

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO THE ACCURATE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL/SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Kingsley U. Omoyibo¹, Anthony Afe. Asekhauno²

¹University of Benin, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

²University of Benin, Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Submitted: 2015-07-18

Accepted: 2016-05-05

Published online: 2016-06-30

Abstract

Humans could manifest behavioral patterns that may not be a true reflection of their inner will, in this sense, man is a being that *doubts, thinks, wills, intends, desires, and is dynamically rational*. How do these features apply in the predictability of man? In short, what is the depth and reliability of our prying into an individual's *will*? Prominently, there are two conflicting accounts on whether or not a scientific study of human social behavior is possible, and these are based on four basic claims: one, that there are regularities in human behaviors; two, that the world is rule-governed and humans are part of that world; three, following Spencer and Comte, like the study of parts and their function in an organism, that humans are part of a larger society and therefore can be functionally studied; and four, following Pratt, that human social behavior can be studied like animals' in characteristic situations. Yet, man is a *rational/intelligent* and dynamic being and many believe he is free: has a will to or not to act – which Nietzsche holds to be absolute. However, whether humans status of will is ontology-based or psychological-based or not, the fact remains that human actions are factual, empirical, experiential and, therefore, also scientific. This paper presented the arguments, indicated their interplay with one another and gleaned their tenability on the predictability or scientific study of man. This study was necessary since every society (particularly Africa) desires the ideals of order, peace and development; therefore, this article ascertained the depth of generalizations about man that could help him to better socialized and conform with societal expectations.

Key words: *willing; desiring; intention; action; science; methodology; deception*

People are conscious, and (they) are conscious that they are conscious.

George Herbert Mead

INTRODUCTION

Prominently, there are two schools of thought on whether or not a scientific study of human social behaviour is possible: one school argues favourably-the positivists, '*Erklaren*'; and the other, the negativists, '*Verstehen*' is unfavourable (MacDonald

and Pettit 1981, p. 55). The positivists believe that: one, there is a reality of regularities in human behaviours; two, the world is rule – governed and humans are part of that world; three, following Spencer and Comte, like the study of parts and their function in an organism, humans are part of a larger society and therefore

can be functionally studied; four, following Pratt (1975), human social behaviour can be studied like animals' in characteristic situations. These arguments truly point to the fact that in any society, the different activities are interconnected and could be studied. But how accurate can the conclusions of such study be? The difficulty stems from the difference between human's behavioural and attitudinal rationality. Moreover humans unlike animals are complex and can purposively function in multifarious ways. Man is not only a physical but a rational/intelligent and dynamic being. Many believe that humans are free, with a *will* to or not to act; and Nietzsche holds that *will* is absolute. Yet these are ontological conceptions of personhood. However, by transforming the 'person' from an ontological to a psychological fact, Descartes opened the door to a series of either grave diminutions or enormous exaggerations of the concept of person. From that time, philosophy also entered the terrain of gnoseology – a way of defining 'person' in relation to self-consciousness, in the mode set by the "cogito ego sum" (Haldane and Ross 1960, pp. 145–147). But whether humans' status of *will* is ontology-based or psychological-based or not, the fact remains that human actions are themselves factual, empirical, experiential and therefore also scientific. What are the inter-relationships of these concepts? Moreover humans can manifest and display behavioural patterns that may not be a true reflection of their inner will. In this sense, man is a being that **doubts, thinks, wills, intends, desires, and is dynamically rational**. How do these features apply to the predictability of man? In short, what is the depth and reliability of scientific prying into an individual's *will*?

The intention in this paper is to analyze these concepts and indicate their interplay with one another on the one hand; and on the other, glean their impact on the predictability or scientific study of man in society. This is necessary because since we have observed useful uniformities/behavioural patterns among all persons and since every society (particularly Africa) desires order, peace and development, we need to ascertain the depth of generalizations we can make about man in society in order to be better able to fashion schemes or mechanisms of control to achieve

the ideals of social order, social cohesion and development.

Willing, desiring, and intending

There are two broad kinds of human action. We can distinguish those actions which originate directly in our own selves (or which we *will*) from those we neither *will* nor originate in us. In other words, we can differentiate 'acts of man' from 'human actions'. Often, one speaks of '**turning one's head**' but some other time speaks of '**one's head turned**'. These two strands represent the transitive and non-transitive use of the verb '**turn**'. While the phrase '**turning one's head**' stands for any behaviour or action and thus an activity of one's mind; on the other hand, the parallel '**my head turned**', implies that I speak simply of a movement of some part of my body, to wit: my head-which is a mere report of a sheer bodily motion, 'change of position', not action (Pritchard, 1968). The first kind of activity described above is *willed*, deliberate and therefore an action. Such is called '**act of man**'. And the second kind, such as blinking, hearing, sneezing, yawning, etc, represents '**human act**'. Perhaps this is why Mc-Murray (1938) persuasively holds that the term action is ambiguous, (**that**) "it may refer either to what is done or to the doing of it... either doing or deed". This however obviously ignores the origination of the action. This is where the idea of *will or willing* is imperative; what is *will*?

Will is ability "to desire an outcome and to purpose to bring it about... volition" (Blackburn 1996, p. 399). Generally, *willing* implies that it originates directly in the individual, having considered all the options of a course. It means the propensity to act. Although it is possible to originate something, **X**, without willing it, but **X** begins to exist as one perceives or becomes conscious of it. Cook Wilson holds that the origination of the thing requires one's willing it such that when one originates a movement of his hand, there is another requirement of his antecedent willing of the origination, and this willing in turn requires the willing or desiring to originate the movement (Pritchard 1968). Some *willing and desiring* are biologically, psychologically, even spiritually originated. One wonders therefore the ultimacy or authenticity of one being the origination of

his **will**. Thus when we think of ourselves as having moved a hand, we are also thinking of ourselves as having performed an activity of a certain kind and a mental activity of certain kind: an activity of whose nature we are dimly aware in doing the action and of which we can become more directly aware of by reflecting on it. The fact of being aware of this/its special nature is made possible by our understanding, un-hesitantly distinguishing it from other mental activities such as thinking, wondering and imagining. On such an activity Hume (1999) states “by **will** I mean nothing but the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body or new perceptions of our mind”.

Yet Hume’s impression is not un-vague or impossible to define, and thus we can still distinguish it from a number of things which it is not. According to Locke, **willing** is different from desiring but it is not ‘conation’ (which is a psychological approach). Agreeably, Thomas Hill Green holds that a species of desiring desires in another sense than that ordinary sense in which we are said to desire while hesitating to act. To him, **will** is the self-conscious pursuit of a good (Blackburn 1966, p. 162).

When we think of ourselves as having done a certain action, we also talk of having **willed** it. Thus in his contention, Cook Wilson associates action with willing, and argues convincingly that “to will an act as distinguished from the act itself is a self contradiction” (Anscombe 1968). There are clear illustrations of this reasoning. For example, I **will** to eat, eating follows; but I **will** to sneeze, and sneezing does not follow. As against Blackburn (1996), **willing** is not followed by volitions but by actions, though not in every case. The question that looms is: is willing an action or is it not itself an action? If willing is an action, do we **will** the willing ad infinitum? However, we must admit that willing could be followed by acting or behaving; but sometimes, we **will** without having caused any palpable or observable change/behaviour.

Consequently, if willing itself is an action, then it is possible to will a willing. **Desiring** is therefore the willing of a **will**. Desire is intense likeness and attraction. Long ago, Aristotle held that acting requires a desire.

Locke maintained that if we never desired something, we would never do something. But **desire** is the desire of what? Truly, it is the desire of the change or obtaining of the transformation which we will. It is the likeness for the willing of **X**, since unless we desired to **will X** we would not will it, that we will it. Thus **desiring** is beyond the mere liking of something. This is why Green averred that **desiring** is **willing** in a special sense. Hence the thing **desired** and that **willed** will be the same thing. And desires may not be followed by willing the act. In other words, one wonders how it is possible to desire **X** without willing it, whereas it is not possible to will **X** without desiring it. For example, scornfully and covetously, Shaibu **desired** the failure of Osumah’s business ventures. But when Shaibu assumed an authoritative position to or not to approve the payment to Osumah’s cheque which will improve or further Osumah’s fortunes, he (Shaibu) did approve (obviously on duty). This implies that one’s action on **will** may even be contrary to his **desire**. Determining such point of discrepancy is nearly impossible. Appropriately therefore, let us wrap up by saying that while **willing** is the propensity to act, **desiring** involves the propensity to will something or an act, conjecturing that if we were to **will X**, our willing might cause some change which we desire for its own sake. Thus **desire** is the **willing** of something; and hope/wish for something, the practical fulfillment of which is called intention.

Intentions are goals, formed from some will. As mentioned before, ‘**acts of man**’ are deliberate actions, with reasons and causes. They are therefore said to be **intentional**. There can be mental causes – a sense in the class of things known without observation: a kind of motivation. By motive, we mean a kind of goal or push for an action. The cause of something is what it is that brings the effect about. In the final analysis, ‘motives’ and ‘intentions’ are still distinct and distinguishable. A man’s ‘intention’ is what he aims, chooses or **wills** to do; but his ‘motive’ is what determines the aim or choice in the first place (which probably means ‘cause’). But it is common place to associate the two terms together. Let us take the idea of ‘profit’, for example. In business enterprises, to make gains is an **intention**, the reason

for something; the **desire** for gain, a motive for the fact of offering, i.e. why an action. Motives are adduced for intentions which may be discoverable in action, and we can here state that in man, causes and motives are psychological, internal generations, **intention** is difficult to determine and it is often also difficult to accomplish. Motives therefore are intentions, expectations and

That which induces a person to act in a certain way; a desire, fear, or other emotion, or a consideration of reason, which influences or tends to influence a person's volition; this often applied to a contemplated result or object the desire for which tends to influence volition (Pritchard 1968).

Thus the question of motives and **intentions** can legitimately be taken to embrace the question about the point of an action, the reason for an act, and the things (desires, fears, or other emotion) which lead or possess a person to act in a certain way.

Thus, we can conveniently claim that humans are the embodiment of emotion: beings that **will, desire and intend**. These features portend the idea that the human **will** is free. Against deterministic theorists, philosophers such as Hume claim that human is a body of emotion leading to exasperating exaggeration by the likes of Nietzsche that the ultimate goal of man is the **will** to power. We must observe that **willing, desiring and intentionality** constitute rationality, which implies the ability for self-functioning and organization (Dubrovsky 1983, p. 142); that man is an ethical and psychologically egoistic being; that rational action "is behaviour done for the reason or purpose of the agent" (Graham 1996, p. 109). It is even rational to think that rationality goes beyond psychological egoism to some altruistic considerations. Thus rationality is of different degrees, and can even be spurious. This conception puts actions done on force and those by non-humans, of kids, of the comatose, etc., out of the category of the rational. Among the rational, the idea of the ideal compounds the problem already generated by the concepts of **motives, willing and desiring**. All these have adverse implications for the scientific study of the human phenomenon.

Science and the human phenomenon

Succinctly put, the word science generally means "any systematized, organized or classified body of knowledge which has been critically tested and is beyond reasonable doubt" (Aigbodioh 1997, p. 1). From observation, existing theories and rules, new hypotheses are formulated and subjected to further observation/testing; and the result either confirms or rejects the hypothesis. This experimentation could lead to the development of newer laws, and becomes a guide for future experiences/deductions. So whereas the application of scientific laws is deductive, the method of arriving at such laws is inductive. It, results are held everywhere, anywhere, and anytime. Though it generalizes, it is significant to note that the identification of a problem and construction/formulation of a model that is tested as a solution to the problem is the hallmark of science. Yet future research could falsify or disprove today's convictions (Popper 1959).

Science is specific, descriptive, public and impersonal. This is why it claims objectivity in its consideration of social, economic, political issues and about nature. While the social sciences attempt to study the nature of man in society, how man responds to socio-economic and political needs (with a view to identifying uniformities, peculiarities and establishing predictability); biological sciences attempt to study the bio-physiological content of human/animal nature. The basic interest of the philosopher of science is to examine the logical structure and methodological features of the scientific method, sift its interaction with other aspects of civilization and nature, and ultimately analyze the socio-cultural implications of technology with a view to making them more applicative (Giddings 1924, p. 55).

One of the most formidable problems of science and its method is that of induction. The problem becomes more obvious when it comes to the study of man, whose nature is dynamic, rational and could be deceptive.

Science and its study of individual/ social behaviour

In pursuing its goals, science relies chiefly on its method and dogma – "a body of true knowledge... objectivity in the investigation

of empirical phenomena... a tradition, a way of thinking, an attitude, and a methodology” (Agbonifoh and Yomere 1999, p. 11). But Hume (1999), Feyerabend, (1993) and Nagel (1961), among others, have pointed out the absurdities of this practice. First of all, if Hume’s constitution of humans as **willing** and **purpose** oriented beings and basically full of passion/emotion is true, two problems are observed for the scientific study of man. One, the scientist is human and thus cannot but employ his own biases/desires and idiosyncrasies (by which he cannot effectively or accurately apply the already problematic scientific method); two, as is contended in this article, man as an object of study is also stuffed with emotions and passions, and deceptions – with his own **intentions, desires and will** and thus resplendent with hidden motives (truly known only to him). As true as this and as emphasized by Hume, that selves and persons must be analyzed as ‘bundles’ or ‘collections’ of perceptions and experiences; the self therefore is not a ‘thing’ but a series of perceptual experiences (Meyers 1960, p. 17).

Again, values and attitudes are consequent upon intentionality, and they vary accordingly with changing society (Broom 1973, p. 243). How can we claim to be able to predict a person who, for example, yesterday had, because of feeling of hunger, frustration and dejection, frowned at a particular government policy but on his appointment as a state Commissioner becomes the government’s chief defender and propagandist? Unlike objects in static nature, persons and societies are in constant flux-dynamic. This is because newer attitudes are learned or gradually developed which reshapes human personality and society (Cuber 1968, p. 239).

In another dimension, personal attitudes may conflict with social experiences or expectancies. Which one of them is of main relevance to the scientist, or how does he determine the exceptional attitude? The condition is compounded by ambivalence and stereotype in social behaviour. When an individual shows spurious behaviour, his real **intention** may be undetermined. For example, a voter goes into the polling booth and votes ‘**A**’, and when he comes out, because of his relationship with him, shouts and exclaims victory for ‘**B**’; and the scientist

goes away with the belief that he (the scientist) had determined/ascertained public opinion in favour of ‘**B**’. This is conflict of **desire, will and intention**. The inadequacy of this is seen when ‘**A**’, a reflection of the actual attitude of many voters (as our example), eventually wins. Human behaviors are dynamic. Behavior is “a response... reaction of an individual, including not only bodily reactions and movements, verbal statements and subjective experiences”. Hence behaviorism is mostly connected with observable action (individual or social); it sometimes “disregards the subjective aspects of human society such as consciousness, intention or the meaning of the behavior to the people concerned”. Behaviorism is a method in scientific research – it emphasizes “... the analysis and synthesis of scientific literature” (Slavickiene and Ciuleviciene 2014). Such is the problem with behaviorism – the view that there “is a necessary connection between the truth of a report of a certain raw feel and the disposition to such and such behaviour”. These have an effect on observational theory and the use of language because “sentimentality is a falsifying of emotion and there is some kind of unreality, exaggeration, distortion and, of course, some intention behind the emotion which is displayed for the scientist” (Rorty 1980, p. 98). In this way, even sociological and researches in social work are faced with this limitation in their emphasis on a “mission that gives greater prominence to community development and counteracting the effects and causes of family poverty and criminality” (Pierson and Thomas 2010, p. 496).

John Searle and Nagel have argued that the inner life of persons contains the convictions of freedom and that in acting intentionally, persons believe themselves to possess dual power – of deliberation and decision (a prototypical antecedent of conscious intentional action), and that this is inbuilt in every normal, conscious and intelligent being (Graham 1996, p. 160). Searle further argues that if the condition of freedom is warranted, then it must be consistent with science. For the avoidance of doubt, we believe that often views on freedom are incompatible with those of science. The possibility of dual power has thus remained the anchor of the scientists’ argument. But others (such as Peter Van Inwagen) argue that if decisions are explained in terms of circumstances wholly outside

or before themselves, then agents lack dual power. However, the point to note is that the disposition to behave is determined by a number of factors which render predictions about them insufficient. Moreover, Kuhn and Davidson adequately provide a synthesis of the odds against science and its study of particularly human persons/society. On his part, Thomas Kuhn (1970) claims that:

Idiosyncratic, subjective and psychological feelings are paramount in the (scientific) process of building up theories and choosing between theories in the scientific enterprise.

In this regard, Kuhn gave a “no criteria” verdict on science and its method, advocating instead, the employment of paradigms.

Similarly and arguing from a conceptual-linguistic perspective, Donald Davidson (1985, p. 133) posits that it:

Seems unlikely that we can intelligibly attribute attitudes as complex as these to a speaker unless we can translate his words into our... to speak of sensory experience rather than the evidence, or just the facts, expresses as view about the source of nature of evidence, but does not add a new entity to the universe against which to test conceptual schemes... Allow that a man’s speech cannot be interpreted without knowing a good deal of what he believes (intends and wants) ... impossible without understood speech, how then are we to interpret speech. ... intelligibly to attribute beliefs and other attitudes. Clearly we must have a theory that simultaneously accounts

for attitudes and interjection speech, a theory that rests on evidence, which assumes neither.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion in the preceding sessions (and Succinctly put by Davidson’s contention), a Sorites could be derived thus to sum up:

- a) one’s attitude/feeling is rightly or wrongly discoverable by behavior/language;
- b) behaviour/language is experiential;
- c) science thrives on experience and is objectively impersonal;
- d) behavior/language has subjective, relative and deceptive disparities;
- e) therefore, scientific objectivity is not possible with individual/social action.

And from our categorization of those things that connote **willing, intending and desiring** as facts about man who himself is a dynamic and deceptive being, we accept the fact that rationality involves the interplay of emotions/passions (Hume) and reason (Kant); that men and society are dynamic, not static objects; and unlike other animals “are conscious and (they) are conscious that they are conscious” (Mead 1934). On the other hand, science thrives in generalizations based on experimentation and has a methodological deficiency in its inductive posture; and coupled with the imperious fact of human rationality (i.e. intentionality, willing and desiring) – though this does not and cannot undermine the immense developments in science in the past century, and its potentiality is rendered incapacitated to undertake an accurate study of human action and social phenomena arising there from.

REFERENCES

1. Agbonifoh BA, Yomere GO (1999). *Research Methodology*. Benin: University Press.
2. Aigbodioh JA (1997). *Philosophy of Science: Issues and Problems*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
3. Blackburn S (1996). *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Broom L, Selznick P (eds) (1973). *Sociology*. 5th ed. New York: Harper and Row Pub.
5. Cuber JF (1968). *Sociology*. New York: Meredith Publications.
6. Davidson D (1985). On the very idea of conceptual scheme. In: Rajchman J, West C (eds). *Post-Analytic Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
7. Dubrovsky D (1983). *The Problem of the Ideal*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
8. Feyerabend P (1993). *Farewell to Reason*. London: Verso.
9. Giddings FH (1924). *The Scientific Study of Human Society*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
10. Graham G (1996). *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Blackwell Books Publications Inc.
11. Haldane ES, Ross GTR (1960). *The Philosophical Works of Descartes vol. 1*. London: Cambridge University Press.
12. Hume D (1999). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford University Press, pp. 147–164.
13. Kuhn T (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Discussed in: Aigbodioh JA op. cit. 1997, pp. 69–74.
14. MacDonald G, Pettit P (1981). *Semantics and Social Science*. London: RKP.
15. Mead GH (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Discussed in: Broom L, Selznick P (eds). *Sociology*. 5th ed. New York: Harper and Row Pub.; 1973, p. 105.
16. Meyers G (1960). *Self*. New York: Western Publishing Company.
17. Murray M (1938). *What is Action? A Symposium by Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary vol. XVII.
18. Nagel E (1961). *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation*. New York: Harcourt Brace & World Inc.
19. Pierson J, Thomas M (2010). *Dictionary of Social Work*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
20. Popper K (1959). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Hutchinson.
21. Pratt V (1975). A biological approach to sociological functionalism. *Inquiry*. 18: 371–389.
22. Pritchard EA (1968). Acting, willing, desiring. In: White A (ed.). *The Philosophy of Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 59–69.
23. Rorty R (1980). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
24. Slavickiene A, Ciuleviciene V (2014). Comparative Assessment of Environmental Taxes in the European Union States. *European Scientific Journal*. 10(14): 1–12.

Contact:

Kingsley U. Omoyibo, University of Benin, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
Email: ufuomaomoyibo@hotmail.com; kingsley.omoyibo@uniben.edu