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What Are the Basic Units of Society? A Micro Discussion

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Abstract

The hunt is on for finding the most basic UNITS of matter and the universe whatever that may be: quarks, strings or quantum waves. There is one major condition, namely this theory must agree with the relativistic predictions about macro cosmos. How about the Humanities and the Social Sciences: what is the micro level like? Max Weber focused on intention.

Keywords

Sinn, meaning, subjectivity, motive, Searle

1. Introduction

Weber was a philosopher of science. His 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 behavior. The emphasis for Weber was upon intention –Sinn or meaning- the inner side of behavior: thought, belief, will, etc. When outer behavior was directed by complex Sinn, there was “Sinnzusammenhänge”.

2. Meaning or Motive

The humanities and social sciences understand outer behaviour by advancing intention or motive. He called it “deutend verstehen”. There is nothing similar in the natural sciences.

This emphasis on the basic subjective nature of human activity opens up for the analysis of ideas, plans, hopes, etc. Since the relationship between inner and outer behaviour is many-one, finding the correct intention requires an hypothesis. Intention or reason is simple or complicated, as when I walk over the street a la J. Searle in order to buy ice cream or when I travel to Dubai a la Mossad to spy upon terrorists. Action = intention + behaviour.

3. Intention Is What

If the world only consists of words and objects (Quine, 1960), where to place beliefs? The philosophy of mind (Pierre, 2002) has no definite reply nor the philosophy of intention (Anscombe, 1957; Jacob, 2003).

Example 1: on midsummer 1941, lots of people and objects started to move on the Out-front into the USSR. What was the idea or plan? The war had been planned for one year, but what were the end and the 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 (*cauldron*s) to be the priority, not Moscow. Hitler's decision changed *Barbarossa* into attrition war, with one likely ending. Goals drive behaviour. Where are they located: in brain synapses (Searle) or “not in the head” (Putnam)?

Weber declared that every action could be analysed with the means-end framework for understanding the inner aspect. This is weak rationality with few on how means and ends are related. Is intentionmerely *teleological* relation, i.e., beliefsor causality with true beliefs about means and end?

Example 2: why, e.g., did Gustavo Adolf’s intervene in the 30 years war? The motives and plans? Can sayings or written documents be trusted? His innermost intention? Lutheran, warmonger, power politics or money chaser?

4. Subjective Meaning

Objective meaning is for religion to speculate about, whereas subjective meaning is for the human sciences. Searle and Putnam live in a so-called material world (external), whatever this may be: matter, atoms, waves, strings or energy. Weber did not advocate Cartesians or phenomenology, though underlining subjective meaning.

Searle now speaks much about

“Unìty of Reality—New Realism” in a way that is out of line with his theory òf consciousness “subjective ontology” or reality. Searle now advocates biological naturalism—Weber would disagree.

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.

5. 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:

(A) Cognition

(B) Volition

(C) Emotion.

Yet, intention draws upon all 3. Subjective meaning occurs in society says Putnam and Kripke. No. Intention is very personal. The Sinn behind all the 1941 behaviors and objects in *Barbarossa* vary from soldiers to generals to the supreme commander.

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? Goals or figment of the imagination? Hitler intended to destroy bolsjevism, but it never became REALITY. Certainly, Himmler shared this intention—same brain functions?

Intentional "objects" are often referred to such as the elimination of bolsjevism 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 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 endless 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 affiliated both logically and causally. He then in 1913 set out to show the counterfactual: no capitalism, no Calvinism (Weber, 1922),

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

Analyzing world religions Weber argued that their core was revealed in the Sinnzusammenhänge of their *virtuosi* (Weber, 1922, 1978).

6. Conclusion

Weber developed a meta-science in a very original manner, picking the best from mainly German philosophy. He was neither a Kantian nor a positivist. His 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 x's Sinnzusammenhänge is outside of actor x's Sinnzusammenhänge. Other people's mind is outside of me but not merely brain or neurological interactions.

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