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Behaviouralism as an Approach to Contemporary Political Analysis: An Appraisal

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Abstract: ***Limitations inherent in traditional orientations of analysing political phenomena are reasons behind the search for new paradigms aimed at increasing epistemic knowledge when analysing political issues in the 21st Century. Against the existing institutionalists, pluralists and elitists approaches, contemporary thinkers have adopted the behaviouralists approaches which has capacity to increase the empirical status of knowledge in contemporary political analysis. The traditional method of analysis in philosophy was used to analyse all current literature, arguments and archival materials on the subject of this paper. The paper critically evaluates most of the criticisms levied against the behavioural approach with the view to identifying the edge which the behavioural approach offers contemporary analysts in political science. The paper concludes that despite these criticisms, not all the examples of the approach are flawed. Behaviouralism has brought with it, new concepts, sophisticated tools of analysis and mathematical models which tend to make us all behaviouralists.***

Keywords: Behaviouralists, Behaviouralism, Contemporary, Elitists, Empirical, Institutionalists, Political Phenomenon, Pluralists, Paradigms

1. Introduction

Some studies (Brown and Ainley, 2005),Lindblom, (1977), conductedtowards finding pathways for further understanding modern political thought and behaviour, revealed that trends of thoughts in political science have moved from the traditional approaches which initially dominated discussion amongst political analysts and thinkers. Some of the approaches in perspective include: the elitists approach, the institutionalists approach and the pluralists approach. These approaches to certain extents, reflect the various epistemological and ontological positions in the analysis of political phenomenon. However, it is important to note that the focus of the inquiry in the approaches just mentioned, are often directed at the divisions and analytical differences that existed in the study of politics. While the institutional approach focused on constitutional and institutional issues, the pluralist focused on the ability of groups to bargain. The elitists group on the hand focus their attention on the manipulation of power. Stroker, (2010). Review of relevant literature and studies in this line of thought (Marsh &Stoker, 2010:15), Dahl, (1951), indicates that the three approaches mentioned above were to a large extent, ridden with various challenges with regards to analyzing political issues. The old institutionalists approach (Lowndes, 1996:181-197) for instance, was known to be characterized by a focus on formal rules rather than the informal conventions and on official structures of government, rather than broader institutional networks of governance. (Marsh &Stoker, 2010:15), As such, the institutionalists approach was often perceived as structuralists' in the sense that, it held that structures determine political behavior in the same way that the legalist see law as having a major role in governing. This same approach was also perceived to assume functionalists roles and tendencies in that, there were some assumptions that principal institutions were always perceived to be present because they help the political system to work well. Recent studies (Finer,1970), and (Bentley, (1908) however, now indicate that understanding the constitutional and institutional basis of different forms of government is not a bad starting point when it comes to the question of analyzing political issues in political science. The problem is that the whole approach has increasingly been found to be ridden with so many challenges. A number of literature (Lowndes, 1996, 181-197), Finer, (1970), Bentley, (1908) are unanimous in their resolve for the need to look beyond the formal arrangements of power in the light of the above mentioned approaches in other to understand politics. It was already clear that the division within political science have gotten more varied and more profound. They had moved beyond the status of analytical differences to take into account different ontological and epistemological positions.

These differences were mostly in the areas of :
(1) what to study, (2) How to study, (3) and the why of the study.

Therefore in responding positively to the contemporary questions that now looms political scientist in the face, thinkers and political analysts are of the opinion that " In other to explore these broad approaches which political scientists adopt in their studies, we will need to step outside the confines of the earlier mentioned approaches: (Institutionalism, Pluralism and Elitism) which were known to have so many challenges,Cerny, (2009) to explore the new approaches which political scientists are beginning to adopt in their daily analysis and investigations.

This papers objective will therefore be focused on doing the following:

- This paper shall explore the 'Behavioralists Approach' also known Behaviouralism in political analysis with the view to first identifying the philosophical foundations which this modern approach offers to contemporary political thought.
- The paper shall closely consider and analyze some of the major criticisms which have been levied against the Behavioral approach for the purpose of evaluating and stating the continued relevance of the approach to contemporary political thought.
- This paper shall in the light of the prevailing arguments and deductions which shall be made from the analysis of the criticisms levied against the 'Behavioral approach identify the edge which this new approaches has over the traditional approaches. The paper in addition shall seek to

identify the continued relevance of the approaches in the light of developing and changing constructs and paradigms in contemporary political thought.

For methods, the paper shall adopt the method of conceptual analysis to clarify the major concepts in the paper: (Behaviouralism, Constructivism). The reconstructive methods of philosophy shall be employed to synthesize the existing basic elements of the behaviouralists' mode of thought with the view to establishing the existing relevance of the approaches in the light of the subject of this paper.

2. Foundations of Behaviouralism

2.1 Historical Background to the Study of Behaviouralism

Behaviouralism rose partly as a reaction against the traditional approaches of political inquiry and partly as a result of the quest in search for a more 'Scientific Method' of acquiring empiricknowledge during political analysis. Consequently, political scientists have in recent times, proposed a variety of approaches to meet the needs of emerging paradigms in political thought. The first breakthrough came with the emergence of the 'Behavioralists Movement' in political science. Behaviouralism, or the behavioral approach to the analysis and explanation of political phenomena, is particularly associated with the work of American political scientists after the Second World War, but its origins can be traced back to the works of Graham Wallas (Human Nature in Politics) and Arthur Bentley (The Process of Government), both published as early as 1908. Both Wallas and Bentley were inclined to lay greater emphasis on the informal processes of politics and less on political institutions in isolation. Wallas sought to introduce a New Realism in political studies in the light of new findings in Contemporary Psychology. The new psychology had revealed that man was not totally a rational creature and that his political actions were not totally guided by reason and self-interest. Wallas therefore insisted on exploring facts and evidence for understanding human nature and its manifestations in human behavior. Arthur Bentley, on the other hand, a pioneer of group approach to politics, primarily sought not to describe political activity, but to provide a set of new tools of investigation in the social sciences. Greatly inspired by Sociology, he proceeded to undertake a study of the role of pressure groups, political parties, elections and public opinion in the political process.

Charles E. Merriam was another pioneer of the behavioural approach. He is famous as the founder of the 'Chicago School' which made substantial contribution to the behavioralists movement. In the article 'The Present State of The Study of Politics' published in American Political Science Review (1999) and in his book 'New Aspects of Politics' (2000), Merriam criticized contemporary political science for its lack of scientific rigor. In his presidential address to American 'Political Science Association' (2011), Merriam exhorted political scientists to look at political behaviour as one of the essential objects of inquiry.

George E. Catlin in his 'Science and Method of Politics' (2012) advanced the case for a value free pure science. He treated 'power' as the essence of politics and argued that analysis of power should not be inclined in favour of any particular value-system. Harold D. Lasswell, (2014), in his celebrated work 'Politics: Who Gets What, When and How' (2013) proved to be a landmark in the empirical approach to politics as the study and analysis of power.

Despite these early attempts, Behaviouralism in political science was systematically developed only after the Second World War, particularly through the writings of American Political Scientists. David B. Truman, Robert Dahl, Evron M. Kirkpatrick, David Easton, Heinz Eulau; are some of the most prominent personalities of the Behavioral movement in political science. Behaviouralism as such came to be understood as something wider than the study of political behaviour, yet political behaviour was its main focus. Behaviouralism as a movement in political science did not remain confined to the study of individual based political behaviour, but developed into a set of orientations, procedures and methods of analysis. In practice, it embraced all that lends a scientific character to the modern political science. According to Easton, (2015) the intellectual foundations of Behaviouralism consist of eight major tenets:

- Regularities: Discoverable uniformities in political behaviour which can be expressed in theory like statements.
- Verification: Validity of such theory like statements can be verified.
- Techniques: Means for acquiring and interpreting data.
- Quantification: Precision in the recording of data.
- Values: Objective scientific inquiry has to be value free or value neutral.
- Systematization: Close interrelationship between theory and research.
- Pure Science: Directed towards forging a link between theoretical understanding of politics and application of theory to practical problem- solving.
- Integration: Integration of political science with other social sciences.

Thus Behaviouralism came to accord primacy to higher degree of reliability vis-à-vis higher degree of generality. In short, Behaviouralism focused on micro level situations rather than attempting macro level generalizations.

2.2 Conceptual Clarifications and Analysis of Behaviouralism

Behaviouralism is not a clearly defined movement for those who are thought to be behaviouralists. It is more clearly definable by those who were opposed to it, because they were describing it in terms of the things within the newer trends which they found objectionable. Consequently, some would define behaviouralism as an attempt to apply the methods of natural sciences to human behavior. Others would define it as an excessive emphasis upon quantification. Others conceive of it as individualistic reductionism. From the inside, the practitioners were of different minds as to what it was that constituted behaviouralism. By this we can see that from inception, behaviouralism resisted a single definition. Dwight Waldo

emphasized that behaviouralism itself is unclear, calling it "complicated" and "obscure." (Waldo, 1999:78). Easton agreed, stating, "Every man puts his own emphasis and thereby becomes his own behaviouralist" as such, attempts to completely define behaviouralism have been fruitless. (Easton, 2000:9).So instead of defining behaviouralism, it is much easier to say what behaviouralism does or seeks to achieve. Behaviouralism for Walton seeks to examine "the behavior, actions, and acts of individuals rather than the characteristics of institutions such as legislatures, executives, and judiciaries – and groups in different social settings and explains this behavior as it relates to the political system. (Walton,1999). For Britannica Encyclopedia, Behaviouralism is the view that the subject matter of political science should be limited to phenomena that are independently observable and quantifiable. It assumes that political institutions largely reflect underlying social forces and that the study of politics should begin with society, culture, and public opinion. To this end, behaviouralists utilize the methodology of the social sciences primarily psychology to establish statistical relationships between independent variables (presumed causes) and dependent variables (presumed effects). For example, behaviouralists might use detailed election data to argue that voters in rural areas are likely to vote for Mr. 'A' and not Mr. 'B' as a result of X and Y reasons.

The behaviouralists approach to social science and political analysis, in all, are guided by two distinctive principles: these principles have been known to differentiate the behaviouralist from other social sciences. These principles include: their insistence on the mere fact that observable behaviour, whether it be at the level of the individual or the social aggregate, should be the focus of their analysis at any point in time. They also insist that any explanation offered for that behaviour should be susceptible to empirical testing. In all these divers contexts, the central questions which the behaviouralists seeks to answer are quite clear and simple. In Sanders' own words, "What do actors involved actually do? How can we best explain why they do it"(Sanders, 1992:94). While we know that these are not just the only questions that behaviouralist tackle, they however in fact believe that as far as behaviouralists are concerned, they believe that these two questions are the most important ones when it comes to analyzing issues in political science.

2.3Some Major Characteristics of Behaviouralism

One of the most outstanding features of the behaviouralists approach is the fact that its philosophical origins are found in the writings of Comte,(1947) of the 19th Century and also in Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle in the 1920's. These philosophical foundations held that analytical statements made about the physical or social world falls into one of the following categories:

- That such statement can only amount to useful tautologies, i.e. that they could be purely definitional statements that assign a specific meaning to a particular phenomenon or concept.
- Statements could be empirical, that is to say, they could be tested against observations in other to see if they were true or false.
- Statements that fall into neither of the first two categories were devoid of analytical meaning. For the positivist in short, meaningful analysis could only proceed on the basis of useful tautologies and empirical statements: Metaphysics, Theology, Aesthetics, and Ethics merely introduce meaningless obfuscation into the process of inquiry.

It is important to note however, that behaviouralism as an approach in political science did not entirely adopt all the philosophical precepts of the positivist thought. The precepts which were known to have been one of the major reasons for which Logical Positivism have attracted various attacks' from other opposing schools of thought. This notwithstanding, (Sanders, 2010:28) notes that the behaviouralist view of the nature of empirical theory and explanation were strongly influenced by the positivist tradition. That stated, we wish to note that the behaviouralists insistence on empirical observation and testing of all theories; is what have earned the approach its characteristic feature for which the behaviouralists approach to social enquiry is known today.

3. Analysis of Some Criticism of Behaviouralism

The distinguishing characteristics for which the behaviouralists approach is known for, has in recent times, attracted various criticisms from all and sundry. One of the major criticisms of the behaviouralist approach rests on the fact of association and influence which the Logical Positivist School of thought exerts on the behaviouralists approach. Thus, the first criticism rests on the positivist influence claimwhich holds that:

* "statements which are neither definitions nor empirical are meaningless" in its entire ramification. By implication, it has been argued by certain scholars that since the behavioral approach share the same mode of thought with logical positivism, it invariably becomes vulnerable to any weakness inherent in positivism. We have already inferred in the sections above that this situation may not necessary follow or apply with the behaviouralists approach. This is because among the large class of statements which the positivist declare to be 'meaningless,' some of these statements actually contains some meaningful facts and ideas which could add very significantly to our understanding of social behaviour and the human condition. Where positivism seeks to exclude these forms of reflections as means through which human behaviour can be analyzed, it will amount to great error. As such, in these recent times, we have had contemporary behaviouralist researchers reject the notion that there can be no role for normative theory, aesthetics or hermeneutics in political and social analysis. They would argue instead that these approaches yield a different form of knowledge or understanding but not that they are 'meaningless'. In essence, modern behaviouralist openly acknowledge this particular criticism of positivism. They however deflect it from themselves by recognizing that other potential useful forms of knowledge can be acquired by scholars working in other intellectual traditions. Modern behaviouralists simply prefer to subject their own theoretical claims to empirical tests. They also suspect that scholars working in none empirical traditions are never able to

provide satisfactory answers to questions such as: how do you know when you are wrong Another major criticism against the behaviouralist approach is that;

* There is "the tendency amongst the behaviouralist, to tilt towards mindless empiricism" as a result of their influence from positivism. (Sanders, 2010:30).On the above criticism, it is important to note that one of the earliest claims of the positivist's school of thought was that theoretical understanding could be obtained only through the process of inquiry that began with theory-free observations of 'all the facts in an experiment for instance, from which law-like generalizations are derived from the empirical regularities that were observed. Later positivist like Hempel, (1966) and Popper were known to have argued strongly that "enquiries could only proceed if the researchers' effort to observe 'relevant facts' where guided either by clear theoretical expectations or, at a minimum, by some kind of explanatory hunch" Hempel, (1966:11-12).The positivist by this position, moves away from Inductivism as a method of science. But on the contrary, we see the behaviouralists' emphasis on data and the concomitant downgrading of aprioritheoretical reasoning which in turn produce specific tendencies among behaviouralists' researchers. One of which is the tendency to emphasize on what can easily be measured rather than what might be theoretically important. The tendency to play down on the potential importance of phenomena that are intrinsically difficult to measure has thus become the matter of concern to both critics and advocates of the behaviouralist research. This scenario has been exceptionally true in relation to the analysis of electoral behaviour. Behaviouralists now thus pay closer attention to issues such as "electorate's social profiles', partisan identifications, policy preferences and economic perceptions. To this end, complex models have been devised to aid showing how the relative importance and causal ordering of different aspects of various phenomena influence the determination of a vote during and after elections. (Sarlvik and Crewe, 1983; Heath et al, 1985; Heat, 1991)

A second and unrelated, undesirable feature of behavioral research that arise from its overly empirical focus has been a tendency to concentrate on readily observed phenomena - such as votingrather than the more subtle, and perhaps deeper, structural forces that promote stability and change in social and political system. One obvious concept that has been neglected by behavioral researchers in this context is that of interests. The notion of interest has played an important part in a wide verity of social and political theories ranging from Marx, Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto in the domestic field of Hans Morgenthau and E. H. Carr in the field of International Relations. In all these contexts, social actors- are seen as pursuing strategies that are aimed at maximizing their interest. Yet as scholars working in the behavioral tradition have found repeatedly, it is extraordinarily difficult to observe the 'interests 'of a particular individual, group of people or state directly. In consequence, behaviouralist researchers have tend to shy away from the theoretical and empirical analysis of interests- preferring to leave the field clear for scholars working in none empirical traditions.

4. Advantages of the Behavioral Approach

Our discussion so far has shown that the behavioral approach can be subjected to serious criticism. It would be however wrong to infer that all examples of the behavioral research are flawed. On the contrary, behavioral research at its best, can make considerable theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding and explanation of social behaviour. The strengths of the behavioral approach derives primarily from its replication. Scholars working in the behavioral tradition are always concerned to establish that other researcher who are making similar set of assumptions as them and examining the same evidence would draw broadly, similar conclusion. The need to ensure that research findings are capable of replication necessarily means that behaviouralists are obliged to be very clear in their specifications of: (a) What it is they are trying to explain; (b) The precise theoretical explanation that is being advanced; and (c) the way in which they are using empirical evidence in other to evaluate theoretical explanation. The need for clarity of exposition means that the behaviouralist rarely enter into the most sterile arena of academic debate where questions such as: What did writer X mean when s/he argued Y. For behaviouralist, except X makes it clear what s/he means in the first place, then X work is not capable of being replicated and thus argument Y is likely to be treated with suspension in any case. For David sanders, the behaviouralists would "rather be clear and (possibly) wrong than to be so impenetrable that other writers are obliged to debate the 'meaning' of what has been written. Sanders, (2010).

4.1 The Relevance of Behaviouralism to Modern Political Science

From all the studies done in the above sections, it is evident that one of the reasons for the emergence of the behavioral approach is to create an avenue which will project the methods of analysis adopted and practiced in political science as against the seeming advances in the methods that are recorded and practiced in other social science disciplines like sociology and psychology. (Hayes and Hedlund, 1970:45-55). Consequently, behaviouralists, being dissatisfied with the traditionalists' opinions about issues like individual participation and political systems in general, resolved to make scientific methodology and research orientation the new hall-mark of political science This explains why the behaviouralists school have consistently sought to make political science very quantitative and scientific and, why they have placed emphasis on micro politics (i.e. study of political actors and process) – rather than the formal institutions of government"(Leeds, 1981:2). These efforts by the behaviouralists in my view constitute nothing but desire for improvement and scientific rejuvenation of political science. This is attested to by the 'Creed of Behaviouralism' or, the key 'behaviouralists' articles of faith' (Leeds, 1981:3). According to the behaviouralists' creed or articles of faith: Capability of scientific prediction and explanation is not beyond the scope of political science, if political scientists engage in search of political behaviors and their accompanying variables. And that observable phenomenon should be the only concern of political science as opposed to institutionalism.(Leeds,

1981:2). Generally, the birth of the behaviouralists approach has consistently led to the genesis of scientific research into variables like "political attitudes, role perception, voting behaviors, pressure groups, roles of leaders and elites, individual and group behaviors and their interaction within the system." (Albst and Tanenhaus, 1920:55). In short, the rise of this approach within the discipline of political science has brought with it, sophisticated concepts and scientifically sophisticated tools of analysis and evaluation like "tables, graphs, scales, charts statistical and mathematical models" Leeds, (1981). With these, behaviouralism or the behaviouralists approach to my mind, is a new thinking about the methodological approach in political science. It has propelled the discipline into a new direction of intellectual inquiry and pursuit of knowledge by charting a new intellectual channel with a capacity to grapple with all issues relating to political phenomena of the past and present dispensation. In other words, it has made political science more attuned to the changing needs of people and the study of politics within a polity. Because of the perceived impact of behaviouralism to political science (though this is debatable), we would argue that behaviouralism is a form of renaissance, - if not in totality - in certain parts of political science. The debateability of the behaviouralists' impact on political science is exemplified by the views of some of the behaviouralist themselves. For example while accepting the idea that behaviouralism has had pronounced impact on political science, Robert Dalh was cautious when making reference to the subject by referring to it as "'the scantiness' of behaviouralism impact"(Delh, 1961:55-70). But, on the other hand, Heinz Eulau seems to be firm about the impact of behaviouralism on political science when he opined that: The behaviouralists' penetration of political science has had the effect of vitalizing and improving the older forms of writing and research. It has had a salutary influence on the quality of all political science. **(**Eulau, 1973:24- 25).

The fact that behaviouralism, since its emergence into the social science arena and more specifically, into the discipline of political science, as an approach to political analysis - instead of disappearing - has continued to reinforces its indelible impact on political science. This is now a fact that cannot be over emphasized. Its mere continuation and existence is an incentive to the pursuit of knowledge. We are therefore resolved to infer that behaviouralism or the behaviouralists approach is an antithesis of traditional political philosophy. Its emphasis on scientific methods and empiricism as opposed to traditional political philosophy is a plus the political science research. Whether the synthesis is about to emerge or has emerged in the form of post behaviouralism, as often observed by the critics of the approach, is indeed a different topic not covered by the scope of the present paper. However, this study notes that despite its impact on political science, behaviouralism has experienced a sort of erosion leading to a wide recognition and acceptability in terms of the criticisms levied against it so far. These criticism notwithstanding, the approach has survived to date due to the evolutionary pattern of human society and its accompanying complexities which necessitate a corresponding sophistication in the knowledge of intellectuals whose expertise are needed to meet the challenges of these complexities.

5. Conclusion

From the studies and activities of contemporary behaviouralists so far, it is widely accepted that theoretical analysis must almost always be the starting point for serious empirical enquiry. This is not to say that theories cannot be modified, enhanced or rejected on the basis of empirical observation. Rather, a theory acts as a vehicle for distancing the analyst from the potentially overwhelming details from what can be directly observed, so that abstract deductions can be made about the connections between different phenomena. In addition, theory for the behaviouralists not only generate testable hypothesis, they also provides guidelines and sign post as to the sort of evidence that should be gathered in the first place. In short, theory plays an important role in contemporary behavioral empirical analysis. Whatever observation a theory may engender, if it is to be considered a truly explanatory theory, it must generate falsifiable predictions that are not contradicted by the available empirical evidence. There is no reason why each theory should not be evaluated on its observational terms. But unless a theory can be evaluated – that is, tested empirically- on its own observational terms, behaviouralist are not prepared to grant it the status of explanatory theory in the first place. For contemporary behaviouralists, the main purpose of social scientific enquiry is to explain behaviour at individual and at aggregate levels. The central questions that behaviouralist therefore ask are: Why do individuals, institutional actors and nations states behave the way they do And what are the consequences of their actions? Embedded in the behaviouralist notion of explanation is the idea of causality. Although behaviouralist are aware that causality may be as much as a reflection of the way we think about the world as it is of 'reality', they nonetheless insist that, unless a theory makes some sort of causal statement, it cannot be deemed to explain anything. They also insist that, if an explanation is to be believed, it must make empirically falsifiable predictions that can be tested against observations. Itis thus very obvious why modern behaviouralist argue with considerable justifications, that nearly all social researchers who work with empirical materials in some way, subscribe broadly to this view. In this sense therefore, the legacy of behaviouralism among empirical researchers is enormous. In a sense, we are all – or should be – behaviouralists now.

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