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Article Title - Defining Agency | Individuality, Normativity, Asymmetry, and Spatio-Temporality in Action

Unit 1 Notes

Pages 1 to 6

This scholarly article by authors Xabier Barandiaran, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and Marieke Rohde communicates the importance of properly defining agency. There is a discussion of the former definition of agency, but there is also an explanation of why the definitions from the past do not suffice. My notes will focus on the three components that constitute agency and why these three components were accepted when reviewed by the authors. For something or someone to have agency, they must have a strong sense of **individuality**, sufficient enough movements for **interactional asymmetry**, and finally for there to be an establishment for **normativity**. Together, these three items are dependent of each other in order for there to be agency. In other words, one cannot have only two attributes or a single attribute - **there must be all three**. Following the abstract, the article discusses reasons why agency's past defining points were lacking. The common mistake that researcher performed in the past is that definition of an item being on its own or being independent is not enough. A helpful example that is provided is a question asked: "Do the tremors affecting a Parkinson disease patient count as agency?" (Barandiaran, Di Paolo, Rohde, Pg. 1). Even if a person is not entirely clear on what agency is, they can easily agree that medical hand tremors do not have agency. This reasoning is further supported in the article when they breakdown the characteristics of the three attributes listed above. A goal of their argument is to ensure that the agency definition involves **the entity performing or doing an action within its surroundings as its end goal**. First, individuality requires for the entity to be able to separate itself from its environment and even for the entity to exist on its own when it is taken out of the environment. "...We might agree on declaring that the table, pen, paper, computer and lamp constitute the 'the workspace' system," is an example provided in the article to help us visualize the distinctions between an agent and the agent's environment (Barandiaran, Di Paolo, Rohde, Pg. 3). A pen will still have a pen function, but it can be an item in the workplace system. This is applied for the individuality of an entity/agent. The agent's existence cannot be dependent on the existence of other items and must be able to make separate actions. Secondly, there has to be interactional asymmetry for the agent. Interactional asymmetry means that there doesn't need to some external force to make actions, the actions happen independently. The agent must be its own source for activities and for it to control the activities. **The source of the activity must come from the agent itself as indicated in the article and while this may be a bit similar to the previous definitions of agency ("something that is independent") the source must also come with a purpose**. This introduces the last item which is Normativity. Normativity comes with the requirement that there is a presence of a norm or a goal. It simply cannot be an action that happened just because something else was the reason it occurred. **After the action has occurred, the agent must be able to determine if the action was a success or a failure. This is what makes the agent's action a goal**. There must be a set of actions or action that must be completed for it to be a goal or else the agent attempts again. This attribute can also be known as normativity condition. According to the authors, normativity condition is the most essential attribute. Finally, the three components cooperate with each other to make something or someone fully have agency and can be found within the organization or the order of the agent. The authors also mention that an entity is inevitably an agent if they have these three attributes.

Short Review Chart

An Agent or Agency	Individuality, Interaction Asymmetry, and Normativity
Individuality	Separate from the environment that it is in
Interaction Asymmetry	Source of the action
Normativity Condition	There must be a goal or norm for the action

