



POSITIVISM IN GEOGRAPHY

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Positivism

- A philosophy developed in Europe.
- An epistemological doctrine that the true knowledge is only about the fact. The fact or the factual is an object that can be observed empirically with our senses. The term 'positive' doesn't mean normatively, but descriptively. It means 'the factual'.





- Comes from the French word "positivisme", which is derived from the root word positif, and denotes that something is arbitrarily imposed on the mind by sensory experience.
- it came to be associated with the scientific method.

August Comte

- The proponent of positivism.
- He suggested that theology and metaphysics are flawed.
- According to Comte the history of mankind develops in three stages:
 1. Theological Stage
 2. Metaphysical Stage
 3. Positivist Stage



Theological Stage

- Man searched the causes of natural phenomena behind the empirical world and found the superhuman forces like idols (fetishism), gods (polytheism) and God (monotheism).
- There was a progress of knowledge from the knowledge of impersonal forces to personal God.
- The social organization was absolutism.

But this stage can be compared with the infantile stage of human person.



Metaphysical Stage

- In this stage the natural forces were not imagined as superhuman forces. They were grasped with abstract concepts like 'cause', 'ether', 'being', 'substance' etc. There was no more God in this stage, because God was conceptualized as an abstract entity.
- The social organization was laws oriented society
- This stage is comparable with the stage of adolescence of human person.





Positivist Stage

- Man explains the natural phenomena factually, i.e. he doesn't try to explain them through theological or metaphysical causes. So, the fall of an apple is not caused by God or by the 'primal cause', but by 'gravitation'. We can observe neither God nor primal cause. They are not facts. Only fact is observable.
- The social organization is industrial society.

Positivists

Positivism asserts that all authentic knowledge allows verification and that all authentic knowledge assumes that the only valid knowledge is scientific. Thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Pierre-Simon Laplace and Auguste Comte believed the scientific method, the circular dependence of theory and observation, must replace metaphysics in the history of thought.

Wilhelm Dilthey, in contrast, fought strenuously against the assumption that only explanations derived from science are valid. He reprised the argument, already found in Vico, that scientific explanations do not reach the inner nature of phenomena and it is humanistic knowledge that gives us insight into thoughts, feelings and desires. Dilthey was in part influenced by the historicism of Leopold von Ranke.

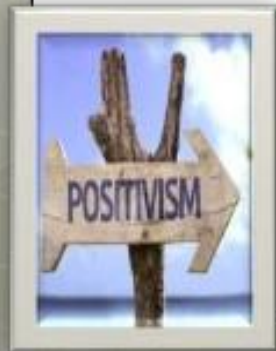
Logical positivism post positivism

Logical positivism a descendant of Comte's basic thesis but an independent movement—sprang up in Vienna and grew to become one of the dominant schools in Anglo-American philosophy and the analytic tradition. Logical positivists rejected metaphysical speculation and attempted to reduce statements and propositions to pure logic. Strong critiques of this approach by philosophers such as Karl Popper, Willard Van Orman Quine and Thomas Kuhn have been highly influential, and led to the development of postpositivism.



Antipositivism

The turn of the 20th century the first wave of German sociologists, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel, rejected the doctrine, thus founding the antipositivist tradition in sociology. Later antipositivists and critical theorists have associated positivism with "scientism"; science as ideology.



In historiography

In historiography the debate on positivism has been characterized by the quarrel between positivism and historicism.

Arguments against positivist approaches in historiography include that history differs from sciences like physics and ethology in subject matter and method. That much of what history studies is non quantifiable, and therefore to quantify is to lose in precision. Experimental methods and mathematical models do not generally apply to history, and it is not possible to formulate general laws in history.

