

Review of: "Significance and its role in the historical constitution and transformation of social reality. A conceptual approach from enactive cognition"

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This is an engaging, thought-provoking, and scholarly presentation of the enactive approach to social cognition, which delves into the essential issue of the relationship between meaning and cognition. Romeu adeptly emphasizes two critical points in this context. First, the subjective nature of both cognition and meaning, establishing a distinct dichotomy between Dennett's physical/design stance and the intentional stance. Second, closely tied to this, Romeu underscores the inherent indeterminacy of social action, a theme highlighted in various sections of the presentation: 'unprecedented, inherently dynamic, unpredictable, and unfinished nature of social reality' (19). The emergence of indeterminacy stems from the probabilistic nature inherent in social action, a quality deeply tied to its significance. Social action is not solely driven by causes; it also involves what Dennett refers to as 'reasons.' While causes follow a deterministic path, reasons operate within a probabilistic framework (without resorting to randomness, which would render social action meaningless). One aspect of Romeu's text that intrigues me is the 'meaning of meaning' quandary. I grasp that meaning is perceived as an attribute of experience, yet I find it challenging to discern the factors determining whether a specific experience holds meaning or lacks it. For instance, in p.7 we read: 'all meaning is cognitively constructed through the interaction of the body as an individual sensorimotor apparatus within the environment in which it lives and experiences life'. This makes meaning almost synonymous with experience itself, as if all experiences were meaningful by definition – hence a meaningless experience would be a *contradictio in adiecto*. On some other occasions, however, meaning becomes synonymous with intersubjectivity, by extension, culture, such as when he refers to the 'preexisting world of meaning, which constitutes culture' (12). From this perspective, a meaningless experience can be defined as that of an isolated individual interacting solely with the environment that consists only of inanimate objects, devoid of any intentional or design stance. For example, an artifact bears meaning, reflecting the maker's intentions, while a living organism or characteristic embodies a form of 'purpose' or 'reason,' such as adaptation to a specific environment. In both cases, a semblance of meaning exists, absent in inanimate objects like the sun or stars. Observing the sun rise each morning, one might wonder: What does it signify? In truth, it holds no inherent meaning; it's merely the consequence of causes like the Earth's gravitational force governing its orbit. Note the distinction between these two purportedly meaningful experiences. Behind an artifact lies a subjective intention, much like the intention driving any individual's action. Even in the absence of intent behind a biological trait (unless one subscribes to the intelligent design approach), there exists a design stance—an inherent reason without a reasoner. Each of these instances seems to imply a 'meaning' conspicuously absent in the rising sun, regardless of how precise our explanation for that occurrence might be. I wonder whether this agrees with



Romeu's approach or perhaps he takes meaning as a necessary attachment or emergent property of all cognition (of both animate and inanimate objects).