

# Teleology in Human Life

Jan-Erik Lane

University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

Around 1900 German philosophy of science had a zenith with different schools. One topic that invited debate and publishing concerned the separation between the natural sciences and the humanities with the social sciences. Was this distinction about methodology or subject matter? Meaning was underlined in the analysis of human affairs.

*Keywords:* *Sinn* or meaning, subjectivity, objectivity, nomothetic, ideographic, Weber's meta science

## Introduction

The German scholars interested in philosophy of human sciences and the natural sciences speculated about how to make this distinction. On the hand, they suggested a methodology separation between nomothetic and ideographic sciences—a questionable distinction. On the other, they argued that Reality was not the same. The humanities and social sciences included besides physical behaviour also meaning, which they called *Sinn*. What is meaning in this context? Let us turn to Max Weber.

## Weber and Meta Science

Interested in philosophy of science, Weber's *Collected Papers in the Philosophy of Science* is a book published after his death in 1920, making him one of the most influential philosophers of science besides Popper, Hempel, and Kuhn.

Weber identified the basic micro unit in social science analysis as intentional behaviour. The emphasis for Weber was upon intention—*Sinn* or meaning—the inner side of behaviour: thought, belief, will, etc. When outer behaviour was directed by complex *Sinn*, there was “*Sinnzusammenhang*”.

The humanities and social sciences understand outer behaviour by advancing intention or motive. Weber called it “*deutend verstehen*”. There is nothing similar in the natural sciences after the naturalistic revolution from Newton to Darwin.

## Meaning

This emphasis on the basic subjective nature of human activity opens up for the analysis of ideas, plans, hopes, expectations, etc. Since the relationship between inner and outer behaviour is many-one, finding the correct intention requires Popper's conjectures.

Intention or reason is simple or complicated, or when I walk the street a la J. Searle in order to buy ice cream or when I travel to Dubai a la Mossad to hunt terrorists. Action = intention + behaviour, stated Weber as well as Anscombe (1957) and Searle (2004).

A teleological perspective focuses on the goals of actors as individuals or as participants in organisational

settings. For instance, to understand Alexander the great goals or ends like beliefs and thoughts are highly relevant, perhaps means-end chains.

### **Intention Is What?**

If the world only consists of words and objects (Quine, 1960), where to place objectives or beliefs? The philosophy of mind has no definite reply (Jacob, 2019). Consider the importance of intention as goals and means as well means-end chains:

Example 1: On midsummer 1941, lots of people and objects started to move on the Ostfront into the USSR. What was the idea or meaning? The war had been planned for one year, but what were the basic end and means? Amongst the German generals there were different goal conceptions, but they all adhered to *Blitzkrieg* as means. Yet, in August the supreme commander declared Minsk and Kiev (*cauldrons*) to be the priority, not Moscow. Hitler's decision changed *Barbarossa* into attrition war, with one likely ending. Capturing more than half a million Soviet soldiers in three months, Hitler declared victory.

Goals drive behaviour and means may be just mistake. Where are they located: in brain synapses (Searle) or “not in the head” (Putnam, 1975).

Actually, the prominent generals favoured Moscow—Guderian was a few days away. Rommel had been sent to fight Mussolini's war in northern Africa as young Italians did not die for the Duce. Hitler also took over Italy's goals in the Balkans. Why?

### **Teleology**

Weber declared that the means-end framework is suitable for the understanding of the action's inner aspect. This is weak rationality with few restrictions on how means and ends are related. Is intention merely *teleological* relation, i.e. beliefs? Or perhaps we also have causality with true beliefs about means and end?

Example 2: Why e.g. did Gustavus Adolfus intervene in the 30 years war? The motives and plans? Can sayings or written documents be trusted? His innermost intention: Lutheran, warmonger, European power politics or money chaser—French support, custom duties, trade in arms, etc.?

Example 3: Napoleon stated that he marched on Moscow to force Russia to make peace. This is mere Teleology, because causality is missing. It was a “meaningless” effort or project.

### **Subjective Meaning**

Objective meaning is for religion to speculate about, whereas subjective meaning is for the human sciences to study. Searle and Putnam live in a so-called external world. Weber did not advocate Cartesianism or phenomenology, though underlining subjective meaning in action and social relations.

Means-end is the starting point for individual action as well as for organisations like *Wehrmacht*. None other than Paulus warned already in fall 1940 that Germany did not have enough resources, even for Blitzkrieg in the East. False means-end beliefs spell often disaster, as Paulus experienced himself at Stalingrad. There is a large literature on why Germany lost. One hypothesis claims that Hitler's mind was too focused on his party ideas. But the simple answer is military incompetence.

### **How Large Is Subjective Meaning?**

Intention is mind phenomenon. So what is the mind? It is all mental. So what is mental? The classic

3-division may be employed:

- Cognition,
- Volition,
- Emotion.

Yet, intention draws upon all three. Subjective meaning occurs in society says Putnam and Kripke about *intension*. Yet, intention is personal. The Sinn behind all the 1941 behaviours and objects in *Barbarossa* vary from soldiers to intention generals to the supreme commander.

Searle writing key books and articles on consciousness stated that it is “subjective ontology”. How about others’ minds: objective ontology or subjective reality? Now Searle talks about One Reality.

Subjective meaning occurs in all humanities and social sciences as well as economics. It implies consciousness but it is more. When intention is mentioned or motive or Sinnzusammenhänge, then intentional objects are underlined. Do they exist? If so where: goals or figments of the imagination? Hitler intended to subjugate the Slaves, but it never became Reality. Certainly, Himmler shared this intention—same brain functions?

### **Intentional Objects**

Intentional “objects” are often referred to such goals as defeat of USSR with the Wehrmacht—that was a goal but really an object like things? Intentional objects are spoken of in phenomenology, although it is not always a matter of goals or means and ends. It is important to make a clear distinction between reality and belief in the concept of intentional objects.

The subjective aspects of action did not pose a hindrance to causality for Weber. It was not the mind-body problem that interested Weber, but cause and effect in social life. He argued incessantly that beliefs and goals mattered, although as a stark realist he underlined power and material benefits. Thus, he was to penetrate into the cores of religious beliefs in civilizations, explaining the emergence of modern capitalism with the Reformation, especially Calvinism, leading to an endless scholarly debate about *Sinn*, *causation*, and *modernity or rationality*.

Weber argued 1904 that the parallel between the meaning of reformation and the meaning of modern capitalism were meaningful.

Importantly, the question of meaning invited meaningful interpretation, whereas causation called for behavioral evidence. The debate over the so-called Weber thesis goes on, now as the origins of modernism, secularism and the market economy. For example Swedish economic historian K. Samuelson denied any connection, neither on the level of meaning (Sinn) nor in causation.

### **Meaning in Religion**

Weber’s comparative inquiry into the business ethics of world religions brings out the importance of subjective meaning with the *virtuosi*.

Instead of generalizing about all religions as “opium” or “functions”, as with Marx and Durkheim, Weber discussed the *Sinn* of each one of them.

He mastered the variety of Indo religions as well as Chinese ones. On Islam he only stated briefly that its social consequences were nefarious—a religion of warriors, and (Orientalism?). Buddhist Sinnzusammenhänge was rational in terms of business, supported by merchants and their ethics, but it denied this world here and

now.

### Conclusion

Meta-science was studied around 1900 mainly in German philosophy on the boundaries of the natural sciences. Weber's concept of the inner aspect of actions—Sinn, subjective meaning—is today highly relevant. The subjective meaning cannot be neglected but what is it?

Meaning or intention is not in the external world except in the sense that actor y's Sinnzusammenhänge is outside of actor x's Sinnzusammenhänge. Other people's minds are outside of me, but not merely brain or neurological interactions nor in society merely.

Aristotle's philosophy of science—*teleología*—dominated meta science until the arrival of the mechanistic world view with Hobbes and Spinoza. Now TELEOLOGY only applies to humans.

### References

- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1957). *Intention*. Cambridge MA: Harvard U.P.
- Jacob, P. (2019). Intentionality. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Putnam, H. (1975). *Philosophical papers: Mind, language and reality*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Samuelson, K. (1993). *Religion and economic action*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Searle, J. (2004). *Mind*. Oxford: OUP.
- Weber, M. (1922). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie. I-III*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society. I-II*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weber, M. (2012). *Collected methodological writings*. London: Routledge.