

Cartesian thought and the foundation of sociology

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Abstract

This paper analyses the foundations of the so-called mathesis universalis, and how this notion, proposed by Descartes in the 17th century, has had significant implications in the origin and constitution (much later) of two of the most important versions of sociology: Sociological positivism and comprehensive sociology. Maintaining that the discipline that studies social phenomena has been constantly influenced by Cartesian thought, some postulates of both approaches are analysed based on the indicated principle. It is concluded that, despite being diametrically opposed from the point of view of the ontological principles on which they observe social reality, in both lines of sociological analysis the principle of mathesis universalis remains in force. This shows an evident logic of critical continuity of Cartesianism in the foundational approaches of sociology, all of which has turned out to be epistemologically significant for the discipline that aims to scientifically study social facts.

Author keywords

Clear ideas
Descartes
Distinct
Ideas
Sociology
Universal mathesis