

Review of: "Teleology, backward causation, and the nature of concepts. A study in non-locality of reason"

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The article starts with categorizing teleological explanations tightly. The dismissal of the Kantian *reflective-teleological thinking* is not particularly deep. The “as if” stance (explicitly first worked-out by Hans Vaihinger) can be characterized as pragmatically fictionalist. Human purposive action (as the original model of teleology) is deep down no less fictionalist, as human intention is not guaranteed to be gratified or even adequate. As Nietzsche writes, “action requires the veil of illusion” [1]. The purposive or planned action (and teleological organization) can be viewed as ever aspirational. Teleological aspirations can be well grounded empirically on past experiences or evolutionary developments — but they are still fictions for a particular pursuit by a particular agent. Assigning certain causation to the aspirational fictions rather than to future events is much more acceptable philosophically. What else beside *future-oriented mental representations* (including *desires, plans*) and *features of the resulting behavioris* really needed for a causal explanation? The goal (the final cause) is just the fortunate upshot of the pursuing action, if it transpires.

Other broad term for a deeper assessment of intentional stance is *anticipation* [2]. This concept underscores dependency on external effective causes to bring about the intended or desired events. Intentional action betrays current absence of the required state of affairs, and is indeed dependent on future causes (including own actions in the future). But anticipated future should not be confused with the actual future. Functional biochemistry of organisms goes on *as if* the predation harm will be avoidable and the environment will continue to provide. Not unlike suggestions of the self-help literature [3], the animals largely prepare for the best, thereby increasing the causal power of their intentional-functional organization.

Kant’s synthetic unity of apperception reflects the narrative unity of fictionalist aspirations rather directly. The causes of this unity and of cognitive faculties lie not in the lifespan of a living agent, but in the evolution. Tinbergen’s framework of levels of explanation [4] in biology can be recalled here. What appears to be synthetic intuition or purposive disposition on the adaptive-functional and developmental levels is causally explained on the phylogenetic level by the past evolution. Organic functionality follows the statistical course of population dynamics of the species rather than individual future benefits.

The article presents the question of concept ontology compellingly. By underscoring fiction and anticipation this review brings up two more contentious concepts! If teleology can indeed be reduced to pragmatic-fictionalist anticipation, what counts as *fiction* or *anticipation*? I suggest here briefly that anticipation implies a tentative, suppositional relation between an anticipating subject and the reality. The particular notions of purpose, motive, intention, function also imply tentative

relations that are not definite entailments. The metaphors of “game” may characterize these “bargaining” relations well, rather outside the dichotomy of objectivity vs subjectivity. Games of existence could be obligatory, as living entities are compelled to participate in natural selection, to take up social or ecological roles. They could be determined by own cognitive schemas, prejudices or habits. They could be stimulated by occasional experiences and associations. Games could be played with different intensity and competence [5]. Abilities and competencies are promissory fictions to be reaffirmed by circumstances or peer subjects. As Wittgenstein concluded, serious logical analysis of the concept “game” would not be conclusive. Living beings just have their habits and interaction practices, recognize patterns and conceptualize them — as sloppily as they can get away with.

References/Notes:

- [1] See Ch 7 in: F. Nietzsche, *The birth of tragedy*, New York: Dover publications, 1995[1872].
- [2] My own investment: R. Vidunas, Fictionalism of anticipation, *Biosemiotics* (2021) 14:181–197.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12304-021-09417-z>
- [3] For example, see: J. Dispenza, *Breaking the habit of being yourself*, Hay House, 2012.
- [4] Streamlined Tinbergen's framework is presented in Ch 1 of: R. Sapolsky, *Behave: The biology of humans at our best and worst*, Penguin Press, 2017. Also see Sapolsky's lectures at Stanford University:
- [5] Consider chess: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnbMn_f5m1s