

Original Paper

Open Texture, Stipulation and Explanation in the Social Sciences

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Received: November 9, 2022 Accepted: November 18, 2022 Online Published: November 25, 2022

doi:10.22158/sssr.v3n4p173

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sssr.v3n4p173>

Abstract

The philosophy of science today seems stuck between falsifiability (Popper) and meaning (Kuhn). Time to devote more to the philosophy of the social sciences, e.g. value loaded terms, stipulations, rationality and explanations.

Keywords

Open texture, stipulation, replication, inner and outer behaviour, rationality, explanation, means and ends

1. Introduction

The social sciences import a lot of words with *open texture*, meaning terms which are essentially contested. The only way out of semantic confusion is to employ the stipulative definition. Stipulation of key terms like “democracy” and “capitalism” paves the way to research into real life phenomena instead of argument over ambiguity. Stipulation can be done in two ways – connotation and denotation. The connotation approach to definition deals with necessary or sufficient properties. The denotation approach points at the real units that have these properties.

2. Real Definition

Brian Barry (1995) states that:

(J) Justice is impartiality.

What kind of sentence is (J)? It is hardly a definition of the word “justice”. There are many such definitions – see Kelsen (1957). Instead it must be viewed as an *explication* (Carnap 1947). Analysing a few well-known theories of justice, Barry came up with his idea of the essence of justice and offered the real definition (J).

Now, we face the question if justice as impartiality contains necessary and sufficient conditions and is not just another stipulation. Thus:

N-condition would be:

- (1) Justice in taxation requires that citizens are treated impartially;

T-condition:

- (2) When citizens are treated impartially, there is just taxation.

The difficulty is *eliptical* definition, namely impartiality in terms of what? Legal justice would require impartiality, but it is still an *opaque* definition. How about proportionality? Intention? Clemency?

To be specific, social justice may require partiality with regard to income and wealth, age and character, merit, etc.

3. Value Loaded Terms

It was Max Weber who first underlined the role of values in social research in his *Wissenschaftslehre* (1922, 2014). Although he knew that values or valuations affect the conduct of inquiry in several ways, Weber still stuck to the notions of objectivity and value neutrality. It was Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who argued for the impossibility of objectivity in social research in his large sociological studies (1958).

4. Inner and Outer Behaviour

The second feature that makes social inquiry special is the place of intention, which is lacking in most of the natural sciences. Social inquiry studies not just behaviour like events or objects in time and space but intentional behaviour, i.e., mind phenomena or consciousness (Searle, 1996).

The language of intentional behaviour or action is teleological in nature, i.e. describable in terms of ends and means:

“All serious reflection on the ultimate elements of meaningful human conduct is oriented primarily in terms of the categories ‘end’ and ‘means’.” (Weber, 1922).

The recognition that social sciences study a subjective dimension – ends, means and means-end chains – has had both ontological and methodical implications.

Firstly, the social sciences study both objective phenomena – outer behaviour – as well as inner behaviour or subjective phenomenon like beliefs and attitudes. Thus, we have the following 2x2 table:

Table 1. Subjectivity

	Ontology	
	Sub	Obj
Epistemic		
Sub	1	3
Obj	2	4

Note. e.g. 1=value, 2=belief, 3=faith, 4= natural science.

Subjectivity - 1 and 2 - 1 that behaviour. Epistemic subjectivity provides an important role for the researcher in valuating social systems.

5. Rationality

Social reality is made up of mind data, whereas ontological objectivity focus upon outer.

Theories of rationality behaviour abound in the social sciences, like economic man, rational voter or politician etc. The rational choice approach as well as the public choice framework explains action by means of a few assumptions about the logic of intentional behaviour. This micro model of individual choice behaviour transforms ends and means into preferences, utilities and probabilities of belief (Neumann, 1946).

The micro model of rationality is seriously questioned in pp and political science. At least in macro models the perspective is broadened to include cause and effect variables.

In economics and public administration the rationality framework is challenged by a concept of soft rational behaviour – bounded rationality. The champion of bounded rationality is Jim March, who has criticized rational choice for its extremely demanding assumptions from 1958 and onwards.

March developed two alternative maxims to full rationality as utility x probability maximization:

- (a) Satisfying: people in an organisation – public or private – do not orientate in terms of an objective function but follows standard operating procedures that guide them towards a satisfying result;
- (b) Appropriateness: people are not driven by goals searching for the means that make them realised. Instead they act in an institutional setting trying to deliver appropriate behaviour towards institutions.

Thus, March deviates much from Weber's emphasis on inner behaviour - ends and means – while focussing upon outer behaviour.

The relation between inner and outer behaviour is a most difficult problem in the social sciences. Goals drive people in search of outcomes, which may or may not match the ends

6. Ends and Means

Intentional behaviour has proved difficult to analyse both ontologically and epistemologically. Goals, ends and means make sense as mind objects, but what are they and how to study them?

Oxford English Dictionary has the following entry on “goal”: aim, something you hope to achieve. And the Cambridge dictionary gives the following key words: The object of a person's ambition or effort, aim or desired result.

Goal or aim is of fundamental importance in human life. Yet, it has not received its proper place in social theory.

Although historians speak of ends and means when accounting for individuals' walk of life, social scientists prefer to talk about incentives, preferences or needs, partly due to the dominance of

behaviorism like e.g. with Ryle or Quine.

A goal is a state of mind that orientates behaviour. It could be realistic or unrealistic, worldly or religious, attainable or unattainable, short term or long run. It could enter into means-end chains as when a goal is means to further ends.

Goals are only indirectly observable, except for introspection. Goals may be hidden or strategically played out. To attribute a goal to someone is an hypothesis that requires confirmation by outer behaviour.

Can goals explain behaviour? A person like Hitler is not understandable, if his cruel means and ends from his Vienna visit are not taken into account. Do Trump really believe in the fake election story? It certainly drives his performance. The relationship between inner and outer behaviour may be causal in nature.

7. Explanation

G. von Wright, well-known giant in philosophy, presented two basic modes of explanation: nomothetic and teleological. The former employs Hempel's (1965) well-known model - law like generalizing, while the latter points at motive and intention. This distinction between Galilean model and Aristotelian model is developed by means of von Wright's insights into deontic logic – the logic of norms or what one *OUGHT* to do. Can goals explain behaviour? Von Wright rejects the Hempel (1965) explanation model for the social sciences and history.

In the latter the aim is all important, “the thing to do”. Understanding the behaviour of humans one must take mind into account: the perception of the situation and the motive. Von Wright **argues that teleological or goal explanations are logical, and not causal in the empirical meaning of “causality” or probability. This is strange claim about human actions.**

Consider the following syllogism:

X INTENDS TO BRING ABOUT P

X CONSIDERS THAT HE CANNOT BRING ABOUT P UNLESS HE DOES HE DOES A

Therefore X sets himself to do A

Yet, Wright's explanation model is incorrect, as it does not explain the action A but the *intention* of P to do A. The relationship between the intention to do A and actually doing A is probabilistic ÷ not logical

8. Goal and Action

Hitler was told by *Wehrmacht* that only *Blitzkrieg* could defeat Soviet. He thus launched *Barbarossa* . When Moscow was almost in sight, he turned his troops around to capture 600 000 Russians at KIEV, making the war a matter of exhaustion. People do not always do “*the thing to do,*” as Weight argued. First inner behaviour - ends and means, then outer behaviour – conduct and outcome.

9. Conclusion

Philosophy of science today is too dominated by the methodology of the natural sciences. The social sciences and the humanities face different challenges that need special attention, especially the goal oriented behaviour: ends and means.

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