

Failed intentions, or why adaptive behavior is not sufficient for cognition

Xabier Barandiaran

IAS-Research, University of the Basque Country (EHU/UPV)

First, I will analyse the “Cognition = Behaviour” and show how it is insufficient to account for cognition as a specific phenomenon different to any dynamical systems (call it “agent”) coupled to another one (call it “environment”). Then I will introduce the idea, defended by many, that the biological grounding of sensorimotor interactions can solve the problems posited by a purely behaviouristic account of cognition. Next, I will try to show that the existing formulations of the necessity and sufficiency of biology for cognition have not been formulated with precision and that additional requirements need to be added. Thus, I will expand the “Cognition = Adaptive Behaviour” into “Cognition = Adaptive Behaviour + X + Y + Z” where X, Y and Z represent those additional requirements that bring adaptive agency closer to intentional agency. I will try to argue that, despite the adding up of new conditions, the approach remains essentially problematic. To account for these problems I shall rely on a benchmark test: the skyline of our own subjective experience of intentionality-in-action (or intentional agency). Finally I will end up proposing some in-principle reasons for this failure and how we can still save part of the basic intuition by moving the baby to a different bathwater: from biological autonomy to sensorimotor autonomy, from the self-maintenance of metabolic organization to the self-maintenance of the behavioural organization.