

The Problem of Relativism in the Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Considering the nature of the subject matter of the social sciences (human behavior in groups), its convolution and dynamism seem to resist any form of universalization of the findings of social inquiry. The paper is propelled by the problem of universalization of social theories and findings given the intricate and constantly changing nature of human behavior as rational agents who are products of enculturation. Attempts by social scientists at establishing lawlike regularities that are universally applicable across all human societies and on the basis of which proper explanation and prediction of human behavior can be made continue to be relative. Knowledge of social phenomena is continually characterized by apparently contradictory opinions, beliefs, and cultures. This seems absurd in the light of our understanding and expectation of the epistemic equation between truth and knowledge. This further shove the social sciences into relativism. The paper therefore aims at showing that humans are necessarily members of a society or social group. Therefore, human behavior is based on the cultural context in which it is studied. This makes relativism inevitable in the social sciences. Humans as members of society are enculturated beings whose actions or behavior can be properly understood only from the standpoint of the cultural context that such actions emanate from. The paper adopts the methods of philosophical analysis and hermeneutics.
Keywords: Concept, Relativism, Social Sciences.

Introduction

The paper as its title suggest is concerned with *The Concept of Relativism in the Social Sciences*. It was propelled by the problem of universalization of social theories given the intricate and constantly changing nature of human behavior as rational agents who are products of enculturation. Like Marx once put it: It is not the consciousness of man that determines his social existence, but on the contrary, it is his social existence that determines his consciousness. This goes to show the interrelation between human behavior

and the social or cultural context such behavior emanates from. Thus, the paper aimed at showing that the proper understanding of human behavior must inevitably be contextual, based on the culture or society and the era of study. This makes any attempt at generalizing such social findings a problem.

The concept of *relativism* has been one of the oldest and polarizing perennial notion in philosophy. The pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (often referred to as the chief sophist) is known to have said “Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not” (Russell, 1972, p. 77). The concept of relativism is generally considered as a problem or obstacle in the social sciences (Schutte, 1979). It is considered a problem or obstacle in the social sciences to the extent that the claim to knowledge and process of social inquiry limits the possibility of reaching a non-subjectively true conclusion on social matter. This we argued is largely due to the convoluted and dynamic nature of the subject matter of the social sciences (human behavior and institutions). This therefore reduces any factual statement about society to a particular place, time or context.

The social sciences deal with a subject matter which seldom submits to generalization given its dynamism and convolution. Human behavior in different societies anthropologists have pointed out differs. The understanding and description of this social diversity has been the primal focus of the social sciences. Attempts at establishing law-like principles or regularities which cut across human society regardless of this social diversity, have proven abortive. Thus, we argued that relativism in the social sciences is inevitable given the complex, dynamic and enculturated nature human behavior. The paper proceeds under the following subsection:

- i. Historical origin of the concept of relativism,
- ii. The meaning of the concept of relativism,
- iii. The social sciences and the concept of relativism,
- iv. Relativism and the methods of the social sciences.

Historical Origin of the Concept of Relativism

Relativism as a philosophical concept would be better understood by tracing its origin as an idea, and the various forms in which it manifests itself in the course of social investigation. In tracing the origins of the concept of relativism, from the fifth century BC onwards, we can detect some level of awareness of diversity in cultural beliefs in Greek thought. This arguably could be taken as foreshadowing relativism. Herodotus (c 485–430 BCE) gave accounts of the variability of customs and habits in Persia and India and argues that if people were asked to name the best laws and customs, they would name their own. Euripides (c. 485–c. 406) shocked his audiences when one of his characters, discussing incest with his sister, announces that no behavior is shameful if it did not appear so to those who practice it. Xenophanes (c.570–475 BCE) went even further by arguing that different people have different conceptions of God for “Ethiopians say that their gods are black and snub-nosed, while the Thracians say that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired.” Indeed, he argues, “if cows, horses, and lions had hands, and were able to

draw with their hands and do the work men do, horses would draw images of gods like horses and cattle like cattle” (Baghrmian, 2004, p. 3).

The pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (often referred to as the chief sophist) is known to have said “Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not.” Russell explaining these words of Protagoras as reported in Plato’s dialogue *Theætetus* states that this could possibly be interpreted as meaning that each man is the measure of all things, and that, when men differ, there is no objective truth in virtue of which one is right and the other wrong (1972, p. 77). Thus, Russell rightly pointed out that the concept of relativism is essentially skeptical, and is presumably based on the *deceitfulness* of the senses.

It is difficult to know what variety of relativism, if any, Protagoras was defending. But Plato seem to think of Protagoras’ relativism as a relativism which asserts that truth should be relativized to a framework or perspective. Thus, to Protagoras “Man is the measure ...” being the opening statement of his treatise lends further credence to this interpretation. Plato also emphasizes the social and ethical dimensions of Protagorean relativism (Baghrmian, 2004, p. 3).

Between Aristotle and Kant there are no major Western philosophers who one could plausibly describe as relativists. Montaigne and Hume certainly stressed the importance of custom in shaping peoples’ beliefs, especially on moral matters; but this led them towards skepticism rather than relativism. Relativism in the modern era took a new shape by Kant’s claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the only world we can know or talk about meaningfully is one that has been shaped by the human mind. On Kant’s view, the concept of “objective reality” is employed speculatively and hence illegitimately if it is taken to refer to reality as it is independent of our experience of it. This served as a challenge to the traditional notion of objective truth. The judgments we call true are true for us and of our world; but to claim they are true in the sense of describing an independently existing reality is to go beyond what we can meaningfully or justifiably assert. However, Kant is not necessarily considered a relativist given he held that the forms our mind imposes on the world are common to all human beings. Truths like the truths of geometry or the statement that every event is caused are thus universally accepted and constitute a priori knowledge. The forms we impose on experience also give the world a certain necessary character that is independent of our beliefs and wishes.

Later thinkers, however, took Kant’s ideas further down the road toward fully-fledged relativism. Hegel, while upholding a concept of “absolute knowledge”, allows every stage that human consciousness has passed through in the historical development of civilization to express an outlook that is true in a partial way. Marx highlights the influence of the mode of production along with class and economic interests in shaping the way people understand their world; and although he appears to recognize the epistemic authority of science in some areas, he rejects the idea of a neutral standpoint from which to adjudicate between different views of social reality. Nietzsche is explicitly relativistic about both moral values and truth, preferring to evaluate claims according to what sort of will to power the claims express rather than according to their objective truth-value.

In the twentieth century, a relativistic view of truth can be found in or inferred from the work of many major philosophers, including Dewey, Wittgenstein, Quine, Kuhn, Gadamer, Foucault, Rorty, and most of those commonly labeled "postmodernists". Numerous others, including some who regard themselves as staunch opponents of relativism, have been accused of harboring relativistic tendencies. There is thus a general consensus that modern philosophy has shifted in a relativistic direction (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). The contemporary period, is characterized by strong relativistic tendencies. This manifest itself in the form of cultural relativism. The doctrine of cultural relativism, inspired by the work of social anthropologists, argues that there can be no such thing as a culturally neutral criterion for adjudicating between conflicting claims arising from different cultural contexts. This has become one of the best-known forms of relativism and has shaped the theoretical framework of the social sciences.

The Meaning of the Concept of Relativism

As a concept, relativism could be broadly seen as, "the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). Thus, relativists repudiate the idea of a framework-independent vantage point to knowledge of what is. As a philosophical concept, relativism holds that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual. This therefore implies "that all moral positions, all religious systems, all art forms, all political movements, etc., are truths that are relative to the individual" (Slick, 2019).

For the relativist, all points of view are equally valid. In ethics, this amounts to saying that all moralities are equally good; in epistemology it implies that all beliefs, or belief systems, are equally true. Critics of relativism typically dismiss such views as incoherent since they imply the validity even of the view that relativism is false. They also charge that such views are pernicious since they undermine the enterprise of trying to improve our ways of thinking (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). Relativism, as currently understood, is the claim that what is true or false, right or wrong, logical and rational, is relative to a culture, belief system, conceptual scheme, or the psychological makeup of different people (Baghrarian, 2004). The relativists argue that: "there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society uses in one area of enquiry" (Rorty, 1991, p. 23).

However, relativism is not one but several loosely interconnected doctrines developed and shaped in response to a variety of philosophical concerns and unified more by what they deny – absolutism, universalism and monism—rather than what they endorse. The various strands of relativism are customarily individuated in terms of their domains hence, the customary distinction between cognitive, cultural, conceptual, and aesthetic relativisms. We shall only be concerned with the cognitive and cultural forms of relativism given their relations to the theoretical framework of the social sciences.

Cognitive Relativism

Cognitive relativism asserts the relativity of truth. Given the close connections between the concept of truth and concepts such as knowledge, rationality, and justification, cognitive relativism is often taken to encompass, or imply, the relativity of these epistemological notions. Thus, epistemological relativism, which asserts the relativity of knowledge, may be understood as a version of cognitive relativism, or at least as entailed by it. The doctrine of epistemological relativism -the view that knowledge is relative, either to time, to place, to society, to historical circumstance, to culture, to conceptual framework, or to personal training or conviction -has been defended since Protagoras. This form of relativism implies that no system of truth is more valid than another, and that there is no objective standard of truth (Siegel, 1986, p. 225).

This kind of relativism can take different forms depending on the nature of the standpoint or framework to which truth is relativized. If truth is relativized to the individual subject, for instance, the result is a form of subjectivism. If the standpoint is an entire culture, the result is some form of cultural relativism. Other possible frameworks include languages, historical periods, and conceptual schemes. These frameworks do not exclude one another, of course, and in the positions developed by thinkers such as Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault (both generally regarded as holding relativistic views of truth) they are considered interwoven. Cognitive relativism continues to be an important but controversial position that one encounters in contemporary debates about the nature of truth, knowledge, rationality, and science. If the social sciences which seeks to understand human behavior can only understand human action by “rationally reconstructing its meaning from within, we have a problem of *double hermeneutic* and a further shove towards relativism” (Hollis, 2008, p. 224).

Cultural Relativism

Martin Hollis asked a very pertinent question with regards to the problem of relativism. He asked: “if there are no facts prior to interpretation, must claims to knowledge of the world always be relative to some set of beliefs held at a particular time and place?” (Hollis, 2008, p. 224) This seems to be the case with cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is a form of relativism that is based on the observation that different cultures have different moral codes, beliefs and values. The idea of universal truth in ethics is therefore considered a myth. The customs of different societies are all that exist. These customs cannot be said to be correct or incorrect, for that implies we have an independent standard of right and wrong by which we make our judgement. Cultural relativism maintains that there is no such independent standard, every standard is cultural bound. Under cultural relativism, our commonly held belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth is challenged. It argues that there is no such thing as universal truth in ethics, there are only the various cultural codes, and nothing more. Thus, our moral codes and cultural beliefs and values have no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times. It is considered a form of arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. Instead, cultural relativism calls for an adoption of an attitude of tolerance towards the practices of other cultures (Rachels, 2003).

Cultural relativism implies that we do not judge other cultures on the basis of our own standards of what is right or wrong, strange or normal. Instead, we should try to understand cultural practices of other groups in its own cultural context. Anthropologists say that when we think about different cultures and societies, we should think about their customs in a way that helps us make sense of how their cultural practices fits with their overall cultural context. For instance, having several wives perhaps makes economic sense among herders who move around frequently. Through such an understanding, polygamy makes cultural sense (Khan Academy, 2019). Given the panoply of cultures in human society, the social sciences is faced with a tremendous task of not only describing and explaining these diverse human behavior. But is bound to do so in the light of the prevailing customs and norms unique to a particular culture at a given time and place. To a large extent, this inevitably pins down the social investigation of the social sciences to a given cultural context.

The Social Sciences and the Concept of Relativism

Before discussing the concept of relativism in the social sciences, we would briefly shade light on what the social sciences is, and particularly with regards to the nature of its subject matter (human behavior in group). “Social sciences is, in its broadest sense, the study of society and the manner in which people behave and influence the world around” (Brewer, 2013, p. 21). Some social scientists argue that no single definition can cover such a broad range of academic disciplines. Thus, they simply resort to defining the social sciences by listing the subject they include. Such as: “anthropology, communication, criminology, cultural studies, economics, human geography, linguistics, public law, political science, psychology, sociology, development studies” (ESRC, 2011). H. P. Rickman (1967) refers to the social sciences as human studies. For him, the social sciences are the “disciplines dealing with the operations of the human mind and whatever is the product of, or has been affected by, these operations” (p. 3). In defining the social sciences, there is an underlying consensus among scholars that the subject matter of the social sciences (human behavior) “imposes a crucial modification of methods on them” (p. 5). “Human beings must be understood as human beings and this is a complicated business” If our approach is too narrow, Rickman warns, “we only get hold of a fragment of a complex state of affairs” (p. xii).

Collective habits and social behavior are the field of enquiry of the social sciences. Individuals are only of interest in so far as they are typical of groups. “People always retain some novel and unique features compared to their fellow group members in terms of social and demographic characteristics or particular beliefs and practices, so social sciences studies *people in groups*, but it is the case that the groups’ shared beliefs and practices shape what individual members believe, say and do. So social science focuses as well on *groups in people*” (Brewer, 2013, p. 23).

Furthermore, the groups to which people belong can be large and amorphous collectivities with blurred boundaries, like social classes, genders, neighborhoods, ethnic groups and nationalities, and more clearly marked and identifiable collections, like churches,

factories, business organizations, political groupings. Humans also have different sorts of closeness to these institutions and relate to them in different ways, and the groups change over time and with it our relationship to them (Brewer, pp. 26-27). The social sciences investigate the structures of institutions as they affect people. These effects vary with the nature of the institution, some institutions have very direct effects that are immediately apparent. Thus, the social sciences studies institutions and individuals. It studies the social relationships between these two.

These relations are two-way. Social sciences studies people's behavior in groups, the way in which institutions are in part constituted by people acting together within them, as well as studying the impact institutional structures have on people's behavior, the way in which institutions constrain and shape people's behavior. In this way, social science studies the relationships both people and institutions have to the collectivity called 'society', and the way in which society is simultaneously both the outcome of people's relationships and the context within which they relate (Brewer, 2003, p. 28).

Having established the task of the social sciences, through a broad characterization of its subject matter, we are faced with the question of the concept of relativism in the social sciences. First, we shall proceed from establishing the concept of relativism on the basis of the nature of the subject matter of the social sciences. Secondly, on the basis of their method, we shall show the nexus between the concept of relativism and the social sciences. Human behavior as the subject matter of the social sciences is arguably modified by the complexity of social institutions in which it develops. But it is also the case that all human actions involve physical and physiological processes whose laws of operation are invariant in all societies. Pointing to the challenge with the possibility of a general law about social phenomena Ernest Nagel writes:

Even the way members of a social group satisfy basic biological needs—e.g., how they obtain a living or build their shelters—is not uniquely determined either by their biological inheritance or by the physical character of their geographic environment, for the influence of these factors on human action is mediated by existing technologies and traditions. The possibility must certainly be admitted that nontrivial but reliably established laws about social phenomena will always have only a narrowly restricted generality (Nagel, 1961, p. 460).

From the standpoint of the subject matter of the social sciences as revealed in the broad characterization of social science, social reality is relative. Relativism seems inevitable in the social sciences given the dynamics, convoluted and encultured nature of human behavior. Philosophers such as Heinrich Rickert and Wilhem Dilthey have argued that human phenomena are product of conscious and intentional beings who become so

by means of enculturation (The assimilation of a culture, including its values and practices). This means that the social sciences are expected to concentrate on meaning and its interpretation as they attempt to understand social life. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

Moreover, if there are no facts prior to interpretation, it seems very likely that claims to knowledge of the world will always be relative to some set of beliefs held at a particular time and place. Specifically, with the social sciences which deals with human action, if human action is to be understood by rationally reconstructing its meaning from within, this shoves us toward relativism (Hollis, 2008, p. 230).

Human actions as studied in the social sciences can be described as self-evidently meaningful: they are typically performed for a purpose and express an intention and they also often follow rules that make them the kind of action they are. The social sciences deal with the behavior of man and his actions as a member of society, and every action carried out by man can be analyzed as both having an internal and external dimension. The internal dimension is comprised of the agent's objectives, beliefs, attitude, and standards of conduct. This internal dimension cannot be underestimated in the study of the behavior of man. (Collingwood, 1969, p. 3). This internal dimension which constitutes human beliefs, attitude and intention are not in any way objective but relative to the cultural settings. Unlike the positivists' expectation of the social sciences that they should aim at observable regularities and patterns of human behavior and society which fits into a universal social law, the social science arguably are all historically conditioned. "True generalizations concerning human activities are possible, but these will merely summarize specific historical periods or cultural norms" It is a neglect of this historical dependency that Collingwood deemed "the fallacy inherent in the very idea of a science of human nature." Out of such neglect arises the vain hope of establishing the permanent and unchanging laws of human nature. This therefore implies that any form of social inquiry of human behavior, regardless of its scope, will "never be more than a generalized description of certain phases in human history." The findings of the study of human behavior cannot form universally applicable laws of human society. Therefore, will always be relative to a given cultural context (Collingwood, 1969, p. 4).

Moreover, social scientists have pointed out that, motives, dispositions, intended goals, and values are not matters open to sensory inspection, and can be neither made familiar nor identified by way of an exclusive use of procedures that are suitable for exploring the publicly observable subject matters of the purely behavioral (or natural) sciences. On the contrary, these are matters with which we can become conversant solely from our subjective experience (Nagel, 1961, p. 474). This critical examination of the subject matter of the social sciences shows not only the intricate or convoluted nature of human behavior in groups. It also exposes the dynamical and culture-bound nature of the subject matter of the social sciences. Peter Winch affirming this point argued that disciplines of the social sciences are inevitably culture-bound (Ryan, 1980, p. 153).

Cultural relativism is another factor which poses as an obstacle to establishing general laws in the social sciences. This is based on the *historically conditioned* or

culturally determined character of social phenomena. It is arguably the case that most societies in the past and present share certain similar characteristics and institutions. For instance, “all known societies possess some kind of family organization, some form of education for the young, some provision for maintaining order” (Nagel 1961, p. 459). Generally, these institutions have been developed in response to different environments and embody different cultural traditions, so that the internal structures and interrelations of corresponding institutions in different societies are in general also different. Accordingly, since the forms assumed by human social behavior depend not only on the immediate occasions that call forth the behavior but also on the culturally instituted habits and interpretations of events involved in the response to the occasion, the patterns of social behavior will vary with the society in which the behavior occurs and with the character of its institutions at a given historical period. In consequence, conclusions reached by controlled study of sample data drawn from one society are not likely to be valid for a sample obtained from another society. Unlike the laws of physics and chemistry, generalizations in the social sciences therefore have at best only a severely restricted scope, limited to social phenomena occurring during a relatively brief historical epoch within special institutional settings (Nagel 1961, p. 459).

It is also generally acknowledged that in the social sciences there is nothing quite like the almost complete unanimity commonly found among professional researchers in the physical sciences as to what are considered matters of established fact. The questions of what constitutes a reasonably satisfactory explanation(s), if any, for the assumed facts, and what are some of the valid procedures in sound inquiry, are yet to be unanimously answered. Disagreement on such questions undoubtedly occurs in the physical sciences as well. But it is usually found at the advancing frontiers of knowledge; and, except in areas of research that impinge intimately upon moral or religious commitments, such disagreement is generally resolved with reasonable dispatch when additional evidence is obtained or when improved techniques of analysis are developed. In contrast, “the social sciences often produce the impression that they are a battleground for interminably warring schools of thought, and that even subject matter which has been under intensive and prolonged study remains at the unsettled periphery of research” (Nagel, 1961, p. 448).

Relativism and the Methods of the Social Sciences

A related methodological question is raised by the claim that objectively warranted explanations of social phenomena are difficult if not impossible to achieve, because social phenomena have an essentially subjective or value-laden nature. The subject matter of the social sciences is identified as purposive human action, directed to attaining various ends or values, whether with conscious intent, by force of acquired habit, or because of unwitting involvement. This subjective or value-laden nature of the subject matter of the social sciences constitutes a challenge to the objectivity of the social sciences.

The German social scientist Max Weber made effort in charting the methodological boundaries of the social sciences. With overt emphasis that the social sciences should be engaged with the task of studying *social facts*, Weber tried to make a distinction between social facts and values which individual scientist may hold. Weber seem to admit of the possibility of social facts been entangled with the values and interests of social scientists. Therefore, his attempt at delinking any connecting influence which the values or interests of the social scientists may have on his investigation of social facts (Inoka, 1995, p. 54).

However, after making attempts at distinguishing social facts from values and proposing that social scientists should study social fact through a model of construction in which the complex and misunderstood social structures and phenomena are rendered simple and intelligible. Weber nevertheless, admits to the very strong role played by values in the social sciences:

The object of social sciences are constituted by ‘reference to values’ without such reference, there would be no focus of interest, no reasonable selection of themes, no principles of distinction between relevant and irrelevant facts. Through ‘reference to values’ the objects of the social sciences emerge out of the ocean or morass of facts (Weber as cited by Inoka, 1995, p. 57).

In making emphasis on reference to values, Weber apparently admits that the proper explanation of the cause of human behavior can only be properly made sense of in the light of the frame of reference or value reference of the individual. This individual in turn is a member of a group and this group has its culture and norm. The culture and norm are contextual, they vary from a given society to another. This goes to show that the social sciences is embedded in and with values. The explanation of a given human action could be properly explained in the light of his or her values. Such Values are product of enculturation. This inevitably implies that the social sciences in trying to understand behavior of humans must limit its generalizations or laws to a particular society.

From a detailed study of methodology in the social sciences, Derek L. Phillips states, “In my view, social scientist spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy trying to account for what may be nonexistent *facts* and nonexistent relationship” (Haralambos & Heald, 2013, p. 620). Phillips believes that far too little attention has been given to the problems involved in obtaining valid data (that is the method of the social sciences). Thus, Phillips argues that social scientists should recognize the impossibility of nonrelative research in situations where human beings collect data from active, thinking people like themselves. From this point of view, investigation into research procedures of the social sciences might provide insights into meanings which governs the actions of individuals. But this meaning is culture-bound, subject to time and place, and therefore inevitably relative to a given society. Moreover, data which result from human interaction are inevitably biased in one way or another simply because of the nature of interaction.

For many social scientists, an objective science of society remains the goal of the social sciences. Their objectivity is summarized by Robert Bierstedt who states, “Objectivity means that the conclusions arrived at as the result of inquiry and investigation are independent of the race, color, creed, occupation, nationality, religion, moral preference, and political predispositions of the investigator. If his research is truly objective, it is independent of any subjective elements any personal desires, that he may have” (Haralambos & Heald, 2013, p. 621). A good number of social scientists now argue that the pursuit of an objective, value free social science is the pursuit of an illusion. With respect to methodology, this means that the entire research process of the social sciences will be influenced by certain social-cultural factors. These factors shape the social scientists’ assumptions about the nature of social reality, his methods of data collection, the type of data considered appropriate for his study, the way he analyses that data and his interpretation of the results. This in turn makes the findings relative to a given culture, place, and time (p. 622).

The implications of this view cannot be ignored. It suggests that there are no fixed or absolute standard against which the validity of data can be judged in the social sciences. If this is the case then the only lesson to be learned from the social sciences may well be the impossibility of knowing anything. Sociological knowledge thus becomes the constructions of reality created by social scientist. These constructions have no more claim to the truth than those of any other members of society. Jack Douglas argues that face to face with social reality, the observer can only see the social world through his own eyes. Given, the nature of man, no two social scientists will see that world in exactly the same way.

With regards to the central issues in the logic of social investigation, social scientists continue to be divided. Specifically, there is a long-standing divergence in professed scientific aims between those who on the one hand view the explanatory systems and logical methods of the natural sciences as models to be emulated in social research. On the other hand, are those who think it is fundamentally inappropriate for the social sciences to seek explanatory theories that employ “abstract” distinctions remote from familiar experience. The social sciences today possess no wide-ranging systems of explanations judged as adequate by a majority of social scientists. Thus, the social sciences are characterized by serious disagreements on methodological as well as substantive questions. However, these proposed methods and logic of social inquiries have contributed large quantities of frequently reliable information about social matters. “These contributions are primarily descriptive studies of special social facts in certain historically situated human groups, and supply no strictly universal laws about social phenomena” (Nagel, 1961, p. 449).

Conclusion

The social sciences deal with a subject matter which hardly submits to generalization, given its dynamics and convoluted nature. Human behavior in different societies as anthropologists have pointed out differs. The culture, tradition, ethos and systems

of belief vary from different society. “Different things are not just thought true (reasonable, natural) in different societies – rather, they are true (reasonable, natural) in different societies” (Musgrave 2019). The understanding and description of this social diversity has been the primal focus of the social sciences. But at the same time, the social sciences have the task of establishing general laws or principles which cut across human society regardless of social diversity. The complexity and dynamism of human behavior as rational agents who are products of societal enculturation, can only be properly understood from the standpoint of the cultural context of the actor. Thus, we maintained that relativism is inevitable in the social sciences given the socio-cultural diversity of human society.

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