

Epistemological Limits in The Scientific Study of Social Phenomena

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Abstract: In this study, we seek to identify the development witnessed in the study of social phenomena through the multiplicity of visions in the approaches applied to them, and then the epistemological limits of each approach, as scholars disagreed about the possibility of explaining the social phenomenon through the mechanisms of the natural sciences approach, between supporters and opponents. Supporters believe that it can be conducted. It has to be experiments and we have to predict it will happen, in contrast to opponents who acknowledge the difficulty of studying social phenomena in the same way as studying natural phenomena, stressing the necessity of developing a new scientific method that is compatible with the nature of the social phenomenon, which is the method of understanding.

Keywords: Epistemology; Interpretation; Understanding; Social phenomenon; Scientific Study.

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- Introduction :

The development achieved by scientific knowledge in the field of natural phenomena, whether in the field of inanimate matter or living matter, encouraged scientists to try to transfer the same method and the same mechanisms and apply them in the field of human phenomena in general and social phenomena in particular, in order to achieve the same goal and the same purpose, which is to reach controlling laws that control the field of these phenomena in their human dimension. However, the difference in the subject studied raised many discussions, some of which considered that human phenomena are similar to natural phenomena and therefore we study them with the same method as things that differ in their degree of complexity and difficulty from the subject of nature only, and therefore they are more difficult than nature only.

While another trend sees that these phenomena differ in nature and basis from natural phenomena, as man is a multidimensional and highly complex being whose behavior and interactions cannot be controlled and explained by fixed laws of nature according to the deterministic, automatic model.

In the midst of this epistemological discussion, we want, through this research, to clarify the epistemological limits of both trends by addressing the social phenomenon.

Can social phenomena be studied scientifically as is the case in the natural sciences? Or does the social phenomenon have something that distinguishes it and makes it intractable to the mechanisms of studying natural phenomena? Then, what are the epistemological limits of the methods of interpretation and explanation in studying social phenomena?

1. Conceptual Introduction

Terms gain their cognitive value through their control and clear definition of their meanings so that their purpose is purposeful and their intent is useful, which will be explained in this conceptual introduction.

1.1. Epistemology

It is a relatively new field of knowledge, despite its roots extending back to previous periods, and which is concerned with criticizing scientific knowledge with the aim of revealing its principles, the circumstances of its emergence, and its interpretations of reality, in terms of interest in concepts, methodological mechanisms, and the results reached in various sciences.

Epistemology was used for the first time in the second half of the nineteenth century (1806-1864) in the book *The Laws of Metaphysics*, in which distinguished between epistemology and ontology (Rassoul, 1993, p. 86).

The word literally means the theory of knowledge (*Theory de la science*) and its appearance in French dictionaries dates back to the dictionary of (Larousse illustrated) in 1906 (Robert, 2003, p. 09). Epistemology is a term composed of two Greek words (Karkari, 2010, p. 15).

- Episteme (*Epistémè*) means science (which is the subject of epistemology).

- Logos, and its meanings include science, criticism, theory, study, and it indicates a method.

Accordingly, epistemology, in terms of linguistic derivation, means “the science of sciences,” “the science of knowledge,” or “the theory of science.”

Technically, “A critical study of various sciences and knowledge. It critically studies the principles of all types of sciences, their branches and their results, to determine their logical basis and demonstrate their objective value” (Lalande, 1988, p. 293).

Epistemology is a critical study of scientific knowledge regarding its sources, principles, foundations, methods, tools, and results in detail and in a dimensional manner in the diversity of sciences and subjects, not in the unity of thought.

Given the overlap of the concept of epistemology with some similar concepts, they can be distinguished as follows:

Epistemology and Theory of Knowledge: Theory of knowledge is the term closest to epistemology and the most overlapping with it to the point that they are used as synonyms for one concept by some thinkers, especially the Anglo-Saxon trend, while most contemporary scholars, especially from the French school, see the necessity of distinguishing between epistemology and theory of knowledge based on the fact that epistemology is concerned with the theory of scientific knowledge, while the theory of knowledge deals with all types of knowledge.

Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Philosophy of science is one of the branches of philosophy, concerned with studying the philosophical foundations, assumptions and contents found within the various sciences, including the natural sciences such as physics, mathematics and biology, and the social sciences such as psychology, sociology and political science. In this sense, the philosophy of science is closely related to epistemology, meaning that it practices the criticism that epistemology practices.

The precise distinction between epistemology and the philosophy of science is becoming more difficult, due to the flexibility of this latter expression. There are those who object to the philosophical character of epistemological research and believe that the first task of epistemology is to determine an a priori standard for all scientific knowledge (Awadi, 2016, p. 48).

If we look at the philosophy of science in the broadest sense, we find that epistemology is one of its chapters, or one of its topics.

Epistemology and Methodology: Methodology studies the set of mental and practical operations that a scientist performs from the beginning of his research to its end in order to uncover the truth of a matter or reality and to prove the hypotheses established to reach it.

The relationship between epistemology and methodology is that methodology provides the descriptive study used in the acquisition of scientific knowledge, and then epistemology goes beyond that to the critical study aimed at extracting the principals involved in scientific thinking (Al-Jabri, 2018, p. 17). In conclusion, it can be said that it is not possible to completely separate methodology from scientific epistemology. It is difficult for an epistemologist to critically study the principles and laws of any science without questioning the nature and value of the means used by these sciences to reach the results and laws.

Epistemology and the History of Science: The history of science seeks to trace the developments of science throughout history. It is responsible for monitors the paths of knowledge formation and development by returning to its history (Paiget , 1967, p. 08). Epistemology can rely on its data during the process of criticism because the history of science focuses in its mission on description. It is like a laboratory for epistemology, while epistemology focuses more on criticism.

Epistemology Etymology: As it is related Epistemology and etymology, which investigate the linguistic roots of various words, terms and scientific names within this context.

Epistemology and axiology: Epistemology and axiology are also related. This is amazing the latter links values and ethics to science, as well as ontology, which means research into existence, and other topics.

It is clear that epistemology is based on, overlaps with, and intersects with many fields of knowledge, but it is distinguished from them by being more specific and far removed from traditional philosophy, as it is based on criticism and objective evaluation of scientific knowledge. Thus, epistemology is a science in its own right that other sciences need in order to evaluate and assess their results, path, methods, tools, and knowledge base.

1.2. Social Phenomenon

The phenomenon is everything that science investigates in terms of experimental facts or direct experimental data in terms of what is independent of the perceiver, it is the subject of every possible experience, that is, everything that happens in time and space (Jamil , 1983, p. 30).

This is with regard to the concept of the phenomenon in general. As for the social phenomenon, “it is every phenomenon whose basis is a relationship between individuals and is accompanied by a feeling of the authority of society. It is the subject of study in sociology, and arises from people meeting with each other, and is not the product of individual mood or will” (Madkour, 1983, p. 144).

It is also defined as “a type of behavior, whether fixed or not, that can exert some kind of external pressure on individuals, or it is any behavior that is prevalent in society in general, with a special existence independent of the forms in which it takes shape in individual cases” (Durkheim, 2005, p. 68).

Accordingly, the social phenomenon is considered a social act practiced by groups of people, who are exposed to it and its results. Based on this concept, the characteristics of the social phenomenon can be determined as follows:

1- Collective: meaning that it is concerned with the behavior and structure of the group, not the individual, and this phenomenon appears in group behaviors that are consistent and harmonious.

2- Commitment: It means the state of coercion and compulsion that collective behavior as a social phenomenon exercise on individuals and the transmission of tradition and social behavior through what is called social contagion.

3- The human character: This characteristic distinguishes it, as the social phenomenon is related to human society and not to other societies.

4- Spontaneity: The social phenomenon constitutes a spontaneous and natural state of the existence of social life and the habit of social interaction between members of society.

5- Interconnectedness: The social phenomenon is interconnected, meaning that its elements are organically and functionally interconnected. In general, the social phenomenon is derived from collective manifestations - beliefs, collective practices, and can be identified by the coercive force it exerts on individuals and embodied in patterns of behavior.

With these characteristics, it can be said that the social phenomenon becomes a subject of scientific study in the field of sociology, using the scientific method, with the aim of identifying the characteristics of the phenomenon, its size, the speed of its spread, and its rates of change. It also includes studying the social fields that produce the phenomenon and are effective in its formation.

1.3. Scientific Study

The journeys of human thought throughout the history of human existence have formed a vast intellectual accumulation, producing many ideas and knowledge through which man has been able to keep pace with the era in which he lives with all its developments and changes. However, they were limited to his perceptions and imaginations that sometimes express reality, and sometimes deviate from it, and express his hopes and ambitions, especially in the early ages that bore the character of myth and lacked the principles of correct thought.

Man could not achieve a correct understanding of himself and all the phenomena surrounding him, except when he was able to reach a control of the basic principles of science, from methods, foundations, approaches and foundations, and the credit for that understanding goes to science, which allowed man to understand all the phenomena surrounding him and the problems he suffers from, and this is what prompts us to say that science includes a set of relationships and laws that

enable man to understand and interpret the various events and phenomena surrounding him and to control them and harness them to his advantage.

The concept of science: Science is a branch from Branches Knowledge or the study that cares Coordinated by and consolidation Facts and principles and curricula by Experiments And the assumptions (Melhem, 2002, p. 10).

It as a process to produce Knowledge Scientific Approximate and Temporary The interpreter for things (Gaston, 1994, p. 43).

And so, Knowledge Coordinator And the rank that arise on Note And the study and experimentation Which It is done for the purpose of to set nature or Foundations And origins what It is done His study.

From this, it can be said that science is a series of concepts and laws that are interconnected and interconnected with each other, arising from experiments and observation. It is an organized knowledge that comes from research and thinking, and an activity through which man seeks to develop his abilities to control nature. Its goal is to describe different phenomena through observation, use scientific tools, explain phenomena, know their causes, study the changes that lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon that has occurred, predict the occurrence of phenomena in the future with the help of previous results, and control the factors that lead to their occurrence in a way that is in the interest of man and humanity. This is based on the scientific method, which is a fundamental pillar of scientific knowledge, and is considered the organized method that the researcher uses in order to reach a logical explanation for the phenomenon that is the subject of the study. The method is the fixed element in all scientific knowledge, while the content of this knowledge and the results arising from it are in constant change (Badawi, 1977, p. 04).

The concept of scientific knowledge: Knowledge in general is a set of opinions, perceptions, beliefs and meanings that are formed in a person as a result of his repeated attempts to understand the phenomena surrounding him. As for scientific knowledge, it is those “ideas, perceptions and meanings that are acquired in an organized manner using the scientific method that is based on observation, research and experimentation. This knowledge aims to understand phenomena with an objective and precise understanding” (Rushwan, 2003, p. 11).

Scientific knowledge is the activity through which we gain the greatest amount of our knowledge of phenomena, and through which we exercise control and domination over the natural world. Every field of knowledge is considered a science, as long as it uses the rules of the scientific method in an organized manner (Abdel-Adim, 2014).

Scientific knowledge is an organized structure of ideas and perceptions, starting from reality and ending with its understanding, interpretation, and the possibility of predicting it, and then comprehensiveness and generalization. This understanding and interpretation of natural phenomena constituted an important turning point in human life, achieving decisive results in the field of inanimate matter and living matter, which tempted him to transfer the previous steps to understand the field of human and social phenomena, interpret them and reveal their depths, in order to achieve the same results achieved in the field of natural phenomena, thus transforming the phenomena of human and social sciences into object phenomena, with the aim of controlling them and applying the scientific method in studying them despite their difference in nature from other phenomena, which made some believe that these phenomena cannot be studied in the same way, and from this the differences emerged among scientists in the possibility of studying human and social phenomena in the same ways and mechanisms by which natural phenomena were studied. They are phenomena that need to be understood with a method that suits their nature. This will be clarified in the following elements by focusing on social phenomena.

2. Social phenomena between interpretation and understanding

It is known that sociology is the science that studies society to identify the laws governing and controlling it, its systems and its problems, a scientific study on the one hand, and this is as the positivists say, on the other hand it tries to understand human action and interpret it within the specific social structure in order to know the various connotations and meanings that this action expresses in its social interaction and communication, or it combines the previous opinions by using understanding and interpretation at the same time.

Hence, the sociologist intends to study social phenomena through three basic steps: understanding, interpretation, and explanation.

Therefore, it can be said that the study of social phenomena is based on two prominent approaches: the approach of causal explanation, as is the case in the natural sciences, which are characterized by stability, neutrality and the possibility of controlling them, and the approach of understanding and interpretation, considering that subjectivity and objectivity are strongly present in the study of human and social phenomena, which are characterized by change and instability, which led to the presentation of a methodological crisis in them.

2.1. The nature of the social phenomenon

The path of studying social phenomena scientifically was not clear and smooth according to specific laws and theories as is the case in the natural sciences, as the path of the social sciences was riddled with many obstacles, problems and crises. This is due to the nature of both the social phenomenon and the nature of the method to be applied to it.

The scientific method is a set of rules that are established with the intention of arriving at the truth in science, which is characterized by objectivity, observation and experimentation, and is based on causality and inevitability. Applying these principles to social phenomena is very difficult, because these phenomena have features and characteristics that cannot be ignored, which are:

- The complexities of social phenomena and their change, as these phenomena are not fixed or stable as they are connected to humans (Al-Shalabi, 1998, p. 123), Because it changes according to circumstances and conditions from one time to another, as well as with respect to the place in which one lives, this is what makes it logical that social phenomena do not remain stable in one state (Mazal, 2003, p. 140), which often leads to results that cannot be generalized or relied upon in studying other similar social phenomena.
- Social phenomena change rapidly, so stability is relative, which leads to the failure to repeat the experiment and study in similar circumstances. The complexity of these phenomena is due primarily to the human being, as he is the focus of social studies due to his multiple social, psychological and historical dimensions that do not help the researcher to control the single dimension that he wants to study, whether in terms of methodology or subject matter.
- Heterogeneity in social phenomena: Despite the existence of some generalizations that we issue about social life and human behavior in general, social phenomena are unique and not repeated, and we cannot abstract the common factors in many social events in order to arrive at a general law that controls them based on a causal and inevitable structure as is the case with natural phenomena.
- Personal biases and tendencies, as social phenomena cannot be studied objectively, free from the interference of whims and emotions (Al-Zoubi, 1997, p. 94), because these phenomena are concerned with the human being as an interactive member of a group working to achieve various utilitarian, interest-based, ideological and ideological goals stemming from his freedom and will, which helps him change his positions and behaviors, and thus the study of the social phenomenon is affected by this will and these positions that change and are modified from time to time.

- The construction of concepts and expressive terms related to and associated with the social sciences has changed (Sharoukh, ny, p. 53), as the construction of concepts in them is characterized by flexibility and subject to the prevailing social culture, unlike what is the case in the natural sciences, in which concepts are characterized by precision, stability and agreement.
- The difficulty of generalizing the results in social studies, as the nature of the phenomena studied cannot be reached in a fixed theoretical system, and this is due, as previously mentioned, to the fact that social phenomena are centered on man and his activities in all fields, as he is a living being of great complexity that affects and is affected, and the researcher cannot adhere to complete objectivity when studying his activities, in addition to that he is characterized by changing his positions and evaluating them because he is a being of freedom and will.
- Choosing objectivity, as the researcher in the social sciences is affected by the subject being studied as part of it, and therefore does not adhere to the necessary neutrality and objectivity, due to his vision of the phenomenon based on what he carries of ideas, feelings, customs and beliefs that oblige him to positions or theoretical doctrines that he projects onto the phenomenon during his study of it.
- The multiplicity of approaches, methods and theoretical visions that explain social phenomena, as each approach or method attempts to explain and understand these phenomena based on its philosophical roots and foundations.
- The multiplicity of theoretical starting points on which social research is based can be formulated in general in what can be called the positivist starting point, which looks at the social phenomenon by comparing it to the natural phenomenon and then interpreting it according to a causal perspective, or the interpretive starting point based on trying to understand social phenomena and not comparing them to natural phenomena and interpreting them in favor of the self and meaning.

2.2. The method of interpretation and understanding in the social sciences

- **The method:** A word whose linguistic origin comes from the verb “nahaj” which means to take or follow, and “nahaj” and “minhaaj” mean the clear path (Ibn Mandhur, 1414 AH).

In terms of terminology, for Descartes, it is a set of certain rules that indicate to the knowing self the location of the truth, and the ways to construct and perceive it. It is what protects the researcher from falling into methodological or cognitive errors, and thus from rushing to issue judgments and adopting rational evidence (Descartes, 1970, p. 65).

Hence, the method is the path or way of research that is based on a number of main features, the most important of which is that phenomena, their components and the relationships between them exist independently of the individual and his opinions, tendencies and perceptions, and that these phenomena are subject to fixed laws that control and direct them regularly, and that it is possible to reach knowledge of the characteristics of these rules and the methods of performing their functions.

The method in the social sciences through the above is the objective scientific path followed by the sociologist with the aim of studying a phenomenon, knowing its truth, revealing its causes and reasons, and arriving at its laws, and then controlling and harnessing it on the one hand, and on the other hand understanding its implications, purposes, and the meanings it contains and refers to, “the method in studying sociological phenomena is a set of objective and scientific rules that enable the researcher in sociology to study social phenomena in isolation from any self-censorship or personal influence, since they appear outside the awareness of individuals and are isolated from their will, but in return they exert pressure and coercion on their social existence” (Durkheim, 2005, p. 29).

Therefore, the study of the social phenomenon is conditional on two factors: a special subject distinct from the subjects of other sciences, and that this subject be capable of interpretation as is done in the natural sciences.

- **The method of interpretation in the social sciences:** Interpretation in the sociological field means studying social phenomena on the basis of their causal and causal relationship, i.e. studying the variables of the social phenomenon, both independent and dependent, within an experimental vision and reducing the group of phenomena to the fewest possible number of strict logical operations according to specific paradigms, with the aim of arriving at laws and theories that represent an accurate scientific reading of the phenomenon being studied, as is the case in the natural sciences.

Hence, interpretation means the mental process that aims to uncover the causal relationships between two or more phenomena in order to know their causes and the laws and inevitabilities that govern them. Therefore, the concept of sociology becomes, through this view, the link between two interconnected concepts, namely science and society: "Phenomena are studied in an objective, scientific, and positive way, considering them facts that exist in nature, meaning that they are subject to the principle of order and inevitability and contain rationality" (Mouss, 1971, pp. 6-7).

The interpretive approach adopts the positivist tendency, as it sees that the social phenomenon is explained and not understood, and the researcher in sociology seeks to uncover the causal relationships that govern phenomena, and thus does not stop at extracting the implications of the social behaviors of the actors and deducing their values and intentions, as this trend starts from the idea that the social phenomenon is governed by a structure of relationships that form a unit within a system of social determinisms and external factors that impose obligation and coercion on individuals and groups, and thus accepts interpretation because it is the product of fixed elements that can be revealed objectively, and the social phenomenon accepts positioning, as it is like material systems that are stripped of the a priori concepts associated with them, and thus the self, freedom, and will are excluded, and any metaphysical perspective or the essences of the truth of the self are excluded, as is the case in the study of physical or chemical phenomena. ...The sociologist constructs the social phenomenon according to its characteristics of status, generality, stability and obligation, which are the scientific requirements of the phenomenon according to its specificities.

"Scientific exploration in sociology, like biology, uses three basic patterns: observation, experimentation, and method" (Auguste, 1839, p. 48).

The influence of this trend was strong in sociology through the works of sociologists, who adopted the methods of experimental sciences based on hypotheses, observation and experimentation, taking physics as a model to follow in studying social phenomena.

They called for applying the physiological method to sociology and called it social physics, saying, "Social physiology looks at individuals as elements in the social body, which is concerned with studying its organic functions in the same way that private physiology studies the functions of individuals... which is the same path that leads to knowledge of the physiology of human societies" (Saint-Simon, ny, pp. 50-51).

From this perspective, those sociologists presented their scientific, positivist concepts about the social phenomenon, which he called social physiology, which is concerned with studying societal entities in their relationship with their organizations. This is the idea that developed and deepened later.

They also contributed to the study of social phenomena through their establishment of evolutionary sociology, influenced by biology, where they likened society to an organic being, each member of which performs a specific function within the framework of the overall system, relying on the method of interpretation to discover the laws of evolution in human societies.

They defined sociology as "the science which describes and explains the origin and development of social systems such as the family and social control and the relations between different systems, in addition to making multiple comparisons between societies of different types to know their development. Sociology also deals with the study of the structure and function that exist in societies in general" (Muhammad, 1999, p. 40). meaning that society is an organization in which the group explains and confirms the complex interconnection of the different parts.

Others adopted the method of interpretation in studying social phenomena, inspired by the development of the mechanisms of the positivist method in the natural sciences.

They were aware that experience is actually and realistically the basis for studying society, so they established the law of the three stages (the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the positive stage), considering the latter to be the best stage that reason had reached in its historical process, thus establishing social physics through which he arrived at sociology.

They say: "...we now have terrestrial physics and we still need another kind of physics, which is social physics, that science which takes social phenomena as a subject of study, considering these phenomena to be of the same spirit as scientific, natural and chemical phenomena, in that they are the subject of fixed laws" (El-Khashab, 1981, p. 545).

Accordingly, this view is considered the solid foundation from which social studies were launched as a science parallel to natural science.

Many had applied the interpretive method to social phenomena, which we can conclude from his book, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, in which he established a set of rules and viewed the social phenomenon as a material thing or subject, saying, "Everything that is given to us that imposes itself on observation is considered among things, and accordingly social phenomena are studied in themselves in complete separation from the individuals who represent them intellectually. This rule applies to social reality as a whole" (Durkheim, 2005, p. 103). He applied this in his study of the phenomenon of suicide, arriving at a set of laws that govern it and by which the phenomenon occurs.

This interpretive trend, with its known conditions, sought to achieve the possibility of the scientific model that succeeded in the experimental sciences on social phenomena despite the peculiarities that distinguish them, despite the epistemological shortcomings that befell it, which the understanding trend tried to remedy, which will be explained in the next element.

- The method of understanding in social sciences:

The method of understanding in the social sciences means encompassing the significance of human action, for what it possesses of meaning, significance and purpose. In the social sciences, this meaning, significance and purpose must be understood (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 71), that is, the method of understanding is based on observing the meaning of human action within society, and revealing its connotations, purposes, goals, aims and purposes. This requires deconstructing consciousness, and then taking into account the intentionality of the actor by revealing the connotations of symbols within the social environment. It also means understanding and perceiving a lived experience that is given to us as an intuitive experience. It is also an understanding of an existential and emotional experience at the same time. It is thus the opposite of the method of interpretation based on explaining the occurrence of the phenomenon by assuming other phenomena, realizing that human behavior, whether in its external manifestations or its internal world, shows intentional and voluntary relationships, connections and regularities, which can be the subject of interpretation and understanding. Therefore, it is a penetrating vision that enables the self to perceive the truth of social facts, through knowing their connotations and the meanings that underlie them.

Social phenomena are not fixed and established material systems, but rather they contain a world of meanings and connotations that are revealed by attempts to interpret and understand them,

which makes the study of social phenomena crystallize in a system of their own while maintaining scientific models and methodological standards, whatever the nature and fields of the phenomena, because the presence of the self helps to understand science and its stakes, especially in a field of knowledge such as the field of sociology, which is characterized by the complexity of its topics and phenomena, since the dimensions of man in it are intertwined to the extent that one cannot be separated from the other, and thus it is difficult to study it when it is isolated from its reality and from what the self produces in terms of connotations and meanings.

The method of interpretation that was previously discussed is based on reducing social phenomena to their material dimension only. This matter was noticed by the pioneers of the interpretive trend, in terms of considering the meanings of social action, its significance and its objectives within the social structure. Among these we find:

Some scholars proceeded from the fact that an inner emotional experience appears through inner reflection, as he says: "Understanding is the process by which we know what is inner based on what appears as signs that appear through our senses. For example, when I say how I acted in this way, I mean by that that an aspect of my self-appeared in the sensory world and seemed to me as if it came from a force other than myself and that I am unable to interpret it. We know what is inner psychological based on what appears as sensory signs that constitute an aspect of it" (Dilthey, 1947, p. 320).

Through this statement, it becomes clear that understanding is a subjective knowledge of the perceived subject whose meanings and purposes must be known as they appear to the direct senses. Accordingly, understanding is linked to the question of why?, and from there the self is present in understanding its study of the self, meaning that understanding is reading and interpreting reality in light of its perceived context, unlike interpretation, which starts from the question of how? Where the self is required to be neutral and thus excludes the study of social phenomena in their context.

Accordingly, the method of understanding reveals the inner meanings of the self that appear in the form of behaviors and then arrives at the essence of phenomena that require an interpretive effort that can only be achieved according to cognitive conditions, which are (Abu Rayyan, 1986, p. 54):

- Knowing human nature as a unit that each individual can practice and know the other through his feelings and thoughts.
- Knowledge of the cultural background represented in the terms and expressions that govern the group.
- Knowing the specific contexts in which expressions appear. We know the content of a word through its context in the sentence, and the paragraph through its context in the text, and from the general cultural context of a society we know the social phenomenon.

They concluded that all investigations that focus on understanding human actions are interpreted and understood, which is a process that differs from the scientific, complementary understanding of the natural world, because what we do in this process of understanding is a personal knowledge of what another human being means. Thus, the difference between the natural sciences and the social sciences, according to him, lies in the subject of study on the one hand and in the method or approach to study on the other hand. The subject of the natural sciences is things, while the subject in the social sciences is the person or other persons.

For others, sociology is the science through which the researcher can understand man, the world, and things around him as they are, not as he wants them to be. Because social reality is complex and we cannot easily understand it through interpretation, Weber employed central mechanisms and concepts through which he defined sociology based on understanding through the interpretation of social action (Fayyad, 2018, p. 05).

He paid great attention to the role of action and interaction between members of society in forming social structures, which is built through the role of sociology in understanding the meanings contained in social action and interaction, not in explaining the nature of the external forces that push society towards a certain pattern of actions.

Hence, the paradigm of subjective interpretation comes through focusing on social action, and then distinguishing between positive sciences based on causal interpretation and social sciences based on trying to achieve an understanding of social action in order to reach its results.

They classify social action into four types (Weber, 2015, p. 12):

- Traditional action that is based on customs, values, norms and traditions. This distinguishes the social daily action from the traditional action.

- The emotional or sentimental action that is directed by emotions and is therefore irrational.

Rational action is directed towards values and has a high degree of awareness linked to a goal within the value system, meaning that it is achieved when the individual commits to a value or set of values that guide his actions, and those values do not necessarily have to be a useful or effective way of obtaining them.

- The rational, purposeful action that organizes life by dividing and coordinating various activities on the basis of a careful study of the relationships between people.

These four patterns of behavior are functionally linked to patterns of social relations. Rational behavior is the social action that prevails in society in general, while emotional behavior is specific to the group, and traditional action pertains to all of humanity and represents the sum of customs and traditions that turn into a coercive and binding authority for individuals. Sociology of understanding begins by observing these actions in the society under study and then researching their implications and trying to understand them.

The approach to understanding social phenomena has led to multiple studies and enriched discussions in the field of sociology, which have appeared in the form of approaches and theories, including what is known as symbolic interactionism, based on reconciling previous opinions to create an integrated system for understanding and interpreting social phenomena.

The starting points of symbolic interactionism: Symbolic interactionism is considered an aspect of the sociology of understanding, and it is one of the main axes that social theory relies on in analyzing social systems, as it starts from analyzing the small units and proceeds to the large units, and begins with individuals and their behavior as an introduction to understanding the social system, as the actions of these individuals become fixed to form a structure of roles, where these roles can be viewed from the expectations of people towards each other in terms of meanings and symbols (Al-Assal, 1997, p. 57).

The roots of this theory go back to the social behavioral orientations adopted by a group of scholars from the Chicago School.

The most important assumptions of this theory are as follows:

Society is considered a system of meanings and symbols that are part of human activity.

- Through symbolic interaction between people, truths are constructed and agreed upon in society.

The impressions that individuals form about themselves and others are personal constructions of meanings resulting from symbolic interaction, and represent the most important facts of social life.

Human behavior towards situations is considered a personal gesture about oneself and others in society.

- People act towards things on the basis of what those things mean to them.

Meanings are the product of human interaction in society, and these meanings are transformed and modified through a process of understanding and interpretation that each individual uses in dealing with the signals he encounters.

Symbolic interactionism views education as having two dimensions, private and public. According to this view, learners construct their knowledge.

From the above, and in the midst of the multiplicity of visions to study the sociological phenomenon, whether by applying the method of interpretation that matches this phenomenon with the natural phenomenon, or by applying the method of understanding that deals with understanding and interpreting a self that is complex with special convictions, and thus those positions were not free of epistemological obstacles that make these methods limited in dealing with the social phenomenon, which is what will be addressed in the next element.

3. The epistemological limits of the interpretive approach in the study of social phenomena.

The interpretive position was not free of epistemological obstacles and was not immune to the criticism of researchers in the sociological field, because the study of social facts was considered as things, which is a difficult bet that may not be achieved from the cognitive and methodological perspective. Among the criticisms directed at it:

The positivist model views social reality as a structure of fixed entities with different characteristics.

Social phenomena are based on the principle of causality, which states that every phenomenon has a cause, and thus it is governed by a general inevitable system.

- Ignoring the change of entities in the social context based on social meanings and types, as the social phenomenon occurs in a context with different social and cultural connotations, and the same phenomenon may change and differ due to the transformations that occur, whether social, economic or political.

- The positivist view ignored important issues in understanding and directing social activity that leads to a quantitative and then qualitative accumulation in social phenomena, such as explaining juvenile delinquency or school dropout. For example, if we say that poverty is the cause of delinquency, then this explanation is not correct from a practical standpoint, because from a logical standpoint, if poverty is the cause of delinquency, then it follows that every poor person is delinquent, and thus we would have denied the characteristic of delinquency from the rich, which is something that contradicts actual reality, and hence the relativity of the principle of generalization.

Thus, human actions cannot be explained automatically or mechanically as happens in physical phenomena that depend on a form of absolute determinism through which we can predict. Human behavior has a meaning, significance, and a special purpose that cannot be predicted in many cases. This is consistent with what Anthony Giddens said, who believes that "the absence of general laws taken for granted in the context of the social sciences is not a coincidence, but rather is due to the fact that the causal mechanisms in the social sciences depend on explaining human action in the context of a network of intended and unintended consequences. Therefore, it requires a deep understanding of the behavior or conduct of others in these situations" (Ekstrom, 1992, p. 108).

Accordingly, the method of interpretation and prediction has placed the social sciences in a critical epistemological situation that has not been free from cognitive and methodological shortcomings and obstacles, and thus has not been free from criticism because it has ignored the specificity of the social phenomenon as a free phenomenon that is not subject to inevitability and is viewed as something empty of meaning, and otherwise it is issued by a conscious and free being, not by a causal system that denies freedom, will, and responsibility for the human being.

4.The epistemological limits of the understanding approach in studying social phenomena.

The pioneers of the understanding approach drew their vision from the inner spiritual dimension of man, which makes him a conscious and willing being whose study is difficult to divide. Therefore, they refused to make any comparison between the natural sciences and the social sciences because their subject of study is different. Social phenomena are a spiritual activity characterized by the presence of awareness and will based on the intended meaning. However, this matter is extremely complex and the study is complex, which made this position subject to criticism due to its inability to encompass the significance of human activity and monitor its meaning and purpose. This is what made the social phenomenon linked to the element of awareness, which is the hidden determinant. “The hidden enemy of man is awareness.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1998, p. 101). This is a strong indication that the study of man by man is an extremely complex and difficult matter, due to the intermingling of the self with the subject. Among the criticisms directed at this trend are the following:

The method of understanding has not reached a model that studies social phenomena in their individuality and quality, and at the same time achieves the goals of science in terms of interpretation and generalization.

- The difficulty of abstracting concepts related to meaning and the inability to control them so that they are constant in all cases and social changes, and thus the inability to have a consistent intellectual and mental model. An example of this is when Weber studied bureaucracy, he studied it in multiple fields and in different places and times, but at the same time he spoke about it in a general way by focusing on its abstract and common features to reach a general conceptual system.

The method of understanding was influenced by the experimental tendency through observing what is historical, following the method of experimental sciences, and thus it moved away from reality and dealt with the social phenomenon from a historical and emotional perspective. It thinks about the possible based on the lived experience. For example, the process of judgment can be known through observation, not through memory.

The understanding approach relies on the researcher’s sympathy with the phenomena he is studying. Instead of the relationship between the observing self and the subject, the relationship between the participating self enters here. Understanding here is nothing more than a communicative experience.

The understanding approach raises the researcher’s relationship with the previous and current conceptual apparatus, and here the self enters into the problem of differentiating between what is historical and what is current, i.e. the inability to differentiate between previous interpretations and the subject being studied at the same moment, and here the difficulty of new interpretations that keep pace with the changes that have occurred in the reality being studied with the aim of producing new knowledge emerges because science, as is well known, is characterized by the characteristic of cumulative development.

The mechanism of understanding is based on transferring the internal experience to what the mind perceives, and this is almost impossible, as understanding and interpretation interfere with the result. It is a process subject to measurement and similarity. Understanding is related to the limits of what we are unable to achieve through interpretation, so we resort to it to produce immediate knowledge that requires meaning.

The method of interpretation relied on the self, which is the idea advocated by Descartes, considering the self a true source of correct knowledge, while Freud’s research revealed that this self often stems from the unconscious, which it is unable to explain or understand, as it is ultimately a group of effects, not a single agent.

5. Conclusion:

From the above we conclude that:

The development of the natural sciences was a foundation that helped develop and research in the field of social sciences through the mechanisms of the experimental method and rationality, and all of this helped build the process of analysis, interpretation and understanding of the phenomena of social sciences.

The severity and complexity of social phenomena has led to the multiplicity and enrichment of approaches to examining these phenomena.

The interpretive approach views social phenomena as things that can be studied mechanically without paying attention to their meanings and purposes, as they are derived from humans.

The understanding approach made up for the shortcomings that resulted from the interpretation approach by focusing on the meanings, goals, and purposes that social phenomena produce through the interaction of individuals and groups, but it fell into searching for essences, which distanced it from the causal connection of the occurrence of phenomena, which made it have a tendency towards a subjective identity that focuses on the self and neglects the subject.

Both the interpretive approach and the understanding approach have epistemological limits in studying social phenomena, and this is natural, considering that the subject is the human being, who remains extremely complex, given the multiplicity of his dimensions and their overlap, while he is cognitive, ontological, and value-based. This is what contemporary studies have drawn attention to through the principle of cognitive integration or what is called interdisciplinarity.

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