

'I, myself, move' Lucy O'Brien, SIFA Conference, September 7-9 2023

1. *The Reflexivity Claim*

An argument:

1. *The Reflexivity Claim*: Whenever an agent acts, she reflexively changes and the agent's actions are those reflexive changes.
2. *The Animal Changes Claim*: This human animal (the one standing here talking) changes when I act, and these animal changes are my actions.
3. *The Animal Identity Claim*: I am this human animal.

If the animal movements that occur when I act are my actions, and my actions are *reflexive* changes, then I must be the animal whose changes are those movements.

Reasons to believe The Reflexivity Claim: (i) Reflexivity explains the *Agent claim*: I must exist when I act; there are no 'unowned actions'. (ii) No action at a distance: I can only change what we might call the 'non-me world' – those things and stuffs distinct from me – by me reflexively changing. I move the kettle to the stove, the sandwich to my lips, the note to my friend, by, myself, moving.

Reasons to accept the Animal Changes Claim: We seem to know an action when we see one: when we see a fellow human walk into a room, sit at a table, and pick up a glass, we come to know that someone, walked, sat and picked up a glass. In our ordinary ascription of action *many actions are movements of the human animal*.

Upsbot: we face an explanatory burden – given common sense onbservation and reflexivity claim - if we deny that those animal changes are the actions and deny that we are human animals.

2. *Cartesian self-changes and animal change*

Assume I am a Cartesian mental substance.

In acting I self-change

So, in acting, I change the Cartesian mental substance I am.

A puzzle about action if I am a non-material Cartesian mental substance:

1. The mental substance that self-changes is really distinct from this animal.
2. This animal changes when I act.
3. Ordinarily we call these animal changes my actions.

Solution? The animal changes are the *results* of actions of the self.

Solution 1: Actions are mental self-changes that are causes of animal change

Solution 2: Actions are either mental self-changes or are the effects of mental self-changes:

Solution 3: Actions are either reflexive causings of change to the mental substance or causings of animal changes by the mental substance.

When see an action: It is either the causal effect of another action or not an action at all.

3. *Human animal change*

Assume I am a human animal.

In acting I self-change

So, in acting, I change the human animal I am.

The is NO parallel action puzzle here.

The human animal that self-changes is identical this animal.

This animal changes when I act.
We call these animal changes my actions

4. *The puzzle of a solution without a puzzle*

Contemporary action theorists agree that each of us is in fact a human animal, rather than a Cartesian, (Humean, or Brain-based) self: Steward wants “to insist that *human beings* are the authors of their actions” (Steward 2012, p. 21)

Puzzle: Why do we see views that correspond to the three ‘solutions’ that result from distinguishing the agent from the animal?

Starting question: ‘What is it for someone to act? It is for them to make themselves move?’ (Steward 2012, p.15)

Assumption made: we need to make sense of such cases of ‘making ourselves move’ by asking a question of the form what is it for A to move B.

Example: Big Rock, rolls down a slope into Little Rock, causing the Little Rock to move.

‘A moves B’:

- there are two objects (Big Rock and Little Rock)
- there are two movements: the movement of Big Rock and the movement of Little Rock
- one movement causes the other
- the former movement is transitive, and the latter is intransitive (Big Rock transitively moves Little Rock, Little Rock intransitively moves)

But suppose that Big Rock moved because it was hit by Even Bigger Rock.

Do we now have two movements by Big Rock? No. There was one rolling – which we take to be an intransitive movement, because it was the result of a movement by Even Bigger Rock, and which we also take to be a transitive movement, because it was the cause of a movement Little Rock.

Moreover, we can happily say that Big Rock’s moving (transitive) Little Rock was because Big Rock moved (intransitive) without thinking that there is a causal relation between two distinct movements.

Human action: How then should we understand the idea that a human being moves themselves, or part of themselves? Suppose A raises her arm.

Following the implicit model, we analyse this as if it involved two distinct objects involved in two distinct movements – one transitive and one intransitive – standing in causal relations.

(i) We have two things A, and A’s arm (ii) We have two movings: A’s raising of her arm, and A’s arm rising; (iii). There is a causal relation: A’s raising her arm, is a cause, or causing of her arm rising. (iv) A transitively raised her arm; Her arm intransitively rises.

Hornsby, Steward, and Hyman and Alvarez all:

- (i) make a distinction between an animal that moves and the body, or body part, that moves – an animal *has* a body, rather than *is* a body. (Two things: A and A’s arm)

- (ii) make a claim that the animal's movement (AM) and the movement of its owned body (BM) are distinct. (Two movings, transitive and intransitive: A's raising of her arm, and A's arm rising)
- (iii) make a claim that there is a *causal* relation between the animal's movement and the movement of its body: AM is the transitive movement that is the cause (Hornsby) or the causing (Steward, Hyman and Alvarez) of the intransitive movement BM. (Causal relation)

Must we take things to be like this? If our actions are reflexive changes involving *one* individual human animal, and its relation to itself should start with the idea that our relation has the form A moves A.

Perhaps when we say things like 'I can make my arm rise, by raising it' or, as Wittgenstein put it "Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up." (PI, 621) the structures that makes true such claims are very different from the structures that make it true that Big Rock's movement was the cause, or causing, of Little Rock's movement.

Lavin: This way of proceeding makes "the causality involved in action [take] on the appearance of a relation joining particulars, and thus as belonging to the same category as 'is as large as' and 'hates'...it presupposes that the causal element introduced by the transitive verbs employed in ordinary representation of action is a real relation between distinct, fully determinate particulars – some factor x and a mere happening (p.612, Lavin 2015)

Haddock: "On [Hornsby's] interpretation, 'Jane causes her body to move' means that the event of Jane's moving her body causes the event of Jane's body's moving..."

Hornsby's interpretation tries to display the linguistic truth as forcing upon us a picture of two separate events, the first of which causes the second. But I think we can interpret the linguistic truth in a way that would free us from this picture. (Haddock, 2005, p. 166)

A more helpful example? Suppose a plant grows when the cells in a plant replicate and expand: This need not mean that there is an occurrence of the plant growing that is distinct, but causally related to, the occurrence of the cells replicating and expanding: we are free to give an analysis, or constitutive account, of plant growth in terms of cell replication and expansion.

4.1 *The answer to our second puzzle of a solution without a puzzle:*

Contemporary action theorists introduce a kind of dualism in their account of human action. They assume a *distinction* between A and A's body that she moved, and A's action and her bodily movement.

They take the power to be a self-changer is not fundamentally different to the power to be a non-reflexive changer: it depends upon *having* a body as a distinct thing that one is able to make move

It is only of some sorts of entity that it makes sense to say that they 'have' bodies, thereby separating what is moved (a body or a body part) from what is doing the moving (an animal). It is these entities that are potentially sufficiently complex to sustain an owner/body distinction which I will call 'agents', and the power of self-movement in question is [their] agency.....What sorts of entities may be said to have 'bodies' to be potentially distinct from them in a way which makes sense of this second stronger conception of self-movement?...Only a creature which can have a mind – i.e. to which certain mental predicates to be applied – can really 'have' (own) a body and *vice versa*. There is no point in the distinction between an entity and its body, without the correlative idea of the entity as an initiator, director, and discretionary controller of the movements of its body. (Steward, p. 17)

This seems to be non-compulsory, and wrong – I do not have a body which I move. I am or am constituted by a body which moves when I act. I, myself, move.

4.2 *Maybe it is worth it?*