

The Problem of Other Minds: A Yoruba Hermeneutic Deconstruction of the Logical Behaviourist Approach

by

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Abstract

Using the hermeneutics of the Yoruba linguistic framework, the paper reconsiders the scepticism about other minds, especially from the logical behaviourist perspectives. As a theory, logical behaviourism equates other minds with the overt movements of other bodies. The paper advances arguments against logical behaviourism, particularly on the ground that it blurred our traditional concept of mind as something different from the body. The paper concludes by proposing a search for an appropriate methodological approach through which the logical behaviourist account could be improved to properly incorporate the role of the mind in the production of physical behaviour of the body.

Keywords: Other Minds, Logical Behaviourism, Yoruba, hermeneutics

Introduction

Our intention in this paper is not to set out a theory of other minds that will explain the theoretical flaws inherent in the existing theories. Rather, it is a demonstration of the inadequacy of one of the earliest theories of other minds, namely, logical behaviourism. Hence, the paper is essentially a critique. This critique is basically aimed at arousing the need for a search for a better theory of other minds that will take into consideration some of the identified shortcomings of the existing theories, especially as they are somewhat reducible to the behaviourist attitude. It should be noted that such exercise is not new, as several contemporary commentators have amply shown. However, the novelty of the present paper derives from the fact that it is the first time an objection to any of the theories of other minds would be attempted using an African language, especially Yoruba language.

The first section of the paper clarifies the concept of other minds, identifying why it constitutes a problem for a serious philosophical inquiry. Sections two and three respectively examine the logical behaviourist conception of the human mind and its proposed solution to the problem of other minds. In the fourth section, the paper attempts to show, via the hermeneutics of Yoruba linguistic media, the absurdity of the logical behaviourist approach to the problem of other minds.

The Concept of Other Minds

The problem of other minds arises from the difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility of ascertaining whether other moving bodies are conscious beings, and if they are, the problem of how to account for their state of consciousness. It is the doubtful tendency or temptation to regard other putative human beings as mindless, like self-moving automata, whose existence cannot be traced beyond the physical, thus making us eternally helpless as regards having access to the contents of their minds. This tendency results in a sort of scepticism about the existence of other minds. Properly put, therefore, the problem of other minds is the question of how the scepticism about other minds is to be combated and overcome.

One such area where ignorance threatens is the area of other minds (Dancy, 1985). The ignorance is confounded by the fact of its ubiquity in that it is an epistemic vacuum felt by all (exception is unthinkable) but to which only philosophers seem to have a considerable commitment. Each of us seems to know through a direct means, the nature of his/her own mind (sensory and other mental states); but neither can this be justifiably said of the mental states of others nor do we actually know whether other people have minds to produce the mental states which are not ours. Thus understood, “the problem of other minds is usually taken to be a question about the evidential criteria for other persons’ ascription of mental states and attributes” (Dreske, 1995).

As observed by John W. Cook (1994), “the rise of the problem of other minds is owing to the plausibility of dualism, the idea that a person is comprised of mind and body.” It is argued that given the asymmetry between our own case and that of others, which gives birth to the traditional understanding of the problem, it has been almost commonplace to believe that only a traditional dualist view of the mind produces a difficult problem of other minds (Hyslop, 2005). A dualist is obliged to think that when we speak of thoughts and feelings of others, we are making a leap, inferential or otherwise, from something we perceive (the body) to something we do not (i.e., the other person’s thoughts and feelings). One may ask, what ground, if any, can one give for this leap? Is the causal connection between the observable bodily signs and inner state of mind that of logical necessity such that when one occurs, the other necessarily follows?

Certain difficulties attend answering this question in the affirmative, at least from a traditional dualist standpoint. These difficulties emanate mainly from the dualist postulation of the privacy that he regards as characterizing mental affairs.⁵ Since body is essentially extended (by which it is meant that it occupies space), then it is susceptible to public observation. Mind, on the other hand, is non-space occupying. It follows, therefore, that we can only observe a man's body and its movements, but not what goes on in his mind; that is exclusively private to him. As metaphorically expressed by Akinyemi Onigbinde (2000), his overt behaviour is carried out on stage for all to see; his thoughts, feelings, sensation, and so on, occur 'behind the scene.' Our lack of certainty regarding the existence of this 'behind the scene' entity in others is what the problem of other minds consists in.

The Logical Behaviourist Conception of Human Mind

The logical behaviourist theory conceives the mind as behaviour (Omoregbe, 2001). What we ordinarily refer to as mental phenomena are really behaviours, or tendencies to behave (Braddon-Mitchell, 2005). Attributing a mental state (say thirst) to an organism is the same as saying that the organism is disposed to behave in a particular way (for example, to drink if there is water available). In Lycan's (2006) opinion, the central tenet of logical behaviourism, otherwise known as analytical behaviourism, "consists in the claim that mental ascription simply means things about behavioural responses to environmental impingements."

Viewed this way, the logical behaviourist has no difficulty explaining certain mental categories classified as sensations and feelings. The most common example of this is pain. For instance, to say of someone that s/he is in pain, in the logical behaviourist account, is to have him/her behave in a certain way, which characterizes a typical way of expressing pain. Thus, according to Lycan (2006: 178),

'Edmund is in pain' means, not anything about Edmund's putative ghostly ego, or even about any episode taking place within Edmund, but that either Edmund is actually behaving in a wincing and groaning way or he is disposed to behave (in that he would so behave were something not keeping him from doing so).

The above style of arguing has its theoretical antecedent in Gilbert Ryle's (1949) explication of dispositional concept. Ryle (1949) is interested in repudiating the dualist conception of mind as a hidden reality underlying the appearance of bodily behaviour. This, according to him, is a mistake arising mainly from misuse of language. Ryle (1949) sees the problem of mind, as encountered by the dualist, as purely linguistic problem, which, if it must be resolved, must be through linguistic analysis. Conceiving logical behaviourism as a piece of conceptual analysis, Ryle (1949) suggests the solubility of sugar and brittleness of glass as analogous to behavioural dispositions.

To say of sugar that it is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, or would have dissolved if immersed in water. The same goes for brittleness of glass: “that if ever is, or ever have been struck or stained, it would fly, or have flown, into fragment” (Ryle, 1949). In other words, to describe something as this or that, is to expect certain behaviour from it under certain circumstance, as in when we expect something solid to be resistant to touch, or the ground to be wet when it rains.

But while the sensation of pain and other putatively simple behavioural dispositions can be explicated in the foregoing manner, there seems to exist certain kind of difficulty associated with explaining dispositions relating to propositional attitudes within the logical behaviourist theory. This later group includes such mental concepts as thought, intension, belief, desire, and want, all of which present a special kind of difficulty for being concepts ordinarily used to describe internal states of human organisms. The question is asked, for instance, as to what behavioural disposition(s) to watch out for when someone believes that p, or desires q. In particular, what would we expect to observe or have observed if we say of someone that he thinks that p, or wants that q? This question is especially relevant because:

Normally when someone or something enters a state, we expect to observe some property, not observed beforehand, the presence of which distinguishes something which is in the state from something which is not. When a man catches a disease, we observe symptoms associated with that state – there is thus an observable difference between those who are and those who are not diseased. (Taylor, 1979: 68-69).

Analogously therefore, argued Taylor (1979), “when we say that A thinks that p, we imply that A has said that p; but we imply that the occurrence of no event other than sayings, and no present differences other than the fact that something has now been said.” Thus understood, thinking that p is a logical construction from saying. This seems to be in agreement with the biblical saying that “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12: 23). Given this, however, what readily comes to mind is the manifest difference between thinking and saying. It is arguable, contrary to the submission of Taylor, that thinking and saying do not connote the same thing because saying, unlike thinking, involves the use of spoken language. Taylor himself is aware of this line of objection when he says that neither utterances nor sayings are in general necessary and sufficient conditions of thinking that p. He, however, is of the view that they provide conditions which are necessary and which, in the absence of various excuses, or excluding conditions, are held to be adequate for saying of someone that he thinks that p (Taylor, 1979).

The possibilities of deceit and/or change of mind seem to present a potent objection to Taylor's thesis. For instance, it is possible for one to have something in mind and say another, or to have a change of thoughts. According to Taylor (1979), these present no difficulty whatsoever to the equation of thought/want to saying. Two reasons are offered for this:

- (a) If a person were not taken to be authority as to his own thoughts, or wants, many of the social relationships and social activities we engage in could not continue; so a person must in fact possess this authority.
- (b) The existence of the criterion of what a man thought or wanted, which was logically independent of what he said, would be incompatible with the existence of these types of authority; so there can be no such criterion and saying that p must be a necessary condition of thinking that p (Taylor, 1979: 71).

The first condition (above) is met because each organism has an exclusive access to its own psychological states, which makes it a first-person authority on matters about them. As remarked by Graham (1996), "experience is the necessary and best educator." To strip a man off this authority is to strip him of his humanity. Taylor (1979) describes the situation as rather unfortunate and pathetic, for

How, in such situation, could I engage in any discussion, expecting others to take account of what I said, if what I thought was held to be unrelated to what I said? I could not even set out to express, or reveal, my thought since I should very likely be told that I didn't know what they were. Indeed I should have no reason to suppose that what I said did express my thought (72).

Given the above, it seems logically impossible to discredit what a man says as not corresponding to what he thinks. While this is correct, one might still conceive the possibility of times when one deliberately decides to cheat the audience by thinking something and saying another. For instance, there are times we tell lies to save our own ass. Consider the plight of a helpless Christian who, in the throes of Maiduguri religious upheaval, is confronted by some dangerous looking Boko Haram fellows, and to whom a question is posed: "Muslim or Christian?" Such temptations to lie are fact of our everyday life.

The Logical Behaviourist Approach to the Problem of Other Minds

Having considered mind as what people say and do, the logical behaviourist has no difficulty 'solving' the problem of other minds. The argument is that, if mind is public behavioural disposition, then other minds are but behavioural dispositions observed in others. Graham (1996) states this solution in a simple manner. He writes:

We find out about the minds of others only through observing what they say and do; through observing their public behaviour. Being restricted to public behaviour, however, is not a liability. It is an asset since minds just are what people say and do. Pain is moaning. Happiness is smiling. If we could subtract behaviour from mind, we would have nothing left over. If you observe what others say and do, since saying and doing is mind, you are amply warranted in believing that other persons are minded.

Thus conceived, the problem of other minds is reduced to a pseudo-problem in the logical behaviourist programme. The problem of other minds, on this account, is a wrong kind of problem, generated by the alleged privacy of the mind. It only takes the empirical approach – that is, the approach of seeing the mind as what it really is, namely, physical movement of the body – to unravel the mistake that goes into the making of the problem. Certain examples will suffice to help in this connection.

Suppose I want to know if the driver of the car travelling ahead of me is a minded human figure. Do I literally get into his head and find out? Even if I do, does the presence of the material brain tell me anything about his mindedness, or about the move he is to make next? Suppose the driver sees a pothole ahead, and does not intend to run into it. Suppose further that a huge van is travelling ahead and there is need for him to overtake it, or that he has gotten to his destination and needs to pull to a halt. All these present an imaginary case of the mind at work. Now, according to a standard logical behaviourist agenda, the observable behavioural disposition of the car is all there is to the mind of its driver.

Consider, for instance, when the driver sees a pothole ahead and does not intend to run into it. He slows down the car by stepping on the brake-pedal, the coming alive of its brake-light warning me, or the driver in whose car/bus I am travelling of the need to take precautionary measure to ward off front-to-back collision. Consider the action of the driver when a huge van ahead prevents him from travelling at a desired speed rate: he turns on his car indicator on the side where overtaking is possible and safe, announcing to vehicles behind him that he has no time to waste; and so forth. Now, on the account of the logical behaviourist, I am able to 'know' this because of my ability to read and understand the outward behaviour of the car, which literally represents the inner working mind of its driver.

The above analysis can be extended to our understanding of mental states. How do we come to have the knowledge that certain behavioural dispositions represent certain mental states? What is it in moaning that announces the presence of pain, or in a dull physiognomic expression that betrays boredom? Stuart Hampshire's (1960) article, "Feeling and Expression" is an attempt to answer this kind of question. This he clearly announced at the beginning of the said essay, where he remarks

I shall argue that in the particular case of feeling, the inner life of the mind is to be understood as a development of something more primitive in every man's behaviour of which it is the residue and shadow (1).

In Hampshire's (1960) opinion, therefore, human beings are constructed to behave in a certain identifiable way when undergoing certain experience. This identifiable way, he refers to as "natural expression of feelings" (Hampshire, 1960). The question of how we come to have the knowledge of this connection (i.e., between mental and physical) does not arise because it is a thing we have come to acquire through experience from childhood, when we are still unable to discriminate between the fake and the original behaviours, something Hampshire (1960) likens to imitative play or fiction.

As social animals, human beings are from beginning recognized as potential language users and as observers of social conventions, which they later learn to formulate. Taking a broad notion of language, Hampshire could be understood as including within his framework of analysis both spoken and unspoken languages; and just as we learn spoken language from childhood, so do we bodily language. Thus, we have no difficulty identifying what bodily behaviour accompanies a certain feeling just as we have no controversy concerning the meaning of a given expression or word within our linguistic framework. Consequently, when we observe this natural expression in others, we are amply warranted in describing the situation as that of so and so.

Beyond feelings and sensations, the logical behaviourist account of other minds must include the expression of belief and other propositional attitudes. One could ask what bodily behaviour accompanies the belief that it will rain soon. Or how do we know via bodily media the proposition that "Joseph believes that his dead father is not really dead?" Consider the first question. What behavioural disposition(s) counts for the belief that it would rain? Is it staying indoors? Taking an umbrella along or removing my washed cloth from the line outside? Consider also the belief that my dead father is not really dead. What state of my body parallels this belief? Could it be pouring libation on his grave, or talking to his presumably present spirit during turbulent time? An attempt to answer these questions may present a real difficulty for the logical behaviourist; and yet they are questions he must answer, satisfactorily, if his theory is to count as a better alternative to his competing rivals.

The Yoruba Hermeneutic Deconstruction of Logical Behaviourism

Hermeneutics is both a theoretical methodology and philosophy of a sort. Etymologically speaking, hermeneutics, a Latinized version of the Greek *hermeneutice* (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2009) means “expression”, “explanation”, “translation” or “interpretation” (Inwood, 1998). As a method in African philosophy, hermeneutic narrative helps to build a bridge that connects the contemporary African philosophers to their rich philosophical ancient past. It is hinged on the assumption that, properly collected and interpreted, African oral materials are capable of establishing a firm foundation for the African philosophy, distinct from any other in the world by its grounded-ness in African traditional beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices are often couched in linguistic and non-linguistic forms. African oral materials used for hermeneutic analysis include proverbs, aphorisms, adages, folklore, songs, prayers and *ifa* poems, etc. These, according to R. B. Bell (1989), “are parts and parcels of the memoir that philosophy must write: they are part of the conversation; both oral and written that Africans must keep going in a creative fashion.” These oral materials shall constitute our tool of analysis in the examination of the Yoruba traditional attitude to the logical behaviourist theory of other minds in this section.

The Yoruba¹ linguistic framework offers some interesting grounds against the logical behaviourist thesis that “what one directly observes is all there is.” The Yoruba language, like many other African languages, beside its traditional communicative purpose, is a medium for preserving traditional ideas, beliefs, and modes of thoughts in general in a way that they can be easily reached and invoked when occasions arise for them. Suffice to argue that the Yoruba linguistic framework is most illustrative of the Yoruba world-view about the existence or non-existence of other minds. As for the appropriateness of the Yoruba linguistic media as a proper tool of analysis of other minds, Akinnawonu (2012), in a recent study, has amply shown both the epistemological and ethical bases and significance of African cultural expressions from the perspectives of oral tradition. One is bound to conclude, as he seems to, that a critical hermeneutic interpretation of some of the Yoruba sayings leads to depth of knowledge concerning various areas of human enquiry.

Contained within the Yoruba metaphysical semantics is the outright scepticism of other minds understood in the logical behaviourist sense. This scepticism is a local variety because it is about the contents of other minds, and not that minds themselves do not exist. In agreement with Descartes, the Yoruba believe that each person is familiar with his/her own mind the way he/she is not with other persons’. According to Ogungbemi (2007), “the phrase ‘I think therefore I am’ of Descartes is compatible with the Yoruba subjective understanding of individuality.” This does not mean that the Yoruba are dualists in the same sense in which Descartes is a dualist. For whereas Descartes identifies two elements that make up a person the Yoruba’s analysis of human person shows him as a conglomerate of the body (*ara*), the life force/spirit (*emi*) and *ori* (metaphysical head). Scholars have described this as a *tripartite* conception of the human person (Makinde, 1984).

It should be remarked that the Yoruba language has no linguistic equivalent for the English word 'mind' (Balogun, 2009). This might suggest to a foreign reader/observer the seeming conclusion that it (the Yoruba language) lacks psychological concepts inasmuch as they are realized in the Western scientific linguistic culture through the operation of the mind. This, however, will be an erroneous way to conclude, for, in the Yoruba traditional thought, the mental roles attributed to the mind in Western philosophical literatures, are realized through a mixture of physical organs called *ara* and immaterial parts, especially *emi*. The physical organs include *ori/opolo* (head/brain), *okan/aya* (heart/chest) and *ifun* (intestine). For instance, the mental events of thought, intelligence and sanity are attributed to *ori/opolo*, (as in *olori pipe/ olopolo pipe* for intelligent person, etc); while *okan/aya* – accurately translated by Bolaji Idowu (1962) as “the heart” – is the seat of emotion and psychic energy (Balogun, 2009). According to Balogun (2009), another part of *ara* which is also capable of performing some mental activity and psychic functions is the intestine (*ifun*). To the Yoruba, intestine is responsible for one’s strength. A person that cannot remember things easily, someone who has no initiative and who is not resourceful is described as *oni ifun kan*, “person with one intestine”. The implication of the foregoing is that in the Yoruba linguistic framework, mind can be so many things including *okan, ori, opolo, aya, ikun and ifun, etc.*

A more frequently used term to denote mind in the Yoruba language is *inu*, which literally translates “the inner part”. Perhaps, this term is particularly appealing to the Yoruba because it helps to paint a picture of “the unknown” or “the unknowable”. As an evidence, the Yoruba will say *inu eda jin* (the life of man is deep on the inside). This depth is suggestive of our ignorance of the contents of other minds. For instance, when an event takes place that requires one to stand in for another, an hesitation to do this may excite such statement as *inu mi ni mo mo, mi o mo inu on’inu* (I only know my mind; I don’t know that of another). This excludes the possibility of one not knowing the content of one’s mind. For an emphasis, the Yoruba will say in such occasion that *okunkun ko ni kun, k’oninu ma mo’nu* (however dark it is, the content of a man’s mind will always be clear/known to him). This further confirms the impossibility of the conscious subject not knowing what is going on in his/her mind. It reiterates the infallibilist thesis about psychological states. According to Andre Gallois (1996: 21), a claim to psychological state is infallible if:

It is not possible for me to believe that I am in a given psychological state without being in that state. For instance, my belief that I am suffering from a toothache is infallible if and only if it is not possible for me to believe that I am suffering from a toothache unless I am suffering from one.

The asymmetry between my own mental states and those of others can be explained, in part, within the Yoruba metaphysical ontology of the human person. As earlier noted, a person, in the Yoruba traditional worldview, is a composite of *ara* (body), *emi* (spirit) and *ori-inu*, or simply *ori* (metaphysical head) (Makinde, 1984; Gbadegesin, 1996; Ogungbemi, 2007).

Out of these three elements only *ara* (body) is physical. The Yoruba conception of person is therefore primarily spiritualistic. Hence, in observing others, what I am directly confronted with are their bodies and never their spirits or their metaphysical heads.

Thus, the Yoruba believe that the body, being physical, can be manipulated by its owner to induce false beliefs in others. Put differently, since the body is the only physically accessible part of man, it becomes a tool, so to say, in the hand of its owner, and can be employed to achieve any desired end. This is evident in the saying: *iwofa l'enu, ohun ti o ba wu elenu lo le fi enu re so* (The mouth is an *eru* (slave) that can be employed as its owner pleases). The mouth here, being essentially physical, represents the body, capable of being used to achieve anything as so desired by its owner. The public nature of the body and the imperceptible nature of the human mind are well represented in the sayings such as *ara la'mo, a o mo'nu* (we only know the body; we do not know the mind); *Awo fele bo'nu, ko je ki a r'ikun ase'bi* (a near-transparent skin covers the nakedness of the wicked mind); *Oju l'ari, ore ko de'nu* (we only see facial expression, there is hardly any sincerity in friendship); *On'ikun lo m'oka* (only the wicked mind knows its own wickedness); etc. These adages are used by the Yoruba to stress the privacy of the mind and its contents.

The Yoruba also deny any logical (necessary) correlation between what is said and what is thought. Contrary to Taylor's position that thinking is logically equivalent to saying, the Yoruba is aware of cases where what is said does not match up with what is thought. In this respect, the Yoruba will not hesitate to say that *enu opuro kii s'eje*. To say this is to say that no difference exists between the one saying the truth concerning his psychological states and the one lying about them. Whatever the case is, however, the Yoruba vest the epistemic authority either in the hand of God (one of the attributes of God is *ar'inu r'ode; olumoran okan* (He that sees both the body and the mind; the knower of the contents of a man's heart)) or in the hand of the owner of the mind (*eni meji kii padanu iro; ti eni ti a n'paro fun ko bamo, eni ti o nparo fun ni mo* (Two cannot be deceived at a time; if the person being deceived does not know, the person deceiving knows)).

The foregoing can be put in a more practical context. In existential situation, there are times when, deep down in one's mind, one is not happy with another person, but is constrained by situation to show outward friendliness to him/her. In such event, one is said to *f'eje s'inu tu'to funfun s'ita* (literally meaning to hide blood inside and spit out white saliva). The bible copies this when it warns: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15) and "this people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." The Yoruba believe that only God could deliver one from such hidden conspiracy, hence they pray *Olorun gba wa l'owo af'oju f'eni ma f'okan f'eni*" (meaning: Lord, deliver us from those who love us with sight and not with mind).

In the Yoruba social thinking, there are three categories of enemies: *a mo'ni se'ni* (close enemies); *af'aimoni s'eni* (distant enemies) and *a s'eni ba'ni d'aro* (friendly or sympathetic enemies). The Yoruba agree that the worst of these categories is the third one. This is perhaps not only because this category is constituted by close relatives, friends and other acquaintances, whom ordinarily could not have been thought to be involved in evil acts against the person of whom they are hidden enemies, but because having perpetrated evils, they still sympathize with their victims. The Yoruba call them *ota bi ore* (enemies in form of friends). This is why when one finds out, via *Ifa* divination or any other spiritual medium, who the real enemy is, the Yoruba will say *imu n'ika; ko je ka gb'oorun as'ebi* (the nose is wicked; it does not allow for the smelling of the evil doer).

The foregoing analysis can be extended to the specific case of anger. In Stuart Hampshire's (1960) opinion, anger is a tendency or disposition to do certain things characteristic of anger-behaviour. As he writes, "If I am angry, I am inclined, or disposed, or have a tendency, to attack or to behave aggressively" (Hampshire, 1960). This seems to suggest that anger is a publicly displayed behaviour of the body. Such conception of anger is, however, out of tune with the Yoruba understanding of anger, which is rather an internal thing. As the saying goes, *I'biju kan o si, I'binu lo wa* (anger is an internal phenomenon, not an external one). To be angry therefore is to be in a particular psychological state, known only to the one having the state. Hence, rather than being liable to shout, and so on, some angry person may just decide not to do anything at the moment since *Oruko ta o so omo eni, inu eni ni'gbe* (the name to be given to a newly born baby is always hidden in the mind of its father).

On the level of sensation, the Yoruba believe that no description, however accurate, could take the place of the 'raw feel of experience'. In the Yoruba thought system, the 'raw feel' which is also known under various names such as 'phenomenal consciousness', '*qualia*', 'what it feels like to be' or in general 'subjective quality' (Fasiku and Oyelakin, 2011) is an experience that cannot be shared amongst persons. Being subjective, the felt quality of experience is personal, and not amenable to public scrutiny or analysis. This is evident in the saying that *eni wo bata lo mo ibi ti o ti n'ta oun l'ese* (it is he whose feet are trapped in shoes that knows where they pinch him). This is a way of saying "you do not know my pains, nor I yours".

The above has generated a kind of problem for consciousness analysts. This problem – classified as the hard problem of consciousness by David Chalmers (1996), that is, the problem of explaining the phenomenal qualities, which is also the problem of explaining consciousness – is not peculiar to the Yoruba alone. It is called a hard problem notably because it is a kind that cannot be easily solved by scientific (bio-chemical) analysis of the structure of the human brain, or by other efforts inspired by any member of the academic conglomerate known under the aegis of cognitive sciences. Hence, Chalmers (1996: 15) writes,

Consciousness is the biggest mystery. It may be the last outstanding obstacle to our quest for a scientific understanding of the universe... We have good reason to believe that consciousness arises from physical systems such as brains, but we have little idea how it arises or why it exists at all. ... We do not just lack a detailed theory; we are entirely in the dark about how consciousness fits into the natural order.

The foregoing readily shows that the Yoruba recognize the fact that the individual perceiver has some authority over the content of his/her perception. This probably explains the epistemological basis of their saying that *oju ol'oju ko jo oju eni* (another person's eyes cannot be close substitutes for one's own eyes). For instance, when a Yoruba man is asked to give an account of a past event in which the 'asker' did not take part, he would most readily decline, saying *Iroyin ko to af'oju ba* meaning, "you don't know what it feel like being there".

On a general note, such scepticism as regards the content of other minds has led to an attitudinal trait of mutual distrust among the Yoruba. To them, anybody can be one's enemy, except oneself. The evidence for this can be found in the saying, *opo alangba lo da'kun de'le, sugbon a ko mo eyi t'inu run*, literally meaning: many lizards go on their bellies, we do not know which one suffers from bellyache. At least two interpretations can be read out of this saying. One, it is used to echo the fact that physical semblance does not imply mental semblance. Two, it shows that one cannot conclude who the real friend/enemy is by the mere look on their face. In consequence of this, the Yoruba will say *eni a fe lamo, a ko mo'ni to fe'ni* (we only know those that we love, and not those that love us). Given this uncertainty, one is admonished to keep whatever one knows to oneself. Hence the Yoruba will say *ti o ba l'ogbon, jowo fi s'ikun ara re* (if you have knowledge, please keep it to yourself).

This mutual distrust plays a significant role in the psychological make-up of an average Yoruba person. For instance, it serves as a kind of mental consolatory relief for disappointments coming from an unexpected quarter, such as from a close friend or family member... *Eni ore da ma fi se ibinu, eni a-bi-ni-bi gan n'dani* (he that got betrayed by friends should not be discouraged as people born of the same parents do betray themselves). In addition to this, the Yoruba have carved this mutual distrust into a potent political weapon used especially during electioneering times. This has been demonstrated in one of their most popular political songs/jingles: *Bo r'owo mi o r'inu mi, demo ni mowa* (if you see my hand you cannot see my mind). Such song as this helps to confirm the Yoruba belief that the best way to select an ideal leader is to grant the voters a limitless autonomy to choose based on their rational conviction, and that only through secret ballot system can this be achieved.

Conclusion

Given the details of the analyses in this paper, it is argued and submitted that the being of man can hardly be known in a direct fashion, as logical behaviourism seems to have presented it. This is because, beside the possession of the body, which he shares with the objective world, man also possesses the mind, which stands him out from the rest of other things in the material universe. With mind, certain terms are predicated of man, which have no corresponding signification within other contexts, except when used metaphorically. Any theory, which seeks a wholesome knowledge of man, must, therefore, take into cognizance these attributes in terms of their mental origin. Logical behaviourism fails to meet up with this requirement as it is ideologically glued to the behavioural effects, ignoring their originating mental causes.

It thus appears that the logical behaviourist quest to enlist the study of mind among the sciences proper is a problematic one. Such move has the potential challenge of presenting a pseudo-picture of the *being* of man as exhaustively explicable in physicalistic terms. The attendant difficulty to this approach is that it erroneously equates human reality with that of less complex, lower organisms, which are controlled by brute instinct rather than the high-level complexity that characterizes the mysterious terrain of human behaviour. This, among other things, blurs the significant disparity between man and other forms of existence. The possession of mind by the former helps to explain this difference; and unlike body, which he shares with other animals, man's mind is an extra-scientific fact. It is perhaps due to this that it constantly defiles all scientific cogitations.

Although the Yoruba recognize the ignorance we encounter knowing the contents of other minds, as had been linguistically demonstrated above, they seem helpless, like other peoples, as to the way out of this epistemological bottleneck. The best they seem able to offer is a conjecture, thus they would say *oro to ba wa ninu oloti ni otin n'pa mo*, meaning "it is what is in the mind of a drunkard that he utters during drunkenness." It should be remarked that this difficulty is not peculiar to the Yoruba people of Nigeria alone; it is a universal problem, cutting across all cultures of the world. It is indeed in this that the universal consciousness of the mysterious nature of human beings consists.

The point needs to be made, at this juncture, that outside philosophical theorizations, we are all dualists. This is in the sense in which we all know that there exist certain experiences in us that cannot be exhaustively explained by reference to our bodies alone. Being a commonsense belief, it does not really exclude the materialists or physicalists who seek to account for human reality purely on the physical plane. Hence, the problem of other minds arises for all human beings, irrespective of our race, philosophical orientation, or religious inclination. We all encounter solipsism in its practical form, though some may, and in fact, do shy away from it during philosophical business. Nevertheless, however hard we try to run away from it, the problem of other minds poses a real philosophical problem, which even the most critical denial of the ontological status of the mind cannot take away from us.

Radical materialism is therefore a position that can hardly be sustained in the face of the complexity that characterizes the human reality. Admittedly, materialism has opened up the world to closer and more successful examinations. It no doubt has some merits. As maintained by Karl Popper and John Eccles (1977), “what speaks in favour of radical materialism or radical physicalism is, of course, that it offers us a simple vision of a simple universe, and this looks attractive just because, in science, we search for simple theories.” Its appealing nature to contemporary minds notwithstanding, materialism has failed to articulate clearly the difference between human beings and other constituents of reality. Sir Herbert Louis (1964: 237) argues,

The materialists appear to ignore the obvious lesson of daily experience. We see, every moment, events which cannot be accounted for by derivations, however subtle, from physical or chemical processes. Watch a chess-player deliberating for a quarter of an hour whether to move his queen here or a pawn there. At last he stretches his hand and does the one or the other; or he may do neither; using his vocal organs, he may say, “I resign this game.” The physiologist may reveal the nervous and muscular mechanism which operates the hand or the tongue, but not the process which has decided the player’s action. Or consider a novelist making up a story, a musician writing a symphony, a scientist engaged in a mathematical calculation; or indeed, something much simpler, a bird building its nest, and choosing the right materials for each stage, or a cat waiting for a pause in the traffic before crossing the street. All these, and all such, are engaged in some process that is different in kind from electrical attractions and repulsions, or from the processes that unite particles into molecules, molecules into objects, and move them about relatively to one another.

The point of the above long quote is to show the limits of materialism as regards explaining human behaviours, which, ordinarily speaking, seem to transcend what is observed on the physical plane. It means therefore that reducing the human person to its physical manifestation, as does the logical behaviourist, does not seem to offer the best way out of the problem of other minds. This is partly because ignoring the problem does not mean its non-existence. It only suspends it theoretically until we encounter it practically. When this happens, it suddenly reminds us of the duality between theory and practice, and the unfortunate fact that theoretical solution does not necessarily entail practical solution.

Endnote

¹ The Yoruba people of Nigeria occupy the South-western part of the country. They cover such states as Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and parts of Kogi, Kwara and Edo States. For an in-depth analysis of the people of the Yoruba, see Kola Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: a Philosophical Account*, (Birmingham: Iroko Academic Publishers, 2006); see also Hakeem Haruna and Kehinde Faluyi, “The Early Kingdoms and Communities in the Forest Belt of West Africa Before 1800” in Sophie Oluwole (ed.) *The Essentials of African Studies*, vol.1, (Lagos: General African Studies Programme, University of Lagos, 1997), 89-91.

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