Ethics and Social Sciences: A Gandhian Experiment

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Abstract: This paper argues that Gandhi’s claim enables us to rethink the epistemology of both social and natural sciences. Laws of sciences are not pictures or descriptions of stable islands of totalities of nature or society. They affirm a de-totalised and contingent reality within which cognitive and moral adventures are undertaken. The conceivability of natural-social laws allows us to put social sciences beyond the positivist and hermeneutical frameworks. The paper also discusses the responses of western thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire and Kant to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 to bring out the alternative path taken by Gandhi. This discussion will also enable us to understand Foucault’s diagnosis about social sciences. He claims that Modern Western reason is essentially practical reason and the primacy of practical reason and the ontology of human finitude it implies rend ethics impossible. Social sciences, according to him, are “grotesque” epistemic formations that make use of the gap left by an absent ethics. This paper argues that Gandhi offers a proposal to think about the knowledge about society beyond the epistemological configuration of social sciences.