understood. Whenever we generalize some synthetic statement – saying, for instance, that all stones supported, fall to the ground, because we have observed many doing that non behaving differently, or that all human beings feel some are toward the good as distinct from the evil, because there are millions of observations to this effect by millions of people; or that all power corrupts, because we have seen power corrupt, because we have seen power corrupt people very often – then we are applying so – called inductive reasoning. How can this type of reasoning be justified, and if at all, under what conditions? Are we proceeding logically in much reasoning?

The mental sciences study the reality brought about by human activity.

The natural or mature sciences and mental sciences are all called the special sciences which study just one particular aspect of reality. The special sciences each provide insight into but a small part of reality. Thus with terrific specialization, special sciences have brought a fragmentation of the world.

But philosophy being the mistress of all sciences integrates the results of the special sciences. The sumtotal of these – the independent sciences – is philosophy. Philosophy, therefore, is the result of the blending of the sciences. Philosophy, in other words, is an encyclopedic science. It is comprehensive, all embracing and all inclusive. It is an integrating science. It is, therefore, synthetic.

Philosophy as synthesis may be linked to the human organism. The human arm by itself is not the human being. The eye or the leg or the stomach or the head or the foot or any other part of the body cannot in any conceivable be called the human being. All the organs make a unity. This unity is being, man.

Philosophy in like manner is the integrated outcome or result of the individual sciences. It represents totality or whole, or the world view or world picture.

3.4 Herbert Spencer's contributions

Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903), the famous British sociologist and scientist, a particularly known in philosophy as the articulate advocate of the positivistic view, has unequivocally portrayed this view of totality or total reality. He made a study of both German and English philosophy. His comparative analysis revealed that he term philosophy was applied to *well coordinated, systematic knowledge*. After the elimination of discordant elements, there remains '*knowledge of the highest degree of generality*'. According to him, sciences first seek generalization of a simple order. These generalizations rise in gradual manner to higher and extended generalizations. Science means indeed the family of sciences. The fusion of these various special sciences makes a distinct contribution to the whole (or world picture). The various truths of the sciences are coordinated. Philosophy then is this fused knowledge, knowledge which is completely unified and coordinated. This then explains the contention that philosophy is the study of the results of the special sciences coordinated and fused into a broad system of knowledge. "In astronomy, the progress has been from the special generalizations, each expressing the motions of a particular planet, to the generalizations of Kepler, expressing the motions of the planets at large; and then to Newton's generalizations expressing the motions of all heavenly bodies whatever." Similarly in chemistry, physics and biology there has been an advance from the relations of particular facts to relations presented by a still wider class. That is to say there has been an advance of the truths of a high generality or greater abstractness. The logical argument is this: The sumtotal of the truths of the individual sciences must give a kind of universal truth. The universal truth must be arrived at by means of and through a systematic synthesis of the various sciences. The various sciences pull, therefore, their respective truths to make a unity which constitutes the study of philosophy.

IV. Conclusion

If philosophy then is to maintain its prestigious priesthood and remain the father of sciences, it must remain and follow the Spencerian positivism. The fact is philosophy must not be a special science. If it does so, then it will have been swept away by the characteristic terms and concepts of terrific *specialization, fragmentation, lonely intellectualism, and modern heathenism*. The contention is that reality has been defaced by logical analysis and total reality has suffered from the wounds of intellectual specialization.

Philosophy by employing positivistic Spencerianism does heal the wounds of total reality. In this respect, therefore, the researchers, scholars and writers are in full accord with the Spencerian positivism that philosophy must be integrative, all inclusive, all embracing, and comprehensive.

Philosophy, therefore, must be an encyclopedic science. It is the integration of the results of special sciences.

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