Conceptualism and Practical Significance: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a synoptic and distinctive resolution to the debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell, which concerns the extent to which conceptual capacities are involved in human perceptual experience and intentional action. My resolution demonstrates how conceptualism accommodates the phenomenon of unreflective action, avoiding "Cartesian" implications, and preserving distinctive insights from existential phenomenology.

In my first chapter, I expound Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account of the phenomenon of "unreflective action". I highlight how such an account is supposed to avoid a Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. In my second chapter, I demonstrate how conceptual involvement arises in practically engaged experience. This undermines Dreyfus's argument that conceptual involvement necessarily entails Cartesianism. In my third chapter, I demonstrate the incoherence of a non-conceptualist account of intentional responses, with reference to Wilfred Sellars' critique of the "given", and go on to demonstrate how McDowell's conceptualism avoids Cartesianism. In my fourth chapter, I argue that the intentional character of unreflective action necessarily entails that the agent possesses the relevant concepts. I then demonstrate how the apparently non-conceptual "motor intentional" content that Dreyfus highlights only plays a normative role through its integration into a framework of operative conceptual capacities. In my fifth chapter, I secure the idea that perceptual content can be "intrinsically" practically significant in a way

consistent with its normative relation to unreflective action. I provide a distinctive conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger's notion of the "ready-to-hand" in order to do this.

My resolution therefore demonstrates how a conceptualist account of intentional content accommodates the phenomenon that Dreyfus appeals to; the unreflective, embodied and practical way in which human beings engage with their environment. This resolution allows for a post-Cartesian conception of the mind, where the mind is integrated into practically engaged experience.

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Introduction

Overview

The debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell concerns the extent to which conceptual capacities, understood as constituents of thought, are involved in human perceptual experience and intentional action[1]. McDowell holds that conceptual capacities are "operative" in all human perceptual experience and intentional action, and are as such constitutive of the kind of relation to the world that human beings have (see McDowell, 1994: 11; 90). Dreyfus, drawing on the work of existential phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, highlights examples of "skilful coping", or "unreflective action", where an agent's skilful intentional actions proceed automatically, instinctively, and apparently without involvement from *mental* capacities at all. Dreyfus argues that McDowell's focus on mental capacities cannot accommodate the distinctive characteristics of unreflective action, and further claims that this focus propagates an unsatisfactory "Cartesian" or "mediational" picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. The debate proceeds with McDowell emphasising the advantages of his conceptualist approach, and clarifying how it can accommodate the distinctive characteristics of unreflective action while avoiding such a Cartesian picture.

My purpose in this thesis is to offer a synoptic resolution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate that shows how we can emphasise the role of conceptual capacities while preserving certain of Dreyfus's existential

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[1] McDowell understands "conceptual capacities" on the model of Fregean senses. I refer to the definition of "conceptual" below, noting that the precise way in which to conceive of conceptual capacities is a central issue in the debate.

phenomenological insights, and avoiding the pitfalls of Cartesianism. This approach has the advantage of securing the epistemic significance and normativity that should be ascribed to human perceptual experience and action, and retaining the distinctively affective and practically significant perceptual content that existential phenomenology highlights. I hold that a satisfactory resolution to the debate depends upon theorising the relationship between perceptual content and the sort of unreflective action that Dreyfus appeals to. I argue that Dreyfus's conception of "motor intentional content" indeed plays a crucial role in practically engaged experience, but can only do so in virtue of being integrated into an established framework of conceptual capacities. I go on to argue that our practically engaged experience entails perceptual content that is both *conceptual* and *practically significant.* I suggest that we can understand such perceptual content with reference to Heidegger's phenomenology, properly interpreted. My account therefore draws from conceptualist *and* existential phenomenological approaches to perceptual experience; in principle satisfying the concerns of both Dreyfus and McDowell. This resolution shows how we can clarify the positive role and character of the mind without committing ourselves to a Cartesian picture *or* playing down the role of embodied skills.

The Debate and its Context

The debate begins with Dreyfus's 2005 presidential address to the *American Philosophical Association*, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise". McDowell first responds in "What Myth" (2007). The debate spans seven papers in total from 2005 to 2013, including two chapters in Joseph K. Schear's 2013

edited collection, *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: the McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*.[2]

The debate can be characterised and contextualised in a number of different ways. Roughly approximated, the debate concerns how we ought to philosophically characterise the way in which human beings primarily "relate" to the world[3]. Both Dreyfus and McDowell focus on two crucial ways in which we might say that human beings relate to the world. One sort of relation is perceptual – human beings relate to the world through their perceptual experience of it. Another sort of relation is practical – human beings relate to the world through their active, bodily engagement with it[4]. Characterising the way in which human beings relate to the world, then, becomes a matter of characterising ordinary, everyday human perception and action. One option is to emphasise the role of capacities that human beings share with animals; physiological capacities for perceiving and recognising environmental features, and navigating them skilfully. The other option is to emphasise the role of capacities that are distinctly human – in short, the sorts of capacities that pertain to language, thought, and reasoning. Think, for instance, of the way in which we might derive knowledge of some environmental situation from our perceptual experience, express that knowledge in a judgement, and use the judgement to reason about what course of action to take.

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[2]The sources for the debate are as follows: Dreyfus, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; McDowell, 2007a, 2007b; Dreyfus in Schear, 2013; McDowell in Schear, 2013. Dreyfus 2007c also represents a response to McDowell, though it isn't clear if McDowell reads or responds to the material here.

[3] As my thesis progresses, I move away from the phrase "human relation to the world" in favour of the terminology of intentionality and intentional content, which I introduce further in this introduction.

[4] We should also consider the relation of thinking – human beings relate to the world through having *thoughts* about it. However, the question of how thoughts relate to the world has a complex status in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, which focuses on the relations of perceiving and acting. This point will become important as I move on to characterise the debate in Chapters One and Two.

McDowell refers to these latter capacities as "conceptual capacities" – capacities to possess, apply, infer between, and productively combine *concepts*. McDowell uses the term "conceptual" 'in close connection with the idea of rationality' (McDowell, 2007a: 338). McDowell argues that conceptual capacities are "operative" in all human perceptual experience and intentional action[5]. They are as such constitutive of the kind of relation to the world that human beings enjoy (see for example McDowell, 1994: 11; 90). For McDowell, 'our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way to the world's impact on our receptive capacities' (McDowell, 2007a: 338). Similarly, intentional action is a matter of 'realizing a concept of a thing to do' (McDowell, 2013: 48). Roughly, then, the idea is that human beings perceive and act in the world in virtue of their conceptual abilities (see McDowell, 1994: 66). Accordingly, we have to differentiate human perceptual experience and action from that of animals, despite what look to be shared capacities for perceptual discrimination and reaction (McDowell, 1994: 64). McDowell therefore argues for a *conceptualist* picture of the primary way in which human beings relate to the world. McDowell first expounds this picture in *Mind and World* (1994), and many of his papers since have been dedicated to developing and defending it. His debate with Dreyfus represents one such defence.

In 2005, in what becomes the opening paper of the debate, Dreyfus targets McDowell's position. Dreyfus agrees with McDowell that conceptual capacities are operative in *some* forms of perception and action. However, he denies that the involvement of conceptual capacities characterises *all* kinds of

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[5]I have specified "intentional" action in the first instance so as not to invite premature counter-examples of involuntary actions, which I indeed come to differentiate from the kind of action that McDowell takes to be conceptual.

perception and action (Dreyfus, 2005: 47). Throughout the debate, Dreyfus refers to examples in which an agent acts without reflection, deliberation, decision-making, or an accompanying thought process. In these cases, the agent may not be perceptually attentive to the environmental objects that their actions involve. Examples range from expert performances, such as a tennis player returning a fast serve, to everyday activity, such as running down stairs or tying one's shoelaces. Given the absence of any thought process, the role that conceptual capacities play here is unclear. There is a sense in which ingrained bodily skill has taken over responsibility for the action. Dreyfus argues that McDowell's conceptualism denies 'the more basic perceptual capacities we seem to share with prelinguistic infants and higher animals' (2005: 47). Dreyfus argues that conceptual capacities are in fact dependent on *prior* capacities for unreflective perception and action. Dreyfus is sceptical that philosophers can 'successfully describe the conceptual upper floors of the edifice of knowledge while ignoring the embodied coping going on on the ground floor' (Dreyfus, 2005: 46; also see Dreyfus, 2013: 23). Dreyfus accuses McDowell of falling prey to what he calls "the Myth of the Mental" – the "myth" that capacities belonging to the mind must be involved at all levels of human experience (2005: 46). Dreyfus therefore argues for a *non-conceptualist* picture of the primary way in which human beings relate to the world.

From the outset, then, the McDowell-Dreyfus debate concerns the extent to which concepts are involved or "operative" in human perceptual experience and intentional action. The debate generally proceeds with McDowell arguing that his conceptualism accommodates Dreyfus's examples of unreflective action perfectly well, and clarifying what it means for concepts to be "operative" in

such unreflective experience and action. For his part, Dreyfus attempts to refine his non-conceptualism in order to absorb McDowell's clarifications. The overt content of the debate centres on a characterisation of perceptual experience and action, and as such ranges across topics in the philosophy of perception, the philosophy of action, and the philosophy of mind. In the introduction to his edited collection, Schear describes the "central issue at stake" in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate as 'the extent to which conceptual rationality is involved in our skilful embodied rapport with the world' (2013: 2). Schear also expresses this issue as concerning whether or not human beings are 'essentially rational animals' (Schear, 2013: 9). Erik Rietveld characterises the debate in terms of McDowell's claim that 'unreflective bodily coping is conceptual and that such unreflective action is permeated with rationality and mindedness' (Rietveld, 2010: 186). I concur with these characterisations of the principal and pervasive disagreement of the debate, but I want to emphasise that there are philosophical states to the debate that are not immediately apparent.

A reviewer of Schear's collection rightly notes that 'the stakes in this debate are not simply about philosophical problems, but also about philosophical traditions' (Mohr, 2014: 239). We might say, at least nominally, that the debate represents a confrontation between a phenomenological approach to philosophical problems, and an analytic approach. Certainly, Dreyfus's use of phenomenology and his commitment to preserving phenomenological insights is of signal importance in the debate. Dreyfus's assumption that the analytic tradition – at least in McDowell's understanding of it – cannot accommodate the phenomenology that Dreyfus appeals to is called into question throughout the debate. This is why a significant strand of my thesis

attempts to highlight the relevance of existential phenomenology beyond Dreyfus's usage of it. If existential phenomenology simply contributes a non-conceptualist account of the human being's relation to the world, then there may be a concern as to the relevance of that phenomenology if, in the end, we opt for a conceptualist account. Specifically, I focus on Dreyfus's interpretation and use of Heidegger. Dreyfus attributes non-conceptualism to Heidegger partly due to Heidegger's explicit goal of moving beyond Cartesianism. However, I argue in this thesis that conceptualism is at least compatible with Heidegger's views in *Being and Time* (1927), and that Heidegger does not avoid Cartesianism simply by discounting the role of the mind or mental capacities. My contention is that Heidegger's phenomenology in fact runs close to McDowell's position in important respects, but can contribute a distinctive, "tailored" account of how conceptual capacities are operative in practically engaged experience[6]. We can thus take an existential phenomenological approach to articulating a post-Cartesian conception of the mind as integrated into practically engaged experience.

It is indeed important to clarify the important role that "Cartesianism" plays in this debate. Both McDowell and Dreyfus take themselves to be attempting to think past traditional Cartesian assumptions about the mind and its relation to the world. Dreyfus's view is that the philosophical focus on the human mind's capacity to "represent" the world has resulted in what he has most recently termed a "mediational picture" (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015: 2). The general idea is that the human being does not have direct contact with the external world. The closest we get to a point of contact is a resemblance or

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[6] Erik Rietveld (2010) argues that we require a "tailored" account of unreflective action; I expand on this below.

correspondence between, for an example, an internal mental representation and an external state of affairs. For Dreyfus, emphasising conceptual involvement *necessarily* entails a "detachment" between the human being and the world. Consistent with the Cartesian tradition, conceptualism pictures the human being as a detached observer who is not immersed or engaged with the world. Dreyfus understands McDowell's conceptualism to prioritise the epistemic dimension of the human being's relationship to the world; how it entails 'getting it right about a distanced reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 23). It is partly to dispel a mediational picture that Dreyfus highlights the phenomenon of unreflective action, which *doesn't* seem to rely on capacities belonging to the mind, and so bypasses the mediational problem. Dreyfus refers to his account of perceptual experience and action as a "contact" theory; he takes his non-conceptualism to offer us a satisfactory picture of the human being is directly and substantively in *contact* with the world (see Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015: 17).

McDowell does indeed come out of a tradition that emphasises the epistemic features of experience, thought, and language. However, McDowell is motivated by a strikingly similar concern to Dreyfus. McDowell does think that a focus on the involvement of conceptual capacities threatens a philosophical detachment between the human being and the external world. Our conceptual thought about the world seems to operate independently of it: 'we risk losing our grip on how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgements about the world […] what we wanted to conceive of exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game' (McDowell, 1994: 5). However, McDowell argues that we must still affirm the role of conceptual capacities to avoid other problematic philosophical implications. In fact, McDowell's basic

objections to Dreyfus's non-conceptualism bring this point into relief. If we conceive of perception as non-conceptual, we cannot account for the role that perception plays in acquiring or justifying empirical knowledge. To think otherwise, McDowell argues, is to fall into "the myth of the given", the incoherent idea that knowledge of the world is "given" to us through sensory capacities alone[7]. If we conceive of intentional action as non-conceptual, we cannot secure any sense in which action is an expression of human agency.

McDowell is concerned that Dreyfus's non-conceptualism conceives of human perception and action as causal events in nature, falling solely within the remit of scientific explanation. For McDowell, these problems work to shore up a dualism familiar to philosophy, wherein the *normative* features of the human being are sharply distinguished from *natural* features. Conceptual capacities come to look "alien" in the context of the sorts of natural capacities that Dreyfus wants to emphasise. Overcoming such a dualism is essential to McDowell's wider philosophical project. McDowell conceives of conceptual capacities as themselves natural propensities of human animals, and further insists on their operation in perceptual experience and action, precisely to stave off the dualism of the normative and the natural. McDowell wants to conceive of the operation of conceptual capacities as 'integrally bound up with the animal nature of the rational animal' (McDowell, 2009: vii).

Both McDowell and Dreyfus are therefore concerned to overcome a broadly Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. This consideration is not always as apparent in the debate as it should be,

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[7] This is not the only form the myth of the given takes, but it is the most relevant here. Wilfred Sellars "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956) provides the classic diagnosis of various forms of "givenness". I outline this in detail in Chapter Three.

and any systematic approach to understanding and resolving the debate should take it into account. The McDowell-Dreyfus debate represents the challenge of how to understand the role of mind in practically engaged experience *without* lapsing into a flatly causal account of human activity. My thesis is therefore concerned with demonstrating how Dreyfus's association of conceptual involvement with Cartesianism is misguided, while clarifying how conceptualism can preserve those practical, embodied features of the human being's relation to the world that Dreyfus draws attention to.

I should make an initial clarification about how I am defining "conceptual capacities", "content", or "conceptual" in general. A resolution to the debate in fact hinges on how these terms should be defined and used, and so I will return to this issue on a number of occasions. At least in the beginning of the debate, Dreyfus seems to identify concepts with mental representations. The involvement of a conceptual capacity can be associated with an 'internal system of representation' (Margolis, 2003: 562). However, McDowell comes out of a tradition which tends to identify concepts with Fregean senses. A Fregean sense should not be identified with an internal mental item, but rather as an abstract entity that is the constituent of a proposition. The principle and pervasive disagreement of the debate is over 'the extent to which content is conceptual' (Gardner, 2013: 110). "Content" in this context means the content of intentional states, states that are characterised by being about or directed at some object or state of affairs. The content is what the state is about or directed at. Beliefs, for example, are intentional states. The belief that "the taxi is here" is about that state of affairs in the world. "The taxi is here" is the intentional content of the belief, which in this case is propositional, *conceptual* content. The proposition is

composed of concepts, or Fregean senses. Thus, to explain how a subject can be in the intentional state of believing that "the bus is late", we ascribe them possession of the concepts that are the constituents of that proposition[8]. Sacha Golob offers a helpful definition, therefore, of the "conceptualism" that someone like McDowell may endorse:

> [Conceptualism is] the thesis that all standard adult human intentional states (i) necessarily contain concepts and (ii) these concepts play a central, although not necessarily exhaustive, role in explaining the distinctive intentional features of such states. (Golob, 2014: 150).

Importantly, both Dreyfus and McDowell agree that *perceiving* is an intentional state – for example, perceiving that "the taxi is here" - and the debate is partly over whether the content of this perceptual intentional state is conceptual in the same way as the belief above. However, it is worth saying that McDowell means "conceptual capacities" to refer to something more than our acquisition and possession of concepts. For McDowell, conceptual capacities belong to 'a network that rationally governs comprehension-seeking responses to the impact of the world on sensibility' (1994: 12). The term also to refers to our ability to make the sort of inferential connections that are characteristic of human reasoning, and to bring that to bear on aspects of our lives, in the broadest sense, that we don't yet have the conceptual vocabulary to describe. Again, the proper way in which to understand the nature of conceptual content is a decisive issue here, and I accordingly return to assess it in detail.

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[8] I will not go further in unpacking a Fregean account of senses here, as there is of course plenty more to add. I do return to discuss this account in **3.5** and **5.3**.

Objectives, Content, and Structure

My thesis is structured around gradually building an account of how conceptual capacities are "operative" in unreflective action, and engaged practical experience in general, and at the same time showing how such an account can avoid Cartesianism and preserve certain insights of existential phenomenology. Chapter One expounds Dreyfus's non-conceptualism, and its anti-Cartesian motivations. From Chapter Two to Chapter Four, I focus on demonstrating that conceptualism can accommodate Dreyfus's phenomenology of unreflective action without lapsing into a Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. I therefore offer a resolution to the principle and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. In Chapter Five, I move past that disagreement to develop and secure the idea that perceptual content has "intrinsic" practical significance consistent with its normative relation to unreflective action.

In **Chapter One**, I first introduce and characterise the phenomenon that Dreyfus appeals to in the debate. I use "unreflective action" as a catch-all term for intentional, skilful, engaged or embodied action that is unreflectively performed. I specify that unreflective action should be further understood as the primary and pervasive way in which human beings relate to their environment. Dreyfus claims that the absence of reflection or conscious thought in this phenomenon entails the absence of conceptual capacities. I expound Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account of the intentional content involved in unreflective action and the perceptual experience pertaining to it. I refer to Ryle's work on "knowing-how" and Merleau-Ponty's conception of "motor intentionality" here. This relates to a question highlighted by John Bengson (2015) about how

perceptual experience can be said to "produce" intentional action[9]; Dreyfus takes "motor intentional content" to entail bodily skills that are reliably keyed on to, or triggered by, non-conceptual perceptual capacities. Further, Dreyfus argues that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual intentional content. Finally, Dreyfus claims that the involvement of conceptual capacities in fact scuppers, compromises, or interrupts skilful engagement with the world, thus "detaching" the human being from the world, and making possible a "Cartesian" picture of intentionality.

In **Chapter Two** I focus on this latter claim that the involvement of conceptual capacities compromises skilful engagement with the world, and accordingly implies a form of detachment that can be described in Cartesian terms. I first demonstrate how Dreyfus derives such an argument about conceptual involvement from his influential interpretation of Heidegger – I thus introduce some important Heideggerian terminology into the narrative of my thesis, notably the "ready-to-hand" and the "present-at-hand". I then move to argue that *explicit* conceptual involvement, such as conscious thought, or linguistic judgement, does not *necessarily* compromise skilful engagement, but is a frequently necessary part of that engagement. As such, conceptual involvement cannot necessarily entail Cartesianism. I argue that Heidegger has much the same understanding of conceptual involvement, which we find in his account of "*interpretation*". I thus dispute Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger on the subject of the involvement of conceptual capacities. This chapter therefore undermines Dreyfus's crucial assumption about the connection between the involvement of conceptual capacities and Cartesianism. It also calls into question Dreyfus's

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[9] This question pertains especially to *unreflective* intentional action, as Bengson emphasises.

claim that non-conceptual intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content. However, this does not yet secure the idea that unreflective action *necessarily* entails the involvement of conceptual capacities, as McDowell argues.

In **Chapter Three**, I focus on McDowell's conceptualist account of perceptual experience. I highlight how McDowell shares Dreyfus's concern about avoiding a traditional Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world; and McDowell's recognition that affording a role to conceptual capacities can cause problems of a Cartesian shape. However, I move on to demonstrate that McDowell affords such a role to conceptual capacities to avoid a Sellarsian "myth of the given". I thus demonstrate why we ought to avoid positing a non-conceptualist, flatly *causal* account of intentional responses in general. I then elaborate McDowell's conceptualist account of perceptual experience, focusing on how it might accommodate the phenomenon of unreflective action, and further how it is constitutively designed to avoid Cartesianism. That perceptual content is *conceptual* does not mean that the agent actively draws upon their conceptual repertoire in order to make sensory input intelligible. I focus on McDowell's account of the "passive" way in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in perceptual experience, outlining the related notion of "second nature". I then focus on his conception of *de re* singular demonstrative thought, which McDowell takes to secure the object-dependent, non-Cartesian nature of conceptual content. This clarification about the nature of conceptual content informs my resolution to the debate in the following chapter.

In **Chapter Four** I move to consolidate an account of the involvement of conceptual capacities in unreflective action. This entails unpacking two claims that McDowell makes. First, he claims that intentional actions "manifest" or "realise" practical concepts, or concepts of things to do. Second, he claims that unreflective actions are responses to reasons. I begin by focusing on the first claim. I endorse Gottlieb's view that Dreyfus is committed to what refers to as a 'phenomenological fallacy' in his conclusion that conceptual capacities are not operative in unreflective action because they do not show up at the phenomenologically descriptive level. I argue accordingly that Dreyfus's phenomenological methodology selectively ignores a transcendental element of phenomenology that may admit a role for the involvement of conceptual capacities. I relate this methodological point to an important distinction that Joseph Rouse (2013) makes between "normative" accounts of concept-possession, and "descriptive" ones. I bring these points together to argue that if an unreflective action is nevertheless an *intentional* action, it is only explanatorily intelligible with reference to the agent's possession of the relevant concepts.

I then consider McDowell's claim that unreflective action should be understood as "responsiveness to reasons". I again contextualise this claim in terms of the question of how perceptual experience can be said to "produce" unreflective action; an agent's unreflective actions are in response to perceived states of affairs, and these states of affairs represent situation-specific *reasons* for those actions. I clarify why McDowell insists on this normative characterisation of intentional action with reference to his Aristotelian understanding of ethical behaviour. I then appraise how Dreyfus's conception of "motor intentional content" can fit into this conceptualist picture. I demonstrate that the "know-

how" of skilful bodily responses entails conceptual knowledge that can be captured in demonstrative conceptual content. Further, the agent needs to have knowledge that their embodied skills are reliable and appropriate to the specific situation, and are thus integrated into a network of conceptual capacities.

Motor intentional content entails a phenomenologically distinctive kind of perceptual content that I call "affective content"; roughly speaking, Dreyfus construes this content in terms of an agent's "intuiting" the relevant, specific aspects of the perceived situation. I argue that although such content is indeed phenomenologically distinctive, it can only play a normative role in producing intentional action in virtue of its place in a network of conceptual understanding. In the case of both knowledge-how, and motor intentional content, I appeal to McDowell's clarification of what it means for content to be conceptual; "demonstrative" content does not entail a Russellian definite description, but can capture those specific features of situations that agents unreflectively respond to. I take this conceptualist approach to motor intentional content to represent a resolution to the principle and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

In **Chapter Five**, I move past this principle disagreement in order to focus on the idea that our perceptual experience has "intrinsically" practically significant content. I argue that there may be a concern that McDowell's conceptualism is only geared toward the perception of states of affairs that do not *prima facie* bear any relation to our practical interests. I draw on a parallel critique from Rietveld (2010), who argues that we should "tailor" McDowell's notion of "responsiveness to reasons" to better accommodate the phenomenon of unreflective action; he thus argues that we should conceive of unreflective

action as "responsiveness to normative significance". I argue that we can derive a notion of "practically significant" perceptual content from Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand. In order to do this, I first provide a conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger's account of intentionality, and dispute Dreyfus's non-conceptualist interpretation. I go on to argue that Heidegger's conceptualism is distinctive in that he highlights how empirical concepts belong to a conceptual framework which is composed of "involvement" relations. I draw on Golob (2014) to do this, who offers a distinctive conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger. I therefore demonstrate that we can utilise Heidegger's existential phenomenological insights to provide a conception of practically significant perceptual content, and in turn provide that tailored account of unreflective actions entailing responses to "normative significance".

I then provide some reflections on the "post-Cartesian" purport of existential phenomenology. I argue that Dreyfus is too quick to presume that a genuinely post-Cartesian account of intentionality must reject any explanatory role for the mind, and accordingly imposes a "motor intentional" account on Heidegger. However, I argue that Heidegger is concerned to offer a refined view of the mind, where its capacities are integrated into practically engaged experience. This is a position that my thesis as a whole works to articulate; a conceptualism that can preserve the essential way in which human beings are in the first instance practically engaged agents who are perceptually open to a practically significant environment.

Existing Literature

A unified and extended study of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate has not yet been published. This thesis represents such a study. I offer a distinctive resolution that demonstrates how a conceptualist account of perceptual experience and intentional action can accommodate the distinctive "motor intentional content" that Dreyfus emphasises, and how we can make sense of the "practical significance" of perceptual content. Further, I highlight how this resolution entails a post-Cartesian picture of how the mind is integrated into practically engaged experience.

My resolution first of all contributes to the literature that has been generated by the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. There are, of course, the essays collected in Schear's 2013 anthology. Notably, I utilise Joseph Rouse's clarificatory remarks about different kinds of conceptual involvement, and Barbara Montero's reflections on conceptual involvement in expert performance. Gabriel Gottlieb (2011) offers a clear and straightforward response to the central disagreement of the debate. His critique of Dreyfus's phenomenological methodology influences my approach in Chapter Three, and I build upon his discussion of conceptual intentional action in order to make sense of "motor intentional content" in a conceptualist framework. There are two notable papers that directly respond to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Rietveld (2010) and O'Connaill (2014) both recommend that we require a "tailored" philosophical framework to understand unreflective action. Such a framework represents what Charles Taylor (2002) refers to as the "middle ground" between reflective rationality and non-conceptual bodily ability, and is called "the space of motivations" by O'Connaill and "the space of normative significance" by

Rietveld. I critically assess and develop such a framework with reference to Heidegger's phenomenology. I do this in order to make further sense of how perceptual content can be normatively or "practically" significant in a way that "motivates" the relevant intentional action.

Indeed, the relationship between perception and action is a recurrent theme of my thesis. Approaching this topic from a conceptualist perspective is timely, as it has only recently received explicit and sustained interest from the analytic sphere. I draw in particular from Bengson (2016), and also Susanna Siegel (2014). Both refer to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate and are critical of Dreyfus's non-conceptualist approach to the relationship between perception and action. My thesis first of all contributes an account of how Dreyfus's motor intentional content can intelligibly be said to "produce" action by being integrated into a conceptual framework. This represents a development of a suggestion Siegel makes about how Dreyfus's account might be supplemented. Secondly, my thesis contributes that Heideggerian account of practically significant perceptual content outlined above.

The longstanding debate about the status of "knowing-how", which arises from the work of Gilbert Ryle (1945), is essential for understanding and resolving the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Gascoigne & Thornton (2013) discuss the McDowell-Dreyfus debate at some length. Their conceptualist position on knowing-how informs the position I take in Chapter Four. Stanley & Williamson (2001) and Bengson & Moffett (2007) also recommend a conceptualist approach to knowing-how, although the former do not engage with Dreyfus's non-conceptualist approach. I therefore bring these latter approaches into dialogue. I do this in order to achieve a synoptic picture of the

interrelation of bodily abilities and conceptual capacities – that is, the interrelation of knowing-how and knowing-that – where bodily abilities are integrated into a framework of conceptual understanding. Significantly, I develop my own approach to "affective content" that runs parallel to an intellectualist conception of bodily ability. This forms part of my resolution to the principal disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

Finally, my research interprets and utilises the existential phenomenology of Heidegger in a way that challenges Dreyfus's own non-conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger. I do not mean to suggest that Dreyfus's interpretation is the only one on the market, or that it is an uncontentious interpretation. However, it is Dreyfus's interpretation that tends to connect Heidegger to analytic debates such as this one. Sacha Golob states that Dreyfus's non-conceptualist interpretation is the "dominant reading" of Heidegger on intentional content, and associates this interpretation with Merleau-Ponty (2014: 26). Steven Crowell clarifies Golob's assessment here: 'The dominant approach is "dominant" not because it is shared by most Heidegger scholars, but because it is practically the only one to treat Heidegger as an interlocutor in contemporary philosophical debates about intentionality, language, truth, and meaning' (Crowell, 2015: 73). My discussion of Heidegger should be understood in the context of recent scholarship which has sought to rethink Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger in that regard. I should mention McManus (2013), Golob (2014) and Crowell (2015), although only Golob advances an explicitly conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger. Christensen (1997), Schear (2007) and Dennis (2012) also offer alternative interpretations to Dreyfus's. My thesis builds critically on this scholarship.

My view is that the relation between Heidegger's apparent commitment to conceptualism requires reconciliation with his clear focus on the practically oriented dimension of human experience. I dispute Golob's non-Fregean conceptualist interpretation, but draw on his "prototype" account of Heidegger's conceptualism to support my overall argument. I argue that Heidegger's distinction between the "ready-to-hand" and the "present-at-hand" does not amount to a distinction between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, *contra* Dreyfus, but to a distinction between the conceptual frameworks that the relevant empirical concepts are situated in. In brief, I argue that the conceptual framework operative in unreflective action (what Heidegger calls the "existential-hermeneutic as-structure") is composed of specific kinds of "involvement" relations.

By taking this route through the debate and the literature it has generated, I am able to demonstrate how the kind of existential phenomenology that Dreyfus draws from can make a contribution to contemporary, post-Cartesian debates around intentionality and perception, a contribution that does not only turn on ascribing intentionality to the body, but clarifies in a measured way how we should conceive of the role of the mind, and of conceptual capacities, so as not to distort the practically engaged dimension of human life.

1   Unreflective Action and Conceptual Involvement

1.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the phenomenon of "unreflective action" and outline how Dreyfus mobilises it against McDowell's view that conceptual capacities are *necessarily* "operative" in perceptual experience and intentional action (see McDowell, 2007a: 345; 2007b: 366). Dreyfus wants to emphasise the way in which human beings primarily relate to their environment through engaged, embodied, skilful, and unreflective activity. Dreyfus argues that the perception and action involved in such activity does not require, and is in fact incompatible with, conceptual involvement. Dreyfus therefore uses the phenomenon of unreflective action to argue for a non-conceptualist account of perceptual experience and intentional action, *contra* McDowell.

Importantly, such a non-conceptualist account purports to avoid what Dreyfus has most recently termed a "mediational" picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. Such a picture is Cartesian in nature, and philosophically unsatisfactory in that it indicates some detachment or disconnection between the human being and an "external world". Dreyfus takes this picture to arise due a traditional philosophical emphasis on the human capacity for reflection, knowledge acquisition, and conscious thought in general. For Dreyfus, any account of the relationship between the human being and the world that emphasises the role of conceptual capacities – or prioritises the *mind's* relation to the world - is committed to a Cartesian, or mediational picture. In this way, philosophy has ignored the pervasive and fundamental episodes of

unreflective action in which human beings are already immersed and engaged in their environment, prior to any involvement of conceptual mental states. Emphasising the non-conceptual character of unreflective action allows Dreyfus to propose what he comes to call a "contact theory", highlighting how the human being is substantively in *contact* with their environment through their skilful bodily engagement, thus bypassing a Cartesian or mediational picture (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2013).

In **1.2** I unpack what is meant by "unreflective action". I clarify that the term refers to intentional, skilful, and engaged activity that is generally performed without the involvement of reflection, conscious thought, or capacities belonging to the mind. I emphasise Dreyfus's claim that this form of engagement with one's environment is pervasive and fundamental. I also emphasise that Dreyfus takes the lack of involvement of mental capacities to signal the absence of conceptual involvement. In **1.3** I begin to outline the more substantive philosophical implications we can draw from an analysis of unreflective action. I first refer to a Rylean treatment of "knowing-how", to be distinguished from "knowing-that". Ryle argues that knowing how to do something is not a matter of knowing a rule or set of rules. He therefore argues against an "intellectualist" picture, which effectively emphasises the role of conceptual capacities in intentional action.

This epistemological line of thought prepares the ground for Dreyfus's existential-phenomenological treatment of unreflective action in **1.4**. Dreyfus argues for a distinctive form of *intentionality*, arguing that non-conceptual bodily and perceptual skills constitute the primary way in which human beings relate to their environment. "Motor intentional content" is therefore a necessary

condition of conceptual content. In **1.5** I detail Dreyfus's critique of Cartesianism, and how that relates to his appeal to unreflective action and motor intentional content. This involves demonstrating why he thinks that conceptualism is necessarily committed to such a picture, and how his non-conceptualist, "motor intentional" account of unreflective action avoids it altogether, resulting in a "contact theory" of the relationship between the human being and the world that undercuts Cartesian problems concerning the mind's relation to the world.

1.2   Defining "Unreflective Action"

In *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that we must 'see ourselves as animals whose natural being is permeated with rationality' (1994: 79). His formulation of this claim in the final exchange of the debate with Dreyfus is as follows: 'rational mindedness pervades the lives of the rational animals we are, informing in particular our perceptual experience and our exercises of agency' (McDowell, 2013: 41)[10]. McDowell understands human perceptual experience and intentional action to be bound up with the distinctively mental abilities of the human being, or the distinctive character and role of the human mind. Specifically, this entails the view that conceptual capacities are "operative" in perceptual experience and intentional action (see McDowell, 2007b: 366). From the opening paper of the debate, Dreyfus objects to McDowell's claim that the human being's engagement with the world is a necessarily 'conceptual activity' (Dreyfus, 2005: 50; see McDowell, 1994: 111). Dreyfus appeals to a

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[10] Both of McDowell's characterisations here signal his distinctive form of naturalism, wherein he attempts to accommodate the normative character of human thought within a revised conception of the natural world. The acquisition of conceptual capacities is a realisation of one's "second nature" as a human being; I refer to this picture later in the thesis.

phenomenon he calls "embodied coping" to argue against McDowell's characterisation:

> Can we accept John McDowell's Sellarsian claim that perception is conceptual "all the way out", thereby denying the perceptual capacities we seem to share with prelinguistic infants and higher animals? More generally, can philosophers successfully describe the conceptual upper floors of the edifice of knowledge while ignoring the embodied coping going on on the ground floor, in effect declaring that human experience is upper stories all the way down? (Dreyfus, 2005: 47).

Dreyfus's opening paper is meant as a plea to philosophers to pay attention to "embodied coping", and accordingly to reject the idea that conceptual capacities are always operative in perceptual experience and intentional action. Further, Dreyfus seeks to show that embodied coping is pervasive and fundamental, representing a "ground floor" of experience upon which the operation of conceptual capacities becomes possible. For Dreyfus, we have to conceive of the distinctive capacities of the human mind as dependent on these prior capacities that we share with animals. The debate proceeds with McDowell acknowledging the existence of such "embodied coping" - 'Embodied coping skills are essentially to a satisfactory understanding of our orientation to the world' (2007a: 345) – but arguing that conceptual capacities are operative there nonetheless. Rietveld states that the debate 'focuses on McDowell's claims that, in the case of humans, unreflective bodily coping is conceptual and that such unreflective action is permeated with rationality and mindedness' (Rietveld, 2010: 186). The phenomenon of embodied coping – what Rietveld calls "unreflective action" – therefore gives rise to the central disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. In what follows I will provide a substantive definition and characterisation of this phenomenon.

I follow Rietveld in using the term "unreflective action". As we have seen, Dreyfus prefers to use variations of terms like "embodied coping", "skilful coping", or "absorbed coping". My view is that the word "coping" has connotations of enduring some arduous situation, which is not at all something Dreyfus intends to capture. Of course, the term "unreflective action" does not capture everything about the phenomenon that is of interest and relevance in the debate. "Unreflective action" should be understood as a catch-all term for a category of actions or activities that are indeed unreflective, but also skilful, intentional, and entailing engagement, immersion, or *embodiment* in a particular practical situation. Further, unreflective action describes the pervasive and fundamental way in which human beings relate to their environment in the familiar routines of everyday life. I will unpack these aspects of unreflective action in the necessary detail. In this section, I will only gesture toward the philosophical implications that Dreyfus draws from the phenomenon of unreflective action. Relatedly, I will initially only refer to the apparent absence of conscious thought, reflection, or capacities belonging to the mind, in unreflective action. I will, however, try to highlight certain important issues and where in my thesis they are treated in the requisite philosophical detail. I start to draw out the specific philosophical implications in **1.3**, clarifying the role, or lack thereof, of specifically *conceptual* capacities.

First, I want to attend to the distinctively unreflective character of the phenomenon Dreyfus appeals to. In the debate, one example is 'a case in which a person catches a Frisbee on the spur of the moment' (McDowell, 2013: 48). We might think of basic examples like dodging a speeding projectile, scratching a sudden itch, or moving one's foot at the last second to avoid a puddle on the

ground. Now, we can describe these sorts of actions as being "instinctive", "impulsive", or "automatic". These adjectives articulate a sense in which there is no thought process mediating between a stimulus – say, our perception of a Frisbee – and the resultant action – catching the Frisbee. We can imagine, in contrast, examples of action where there is such a thought process. We might think of a person perceiving a large puddle in the street, and briefly working out the best route around it. In giving an account of their action, we refer to a mediational element in describing the way in which the action was the result of a process of deliberation, decision-making, or reflection. In the case of catching a Frisbee "on the spur of the moment", any such reflection or thought process is absent. It is difficult to see when specifically *mental* capacities could come into play here, given the automatic bodily response. Indeed, it is tempting in these cases to attribute the action to something wholly bodily, rather than attribute any responsibility to the *mind*. For Dreyfus, making this latter attribution commits one to '*the myth of the mental*' (Dreyfus, 2005: 47, my emphasis). The myth of the mental is characteristic of Cartesian or mediational pictures of the relationship between the human being and the world, where a primary role is afforded to capacities belonging to the mind.

Consider the expert performances of sportspeople or musicians, where the actions involved are complex than the basic ones above, yet still distinctively unreflective. A world class tennis player, for instance, might be able to return a serve hit at over 130 miles per hour. This action requires them to react in a fraction of a second. In her critical analysis of the phenomenon of unreflective action, Barbara Montero cites a study which finds that 'in grand slam tennis the speed of a ball after a serve is so fast and the distance it needs to travel is so short

that a player must strike it back before she even consciously sees the ball leave the servers' racket' (Montero, 2013: 311; Gray, 2004: 8). A return of serve, then, is a paradigmatic example of an unreflective action. It vividly highlights the way in which the body seems to be reacting to something that our mental capacities simply haven't registered. The writer David Foster-Wallace, a former junior tennis champion, notes that 'pro tennis involves intervals of time too brief for deliberate action […] temporally, we're more in the operative range of reflexes, purely physical reactions that bypass conscious thought' (Foster-Wallace, 2006).

The idea that there is simply no *time* for reflection or conscious thought is important to Dreyfus, drawing on these examples to posit what Gabriel Gottlieb calls his "*argument from speed*": 'For certain expertly skilled actions there is no time for reflection, concepts, or the I, to contribute to the action' (Gottlieb, 2011: 339). In this way, Dreyfus cites the example of a grandmaster playing a version of chess which must be completed in two minutes. We typically think of chess as a distinctly intellectual pursuit, a paradigmatic case of the involvement of the mind. In "lightning" chess, however, 'grandmasters must make moves as fast as they can move their arms, less than a second a move – and yet they can still play master level games' (Dreyfus, 2005: 53). In the same way as a return of serve, the mandated speed of the responses in lightning chess leaves no time for reflection or conscious thought. By definition, if certain actions leave no time for reflection, the actions are therefore unreflective. It is less straightforward, however, to hold that for certain actions there is not time for reflection, and the actions are therefore *non-conceptual*. This latter inference relies on the questionable assumption that conceptual involvement necessarily entails

reflection or conscious thought[11]. This is an assumption central to Dreyfus's case against McDowell.

Focusing on expert performance highlights the *skilful* nature of unreflective action. Indeed, we should associate practical skill or expertise with the ability to act unreflectively. Michael Brownstein defines unreflective action as actions involving 'mastery of a given skill', which unfold 'without the individual who performs them occurrently thinking about what she is doing' (2013: 547).

> Expert action unfolds in the absence of self-reflective thought or conscious self-awareness. Sometimes this phenomenon seems to be an artefact of the fast speed at which sports are played, but it is not unique to fast action or sports. A skilled pianist, for example, might find the rhythm of a sonata only once she stops thinking about whether she is playing well' (2013: 546).

Take a return of serve, which is a clear case of an unreflective action. The return depends on recognition of the ball's trajectory and an understanding of how the ball must be hit for the return to be successful. Spin, angle, and speed – and presumably a range of other factors, like the opponent's position in the court – must all be judged in a split second. The skill and strategic understanding that goes into playing a master-level chess game is well known. Further, the physical skill involved in the return of skill is highly developed and complex. Foster-Wallace notes that 'an effective return of serve depends on a large set of decisions and physical adjustments that are a whole lot more involved and intentional than blinking, jumping when startled, etc.' (2006). Dreyfus's view is that the absence of reflection is the *mark* of the expert. Montero refers to

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[11] This comes to be clarified as the assumption that for some intentional content to count as conceptual, it necessarily needs to be the content of a conscious mental state. I detail the terminology of intentional content in **1.4**.

Dreyfus's view here as *the principle of automaticity*: 'When all is going well, expert performance significantly involves neither self-reflective thinking, nor planning, nor deliberation, nor mental effort' (Montero, 2013: 304). This principle results in a stronger claim from Dreyfus – that any such mental involvement in fact compromises one's ability to act skilfully, and scuppers one's engagement with a particular practical situation.

We therefore arrive at the *engaged*, *absorbed, immersed,* or *embodied* character of the phenomenon Dreyfus appeals to. Dreyfus takes cases of unreflective action to illustrate the way in which the human being can be, and pervasively is, inextricably engaged in a particular practical situation. Nicholas Smith takes the appeal to unreflective action to highlight 'a specific mode of comportment or relation to the world Dreyfus (following Heidegger) calls "involvement"' (2013: 167). This characterisation is meant as a correction to a conception of the human being as an essentially *knowing* subject; a subject who adopts a neutral, disinterested perspective in order to form judgements about their environmental situation. "Engagement" stands in contrast to "detachment", or "disconnection". When one is acting unreflectively, one's perspective is not, as it were, at a distance from the practical situation, but engaged or absorbed within it. Of course, this specification directly relates to Dreyfus's attempt to avoid a Cartesian or mediational picture of the relationship between the human being and the world in favour of a "contact" theory. By emphasising the *engaged* or *absorbed* aspect of the kind of experience pertaining to unreflective action, we can avoid a philosophical picture of a subject, characterised by internal mental states, detached from an external environment. Dreyfus takes McDowell's account of perception and intentional action to be committed to something like

this philosophical picture. I explore this issue in more detail in **1.5**, where I also provide Dreyfus's phenomenological argument that the intrusion of capacities belonging to the mind compromises this involved or absorbed relation to the world; I then assess these associated issues fully in Chapter Two.

Unreflective action should be understood as *intentional action*, as Foster-Wallace refers to above[12]. The actions that Dreyfus refers to in the debate are unreflective and automatic, but they can nevertheless be understood as actions that the agent *meant* to perform. That is, these actions can be understood as expressions of agency, as actions that the agent can take responsibility for. There is a contrast between intentional unreflective actions and non-intentional unreflective actions – call the latter "autonomic" actions. An autonomic action might be something like yawning, or flinching; actions that are involuntary, and belong only to the sphere of bodily reflex. However, it is clear that bodily reflex has much to do with *intentional* unreflective action. There are two broad ways in which we can distinguish an intentional unreflective action – that may include such a role for bodily reflex – from an non-intentional, involuntary unreflective action. The first is with reference to "Anscombean" questions, as Brownstein highlights here:

> [One might argue that] agents who perform skilled unreflective actions can, in principle, accurately answer "Anscombean" questions – "what" and "why" questions – about what they do. When an individual accurately answers such questions, she demonstrates that her action, while unreflective, is nevertheless agential' (Brownstein, 2014: 546 – 547)

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[12] The "intentional" nature of an action here does not necessarily signal a commitment to a particular account of intentionality or intentional content – the intention of an action can be construed in terms of an "intentional state", but etymologically speaking "intentionality" and "intention" are not related.

The idea is that if a question like "why did you do *x*?" yields a response that goes beyond "I didn't know I was doing that", or "I didn't mean to do it", then the action is intentional, or agential, rather than autonomic. McDowell often utilises this line of argument to argue for the rationality and conceptual knowledge inherent in unreflective action (see 2013: 47). To be a little more precise, we can look to Ryle's analysis of action to provide us with an adequate criterion for judging an action to be intentional, rather than autonomic. For Ryle, intentional actions are aptly described with "intelligence-predicates", or "intelligence-epithets":

> Consider, first, our use of the various intelligence-predicates, namely, "wise," "logical," "sensible," "prudent," "cunning," "skilful," "scrupulous," "tasteful," "witty" etc., with their converses "unwise," "illogical," "silly," "stupid," "dull," "unscrupulous," "without taste," "humourless," etc. (Ryle, 1945: 5)

The appropriate application of such epithets to an action signals that an action is intentional. Another way of putting this is that intentional actions admit of normative description, or description that uses evaluative language. As Bengson notes, the application of an intelligence-epithet does not signal that an action is "intelligent" in the narrow sense of "clever". Ryle's "intelligence epithets" include "converses" like "unwise" and "silly". Describing an action as intelligent in this sense really just signifies that the action is intentional, or agential, and can be taken responsibility for by the agent; describing an action as intelligent 'includes all states of intellect and character, even stupidity, idiocy, foolishness, and the like' (Bengson, 2016: 28). The kinds of action that Dreyfus appeals to in the debate are clearly unreflective, but can nevertheless be described using such intelligence-epithets. Dreyfus does not contest the idea that the unreflective actions he refers to are nevertheless intentional and can be

appraised in normative language: 'my coping is mine in that I can break off doing it, and for that reason I take responsibility for it […] Moreover, it is a directed response to the situation that can succeed or fail' (Dreyfus, 2007b: 375). Dreyfus's position lies in what these actions are intentional in virtue of: for Dreyfus, any "intelligence" on display in unreflective action is a distinctive kind of bodily intelligence, rather than intelligence in the traditional sense of involving capacities of the mind. Dreyfus attempts to articulate a form of normativity that operates at the level of bodily intuition, rather than a conceptually articulable standard of acting. I detail and assess this account of the normative character of unreflective action in Chapter Four. I should highlight that the intentional component of unreflective action is important to resolving the debate – acknowledging this component commits one, I argue in Chapter Four, to conceptualist conclusions.

It is worth acknowledging that there are certainly cases of unreflective action that run up to the margins of the distinction between intentional and non-intentional. We might question whether pulling one's hand away from a previously unnoticed heat source counts as intelligent in Ryle's sense – we might describe it as a "wise" thing to do, but there is also a sense in which this action was not genuinely agential, more akin to yawning or sneezing. Notably, Dreyfus raises the interesting case of "distance-standing" (2013: 24). The idea is that there are cultural differences in the distances that people tend to stand from each other in conversation. That somebody stands a certain distance from somebody else is not something they are doing intentionally, nor even something they *notice* doing. Yet, it is a way of acting that is not autonomic – it is a habit cultivated by imitation of people in one's social environment, and if it were brought to one's

attention, an action one could take responsibility for and change. McDowell is prepared to acknowledge that such a habit does not fall within the scope of rationality, and so understanding these marginal cases, while philosophically interesting, is not essential to resolving the debate[13].

Finally, it is crucial to recognise that unreflective action is a fundamental, pervasive, phenomenon. Unreflective action does not only characterise isolated episodes of skilful behaviour, but is the dominant mode in which human beings tend to operate. Schear describes the McDowell-Dreyfus debate as a disagreement over the proper characterisation of 'our skilful embodied rapport with the world' (2013: 2). Now, this "rapport" is taken by Dreyfus to characterise the primary way in which human beings engage with their familiar environment in their everyday lives. Actions that we might think of as the mundane minutiae of day-to-day activity tend to fall under the description of unreflective action. Unreflective action, in this sense, ties our everyday lives together. Think of waking up late for work. One will jump out of bed, hurriedly dress, run down the stairs, and lock the door as one is leaving. Now, we can think of all the actions involved here, and the specific movements involved respectively within those activities. They are intentional actions which entail a skilful, but unreflective engagement with one's environment. Brownstein brings up the example of shoe-tying, an activity that 'involves skill, and [...] is typically unreflective' (2013: 548). In fact, certain everyday actions bear comparison to the unreflective skill we find in paradigmatic forms of expert performance. For example, if one were not an

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[13] Steven Levine disputes, along Hegelian lines, that McDowell should make this acknowledgement (McDowell, 2013: 50 – 51; Levine, 2015). I agree that a case can be made that something like "distance standing" represents a way of engaging in an overall intentional action, and is as such something the agent possesses knowledge of, knowledge that can come in useful in unfamiliar social situations, for instance.

"expert" at running down stairs, this would be an extraordinarily dangerous thing to do. For Dreyfus, we primarily engage with the world in an unreflective manner that relies on bodily expertise. It is activities that involve capacities of the mind that are secondary; this is why Dreyfus describes "embodied coping" as operating 'on the ground floor' (2005: 47). Dreyfus argues that the development of the specific perceptual and bodily capacities that pertain to unreflective action forms a "background" upon which it is possible to reflect on our actions and environment in a way that makes the involvement of distinctly "minded" capacities possible[14]. That is, the acquisition of the skills and capacities pertaining to unreflective action is a necessary condition of the involvement of mental capacities. For example, Dreyfus holds that an empirical judgement is only possible on the basis of a prior familiarity with one's environmental situation that amounts to our skilful ability to unreflectively recognise relevant features and act on the basis of them (see Dreyfus, 2013: 20). I return to this issue in **1.5**, and treat it in some further critical detail in Chapters Two and Four.

By now, I hope to have provided an adequate characterisation of the phenomenon that Dreyfus appeals to in the debate. I have defined "unreflective action" as intentional, skilful, engaged action that is unreflectively performed. Further, we should understand unreflective action to characterise the primary and pervasive way in which human beings relate to their environment. I have also gestured toward some of the philosophical difficulties that Dreyfus takes to arise from a phenomenology of unreflective action. Essentially, Dreyfus's appeal to unreflective action turns on the apparent absence of conceptual involvement, which Dreyfus infers from the absence of reflection or conscious thought. I want

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[14] The "perceptual capacities" pertaining to unreflective action require some detailed explanation, especially as Dreyfus conceives of them. I begin to refer to the topic of perception in **1.4**.

to emphasise this latter point once again; Dreyfus takes conceptual involvement to necessarily entail reflection – accordingly, conceptual involvement and *unreflective* action are incompatible, in Dreyfus's definition of those terms. Given the pervasive and primary nature of unreflective action, Dreyfus thinks it is a philosophical mistake to emphasise the role of the mind in providing an account of the relationship between the human being and the world. The McDowell-Dreyfus debate is in an important sense about clarifying the role that the mind, or the specifically conceptual capacities belonging to the mind, can be said to play in this distinctively unreflective form of engaging with the world.

1.3   An Epistemic Approach

Having characterised and provided a definition of unreflective action, I now want to focus on the substantive philosophical implications we can draw from it. I have noted repeatedly that the role of capacities that belong to the mind is unclear in examples of unreflective action. For Dreyfus, the apparent absence of reflection, deliberation, or any conscious thought process means that *conceptual* involvement is also absent. Now, unreflective action does indeed pose certain problems for typical philosophical conceptions of intentional action. Brownstein provides a clear outline here:

> The phenomenon of flow – of being carried forward unreflectively in the performance of a difficult action – is hard to understand from the perspective of common philosophical views about agency and action. It is hard to understand how an agent can actively choose what to do, or engage in practical reasoning about what to do, or endorse what she is doing, for example, if she is not thinking about herself, or even thinking about anything at all, while she acts. (Brownstein, 2013: 546).

I have defined unreflective action as nevertheless *intentional*, which signals that such action is agential; something that the agent can endorse as something they meant to do, that they can intelligibly take responsibility for. And yet, if there is no decision making on the part of the agent – if there is no process of reflection that led one to choose one action over another – then it is difficult to reconcile the unreflective aspect of these kinds of action with the intentional aspect. Ryle's work on "knowing-how" becomes significant here. It is reasonable to say that Ryle's work focuses on the epistemological dimension of the intentional actions that Dreyfus refers to; Ryle argues that knowing *how* to do something is distinct from knowing *that* something is the case. As we saw above, Ryle is similarly interested in intentional, or "intelligent" actions – those actions, including unreflective ones, that can reasonably be described or assessed with reference to "intelligence-epithets" – and the kind of knowledge that informs them. The philosophical debate around "knowing-how", particularly in the last two decades, is of direct relevance to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate and its possible resolution. I will outline Ryle's epistemological approach as it relates to unreflective action and the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. I will mostly talk about intentional action here, but the applicability to the kinds of unreflective actions that Dreyfus appeals to should be kept in mind.

Ryle begins with what he takes to be a typical philosophical account of intentional human action. On such an account, intentional action 'is a process introduced and somehow steered by some ulterior act of theorising' (Ryle, 1945: 1). For an action to count as intentional, it must 'be guided by the consideration of a regulative proposition' (Ryle, 1945: 2). A regulative proposition essentially

means a proposition that functions as a *rule*[15]. An intentional action is "guided" by a rule insofar as it is an instance of knowing *that* something is the case – i.e. "I know *that* one rides a bicycle by pedalling clockwise" – and utilising this knowledge to carry out the action. It is important to highlight the consideration of rules in this way entails conceptual involvement. If a rule is a proposition, concepts are the constituents of that proposition – "bicycle", "pedalling", "clockwise", and so on. Intentional action depends on possession and combination of the relevant concepts which then function as rules. Bengson & Moffett prefer to use the phrase "propositional attitude", where intentional action is guided by states of mind that have a propositional structure. In this picture, the role of the mind and its distinctive capacities is crucial. Indeed, Ryle refers to such an account as "intellectualist"; wherein 'intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria' (Ryle, 1949: 29). Clearly, an intellectualist account of knowing how to do something clashes with the phenomenon of unreflective action. As we saw most clearly in the case of a return of serve, it is implausible to suggest that the *consideration* of a particular rule or set of rules is in play.

However, Ryle does not in the first instance appeal to the speed or unreflective nature of particular intentional actions. Ryle first identifies a regress in the intellectualist account of intentional action, which he articulates in the following two passages:

> The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, more or less stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it

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[15] I will use the word "rule" from here on, insofar as a rule is understood as articulable in a proposition, and that proposition is regulative.

> would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle. (Ryle, 1949: 30)

> If the intelligence exhibited in any act, practical or theoretical, is to be credited to the occurrence of some ulterior act of intelligently considering regulative propositions, no intelligent act, practical or theoretical, could ever begin. (Ryle, 1945: 2).

If an intentional action is guided by the consideration of a rule, then the consideration of that rule represents a further intelligent or intentional action which itself requires the consideration of a rule. The possibility of drawing upon, say, an *inappropriate* rule, rather than an appropriate one, means that these internal mental acts can themselves be described and assessed using intelligence epithets (see Ryle, 1949: 31). For example, an agent might draw upon, consider, and follow a set of rules pertaining to riding a bicycle, discovering that this is not appropriate to their current goal of riding a unicycle. The consideration of the appropriate rule is therefore an intentional act, and, on the intellectualist picture, requires consideration of a prior appropriate rule. A regress then arises where this chain of considering rules proceeds indefinitely. Ryle therefore takes the intellectualist picture of intentional action to be fatally flawed. I will say something about how Dreyfus utilises this identification of a regress further below. Both Dreyfus and Ryle avoid the regress by disputing that "knowing how" to do something is a matter of possessing propositional knowledge or following rules.

Ryle refers to the chess player in order to argue that knowing how to do something is not a matter of possessing propositional knowledge or following rules. Again, chess might seem to us to be a paradigmatic case of the involvement of propositional knowledge, given that its mastery is identified with

a high level of distinctly mental intelligence[16]. Ryle undermines this assumption by asking us to imagine a good chess player teaching a bad chess player. The good chess player might teach 'so many rules, tactical maxims, "wrinkles" etc., that he could think of no more to tell him' (Ryle, 1945: 5). Further, the bad player 'might accept and memorise all of them, and be able and ready to recite them correctly on demand' (Ryle, 1945: 5). That is, the bad chess player accumulates a whole stock of reliable rules, or propositional knowledge, about how to play good chess. Crucially, though, the bad player might remain bad: 'he might still play chess stupidly, that is, be unable intelligently to apply the maxims' (Ryle, 1945: 5). In *The Concept of Mind* (1949), Ryle states that 'learning *how* or improving in ability is not like learning *that* or acquiring information […] It makes sense to ask at what moment someone became apprised of a truth, but not to ask at what moment someone acquired a skill' (Ryle, 1949: 46). The crucial point here is that the stock of propositional knowledge that an agent can be said to possess is not identical to the practical abilities of that agent; their possession of that knowledge is not a sufficient condition for their *knowing how* to do something. What Ryle calls "intelligent" actions, then, may not always be dependent on capacities that belong to the mind.

We might, of course, acknowledge the role that propositional knowledge – conceptual knowledge – can play in the acquisition of practical ability, while holding that in many cases the propositional knowledge will be outstripped by the ability. Dreyfus makes room for the involvement of rules in this way – but, like Ryle, finds the idea that they are *necessary* for the performance of the action is

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[16] I am aware that at this point I have only hinted at a "bodily" form of intelligence that can be coherently contrasted with mental intelligence – detailing this form of intelligence is my concern from this point onward.

mistaken: 'Riding a bike, for instance, would involve conceptual rules when one is learning, but those conceptual rules are not in play *at all*, not even unconsciously, when one is a skilled cyclist' (Dreyfus, 2005: 52). For Dreyfus, being able to act unreflectively demonstrates that one does not require the involvement of rules – accordingly, there is no need for the concepts that constitute the rule to be involved. There may be a general objection, which Dreyfus hints at above, that rules are still operative at some unconscious level. Dreyfus disputes this, arguing that 'to assume the rules we once consciously followed become unconscious is like assuming that, when we finally learn to ride a bike, the training wheels that were required for us to be able to ride in the first place must have become invisible' (Dreyfus, 2005: 52). The actions that might be practiced with reference to conceptual guidelines become a matter of habitual skill. Indeed, the kind of anti-intellectualism inspired by Ryle 'denies that internal states of engaging propositional content play any role in accounting for Intelligent action', and that "intelligent", or intentional action 'is grounded in powers – abilities or dispositions to behaviour – rather than attitudes' (Bengson & Moffett, 2011: 15). When one acquires an ability to act, there is a qualitative handover in the sorts of capacities that are playing the crucial role. While mental, conceptual, capacities can play a role in acquiring a particular ability to act, those capacities recede when the agent has reached a certain level of competence. The intentional action is rooted in some "ability" or "disposition" that does not amount to a "propositional attitude", a propositionally structured mental state which guides the action.

Now, Dreyfus draws from the existential phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to argue for a non-conceptualist account of intentional action

and the perceptual experience involved. In doing so, he spells out the kind of non-mental ability, or set of abilities, that characterises unreflective action. Merleau-Ponty, in fact, speaks in the straightforwardly epistemic terms of a Rylean approach to intentional action. Here, he describes the distinctive kind of "knowledge" that is in play in the case of an expert typist:

> To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eyes. If it is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action, what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 144).

The crucial thing here is that the knowledge that the typist employs "*cannot be formulated in detachment from [bodily] effort*". The knowledge that the typist employs cannot be "encoded" in propositional form. Dreyfus does utilise a regress argument like Ryle's; we can see here that he substitutes "intellectualist" for "cognitivist": 'the cognitivist will either have to admit a skill for applying these rules or face an infinite regress' (Dreyfus, 1980: 8 – 9). For Dreyfus, the assumption that we have to refer to something other than bodily ability to characterise our intentional action, particularly our unreflective action, is mistaken. Dreyfus asks why we 'shouldn't just accept that one simply does what the situation requires, without recourse to rules at all?' (Dreyfus, 1980: 9). For Dreyfus, insisting on a role for conceptually based capacities like rules or propositional attitudes here is to fall into "the myth of the mental" (Dreyfus, 2005). The sort of unreflective skill on display in certain forms of intentional action is analogous to the skill that animals display in their own engagement

with the world – and we do not seek to ascribe propositional mental states to animals.

We saw that Dreyfus draws such an analogy to animals at the beginning of the debate (Dreyfus, 2005: 47). We could understand unreflective action – and intentional, skilled action more generally – as the kind of refined habitual actions that animals are capable of. The problem, of course, would be preserving the idea of human agency – the idea that human beings have responsibility for their actions, and that their actions can be assessed in normative terminology. Dreyfus recognises that if we do not preserve this distinctly human form of agency, we arrive at an account where the acting agent is being 'pushed around like a thing by meaningless physical and psychological forces' (Dreyfus, 2005: 56). We must therefore account for the crucial intentional component of human action, in the Rylean sense of "Intelligence". Ryle's distinction between "intelligent capacities" and "habits" speaks to this problem: 'It is tempting to argue that competences and skills are just habits' (Ryle 2009: 30). Ryle's distinction here doesn't correlate with either Dreyfus or McDowell's understanding of action, but his wish to avoid a flatly causal conception of human action is edifying[17]:

> The well regulated clock keeps good time and the
> well-drilled circus seal performs its tricks flawlessly,

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[17] Ryle regards at least some intentional unreflective actions, such as walking down the street, as simply "habitual" and not intelligent. The further distinction Ryle makes is between "drill" and "training"; training results in genuinely intelligent actions, and drill results in habitual actions which do not display intelligence (see Ryle, 2009: 30 – 31). However, if a habitual action is nevertheless intentional, there is still a philosophical difficulty in specifying how it can be both habitual, or unreflective, *and* intentional. That a particular action is the result of drill does not – logically speaking - abdicate us from responsibility for that action. Presumably an action that is the result of drill is an action that the agent *knows* that they habitually perform on the relevant occasions – this means that drill-based actions don't belong to the same category as actions like "distance-standing", where the "drill", so to speak, has happened by way of a long process of subpersonal imitation of people in the agent's social environment. This point really just consolidates what I said about the intentional component of action in **1.2.**

yet we do not call them "intelligent". We reserve this title for the persons responsible for their performances. To be intelligent is not merely to satisfy criteria, but to apply them, to regulate one's actions and not merely to be well-regulated. A person's performance is described as careful and skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. (Ryle, 2009: 17).

McDowell's own account of intentional action is primarily concerned to avoid an analogy between the intentional action of human beings and the mechanistic way in which a 'well-drilled circus seal performs its tricks flawlessly'. A human intentional action is defined as such because the human being is not simply *caused* to perform a particular action by a stimulus, but through a *justificatory* and accordingly normative relation to a stimulus. I deal with McDowell's account in full in Chapter Four. It is worth noting that if we define knowing-how, or unreflective forms of intentional action, in terms of refined bodily ability, philosophy then relinquishes explanatory control to the sciences. Indeed, Dreyfus is clear in the first paper of the debate that the relevant explanatory models of unreflective action are most likely to come from science. He cites Walter Freeman's development of a "nonlinear dynamical system" model of the brain, which is apparently inspired by Merleau-Ponty's writings on the body (Dreyfus, 2005: 50). Later in the debate, however, Dreyfus is keen to establish a normative component to unreflective action that keeps it within the remit of philosophical analysis. I provide a critical analysis of Dreyfus's conception of normativity in **4.4.** For now, I want to move on to the topic of the *intentionality* of unreflective action. The philosophical implications of unreflective action are not solely epistemological. Indeed, understanding the kind of intentionality at work in unreflective action allows us to get clear about

how to preserve the "intelligent" or "intentional" component of unreflective action.

1.4   Unreflective Action and Intentional Content

The problem of "knowing-how" is not a narrowly epistemic issue for either Dreyfus or for Ryle. Bengson & Moffett argue that although the regress argument is 'perhaps Ryle's most famous challenge to intellectualism, it may not be the most influential' (Bengson & Moffett, 2011: 11). They refer to Ryle's view that intellectualism 'serves to misrepresent "daily experience" and the "quite familiar facts of ordinary life', in the sense that it 'violates an intuitive distinction between the theoretical and the practical' (Bengson & Moffett, 2011: 10 – 11). This is to broaden a epistemological problem into the terms of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. That is, the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is essentially about how to characterise what Schear refers to as the human being's 'skilful embodied rapport with the world' (2013: 2). The debate isn't simply about whether certain actions rely on conceptual knowledge. It is about the way in which human beings relate to or "understand" their environment in the pervasive mode of unreflective action. Gascoigne & Thornton refer to such an issue in their appraisal of knowledge-how:

> […] understanding is part of knowing *how* […] for Ryle, knowing-how is *essentially* object-involving since it relates to the contextual sensitivity of the abilities and capacities that comprise it. In an obvious sense, then, knowing how does connote a basic structure of intentionality (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013: 38 – 39).

One way of putting this point is to say that knowing-how does not only involve how to move one's limbs in a particular way. It crucially involves some understanding of the environment or practical situation that one is actively

engaging with. Gascoigne & Thornton's reference to the structure of "intentionality" tries to capture this point.

I referred to intentionality in my introduction; a state or event is "intentional" or has "intentionality" if that state or event is directed at or is about some state of affairs. The term "intentionality" is re-introduced into philosophical discourse in the 19th Century by Franz Brentano, who defines it in the following terms: 'The common feature of everything psychological [...] consists in a relation that we bear to an object. The relation has been called *intentional*; it is a relation to something which may not be actual which is presented as an object' (Brentano, 1969: 14). Intentionality is usually attributed to *mental* states; believing, knowing, or thinking, for example. Again, if an agent has a thought that the bus is late, the intentional content of that thought is "the bus is late". Further, the content here is clearly conceptual, and propositionally structured; on a Fregean understanding of conceptual content, we therefore posit concepts as abstract entities that are the constituents of the propositional content. In my introduction, I referred to the idea of a human *relation* to the world, and how best to picture this relation. This relation is described more precisely in terms of intentionality. Gascoigne & Thornton highlight that knowing-how connotes a structure of intentionality because the relevant actions necessarily entail some sensitivity to aspects of environmental states of affairs. For example, a chess player might know how to respond to a particular attacking move. Their intelligent response depends on their being in an intentional state that is about the relevant state of affairs; that is, the positions of the pieces on the board. As I mentioned in the introduction, we might therefore conceive of *perceiving* as an

intentional state – whose content, in this case, would propositionally specify the positions of the chess pieces.

In the debate, the topic of intentionality is treated more or less synonymously as the topic of perceptual experience; both McDowell and Dreyfus take perceptual experience to have some form of intentionality. For McDowell, the intentional content of perception is irreducibly conceptual: 'our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way out to the world's impact on our receptive capacities' (McDowell, 2007a: 338). For Dreyfus, however, holds that the perception involved in practically engaged, unreflective activity is non-conceptual. I want to contextualise this principal disagreement in terms of a question posed by Bengson (2016) about the relationship between perception and intentional action: how can perception be said to *produce* intelligent action? (2016: 26). Bengson makes clear that "intelligent" action simply signals intentional, agential action that can be assessed in normative terms. Bengson's description of how perception seems to *produce* intentional action also works to encompass those unreflective actions that Dreyfus appeals to:

> Stated abstractly, perceiving things to be a certain way may in some cases lead directly to action of a certain kind – specifically, to action that is not blind but displays the agent's quality of mind: for example, her *wisdom*, *skill*, or *sensibility* or, perhaps instead, her *foolishness*, *incompetence*, or *dullness*'. I say that perception leads *directly* to action in the sense that there is no intervening conscious steps or transitions. One perceives, and, straightaway, one acts – not mindlessly, but *intelligently*' (2016: 26).

The way in which Bengson poses the question in terms of perception *directly* producing an intentional action works to highlight and preserve the

unreflective aspect of our intentional responses to the environment. We can understand the principal and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate in terms of this question. Both McDowell and Dreyfus take distinctive positions on how perception directly "produces" intentional action. McDowell's account turns on the way conceptual perceptual content provides reasons for the agent's unreflective response – this requires unpacking in detail, which I do in Chapter Four.

Dreyfus's account of how perception directly produces intentional action is, of course, a non-conceptualist account. The ability to unreflectively respond to an environment isn't based in "perceiving things to be a certain way", as Bengson puts it. That is, unreflective responses are not predicated on being in an intentional state composed of concepts. Sacha Golob points out that 'one of the most influential moves in phenomenology is to argue that the explanatorily primary ascription of intentionality should not be to mental states, but instead to the body in some extended sense of that term' (2013: 6). Dreyfus makes this move, arguing that the perceptual experience involved in unreflective action has a distinctive kind of intentional content that he has referred to as "motor intentional content" [18] (see Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). Dreyfus draws from the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger here. A common reading of Heidegger takes him to argue that 'we are familiar with our environment and the paraphernalia that we encounter in it primarily through our skills and abilities, our competences, rather than through cognition' (Blattner, 2006: 56). Heidegger states in *Being and Time* that our familiar environment is 'completely unobtrusive and unthought'; 'when we enter here through the door

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[18] There is some discontinuity in how Dreyfus uses the notion of content, which I clarify below.

we do not apprehend the seats, and the same holds for the doorknob' (Heidegger, 1982: 172) [19]. Smith provides a useful description of our intentionally shaped, unreflective engagement with a familiar environment, in which our perceptual experience does not contain conceptual intentional content.

> In everyday coping activity, such as turning a door knob upon leaving a room, keeping one's balance while walking along an uneven path, or holding a hammer while joining some wood, on simply deals with the situation one is in without reflecting upon anything or noticing any conceptual or propositional content.

> Rather than having properties of objects "in mind" – such as the shape of the doorknob, the direction of the path, the weight of the hammer – which are ready for some conceptualising operation which may or may not be enacted (the assertion "that doorknob is round", "this path is uneven" etc.), we simply cope with the environment by pre-reflectively responding to whatever opportunities for or obstacles to action it affords (Smith, 2013: 167).

In the pervasive mode of practically engaged unreflective activity, then, the content of our perceptual experience need not be conceptual. Smith's description of the environment "affording" responses to it becomes important here. The term "affordances" belongs to the psychologist J.J. Gibson: 'the affordances of the environment are what it *offers* to the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill' (Gibson, 1986: 127). Gibson's view of perception aligns with Dreyfus, insofar as the practical role of perception is more fundamental than its role in providing us conceptual knowledge of an environment. Gibson emphasises that 'what we perceive when we look at objects are their affordances, not their qualities […] phenomenal objects are not built up of qualities; it is the other way around. The affordance of the object is what the infant begins by noticing' (Gibson, 1986: 129). Although Dreyfus does

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[19] All citations of Heidegger use the English pagination.

use the term "affordance", he comes to prefer the term "solicitation". The latter term is supposed to capture how those perceived features of the environment relevant to unreflective action 'are related to the needs and desires of the perceiver' and aren't reducible to *facts* about what opportunities for action an environment affords (Dreyfus, 2013: 37n12, see also 2013: 22). Dreyfus wants to distinguish a general sort of affordance, such an apple's affording eating, from an agent and situation specific experience of an apple's *soliciting* one to eat when one is hungry. Therefore, 'one can think of solicitations as relevant affordances' (Dreyfus, 2013: 37n12; see also 2007a: 357).

Crucially, for Dreyfus, the way in which the environment solicits one to respond is not happening at the level of the conscious awareness of the agent. The perception of a solicitation is "registered", so to speak, on a bodily level. To 'be true to the phenomenon' of unreflective action, for Dreyfus, we should specify that 'we not only do not need to *think that* the door affords going out […] We need not even respond to the door *as* affording going out […] we needn't apprehend the door at all' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). In other words, there is no awareness involved that represents an intentional state that involves conceptual capacities[20]. This is where Dreyfus's conception of motor intentional content comes in; his account of how perception can be said to produce intentional, unreflective action. Hudin offers a clear definition of Dreyfus's position here:

> Dreyfus is an advocate of non-representational intelligent behaviour that is a function of non-representational perceptual content – a kind of intentional content known as *motor intentionality.*
> (Hudin, 2006: 574)

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[20] I say a little more about how Dreyfus departs from Gibson's conception of affordances in Chapter Four; essentially, Dreyfus cannot preserve the way in which Gibson understands affordances to be "meaningful", or "value-laden".

Dreyfus derives the notion of motor intentionality from Merleau-Ponty: 'To give a name to intentional activities that essentially involve our bodily, situational understanding of space and spatial features, Merleau-Ponty coins the phrase "motor intentionality"' (Kelly, 2002: 377). Merleau-Ponty describes our body as being 'better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have at the means of our disposal' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 277). For Dreyfus, motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content. Before we are able to make conceptual judgements about the environment, we need to have this prior motor intentional relationship to it.

I agree with Hudin that "motor intentionality" is largely meant to characterise the intentional content of perceptual experience, for Dreyfus. However, I find it useful to distinguish between two components of motor intentionality, both the perceptual content, and the skilful, bodily response itself. Dreyfus states that 'being drawn [to act unreflectively] and responding to the draw [behaving skilfully and intelligently] are interdefined in one unitary phenomenon' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Dreyfus means to give a complete account of how perception and action are interrelated in unreflective action. In Chapter Four, I make a further distinction between the overall intentional action, and the particular, bodily skilful way in which the action is carried out. Of course, we should associate the skilful bodily response here with *knowing how* to carry out the overall intention in the appropriate way. It should therefore be associated with the epistemic approach to unreflective action that I discussed above. Accordingly, I return to an epistemic approach in Chapter Four, in order to argue that such knowing-how entails conceptually structured knowledge. For now, I am concerned to focus on the perceptual content of motor intentionality.

Dreyfus argues that such content is operative on the level of bodily *feeling*: 'the body of the performer is solicited by the situation to perform a series of movements that *feel appropriate*' (Dreyfus, 1999: 55). We might therefore refer to this sort of content as "affective" content. However, I will continue to use the term "motor intentional content" as a catch-all term for the general form of intentionality that pertains to unreflective action.

Now, the pertinent question is clearly *how* the body of the performer is solicited in such a way that produces reliable, intelligent actions. Above, Hudin describes a "functional" relationship between the perceptual content and the intelligent behaviour. In order to explain how this functional relationship is generated, Dreyfus argues that the unreflectively acting agent has, through training or gradual habituation, developed a sensitivity to 'subtler and subtler *similarities and differences of perceptual patterns*' (Dreyfus, 2013: 35). We can see this interplay of perception and response at work in Dreyfus's example of the chess grandmaster. Dreyfus notes that 'the speed of lightning chess suggests that the master isn't following rules at all and so must be able to directly discriminate perhaps hundreds of thousands of types of positions' (Dreyfus, 2005: 55). As such, the chess master is 'directly drawn by the forces on the board to make a masterful move' (Dreyfus, 2013: 35). The experience of being "directly drawn" by particular "forces" is what I am calling affective content. Dreyfus also describes such content in terms of "attractions and repulsions" (Dreyfus, 2007a: 357). Dreyfus therefore offers something like a non-conceptualist account of Gibsonian affordances, where the unreflectively acting agent does not cognitively take account of the affording feature of the environment, but finds themselves simply "drawn" to act in the appropriate way. We find a similar

account of affective content in Merleau-Ponty's description of a football player's experience of their environment:

> For the player in action the soccer field is not an "object". It is pervaded by lines of force […] and is articulated into sectors (for example, the "openings" between the adversaries), which *call for a certain mode of action*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 168).

These kinds of developed perceptual capacities should not be identified with the development of a repertoire of appropriate conceptual capacities, for Dreyfus[21]. The capacity to discriminate certain perceptual patterns is akin to a physical skill. Indeed, bodily skills and perceptual capacities are developed in tandem. Dreyfus describes this process: 'as the agent acquires skills, these skills are "stored", not as representations in the mind, but as more and more refined dispositions to respond to the solicitations of more and more refined perceptions of the current situation' (Dreyfus, 1999: 49). In an unreflective intentional action, some relevant aspect of the situation will be perceived in the sense of *unconsciously registered*. This "unconscious registering" triggers an ingrained bodily response which has developed in tandem with the relevant perceptual capacity, which we can understand in terms of "knowing-how". We therefore have some account of how perception can be said to "produce" intentional action.

I will try to sum up what I have said here in a way that leads into Dreyfus's critique of a "Cartesian" picture of intentionality. For Dreyfus, affective or motor intentional content cannot be construed in conceptual terms. Dreyfus is unambiguous on this point:

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[21] This is complicated by Dreyfus's view that conceptual capacities *can* help develop the requisite perceptual capacities, in the same way that one might develop "know-how" with reference to rules. I deal with this in **2.5**, and it is also a theme of Chapter Four. See Dreyfus, 2013: 18.

> Absorbed coping does not involve conceptual intentional content in McDowell's sense; instead it involves motor intentional content, and no ''aspect'' of motor intentional content is ''present'' in a ''form'' which is ''suitable to constitute the contents of conceptual capacities''. The phenomena show that embodied skills, when we are absorbed in enacting them, have a kind of content which is nonconceptual, non-propositional, non-rational (even if rational means situation-specific), and non-linguistic (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360).

I want to emphasise Dreyfus's claim that 'no "aspect" of motor intentional content is "present" in a "form" which is "suitable to constitute the contents of conceptual capacities' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). The kind of affective content on display in phenomenological descriptions of unreflective action is, for Dreyfus, simply qualitatively distinct from conceptual content. It is content that belongs to developed bodily and perceptual capacities, and does not depend on possession of any relevant concepts, nor any form of distinctly mental intelligence. We may see some initial difficulties that this account presents. We might reasonably hold that unreflective action does not entail the involvement of conceptual rules that govern the action – that is, that knowing-how is a non-conceptual phenomenon. Furthermore, we can entertain the idea that there are going to be developed perceptual capacities in play which our bodily abilities are reliably "keyed onto", but do not entail, conceptual content. However, it would surely also be reasonable to hold that unreflective action entails *some* conceptually based recognition of certain relevant aspects of our environment.

I return to this criticism of Dreyfus's phenomenology in Chapter Three, where I assess McDowell's conceptualist account of perceptual content. Of course, Dreyfus denies that there is any such conceptually based recognition, and states that 'the world we are drawn into when we are absorbed in coping

does not stand over against us a set of facts that can be captured in propositions but rather is *directly* lived by the absorbed coper as a shifting field of attractions and repulsions' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Interestingly, Dreyfus holds that any attempt to bring conceptual capacities to bear on this motor intentional, affective content can only distort it in a way that neutralises its role in "producing", or "motivating" the relevant intentional actions:

> To focus on the motor intentional content, then, is not to make some implicit conceptual content explicit—that's the myth—but rather to transform the motor intentional content into conceptual content, thereby making it available for rational analysis but no longer capable of directly motivating action (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360).

Dreyfus argues this point in reference to two further, interrelated claims. First, Dreyfus thinks that his account of affective content explains the way in which the agent is able to respond in specifically appropriate ways to specific situations. I want to treat Dreyfus's claim here in Chapter Four, where I can bring it into proper critical dialogue with McDowell's counter-argument. Second, Dreyfus takes the involvement of conceptual capacities to imply a phenomenological form of *Cartesianism*, where the acting agent becomes *detached* from their engagement with a specific practical situation, and no longer able to skilfully deal with their environment. Dreyfus's underlying philosophical motivations therefore come into play here.

1.5   Conceptual Content and Cartesianism

So far, I have outlined Dreyfus's view that the phenomenon of unreflective action – skilful, intentional, engaged action – does not entail the

involvement of concepts. The knowledge, intentionality, and perception proper to unreflective action does not seem to involve conceptual capacities, or require any such capacities that belong to the mind. I have also emphasised that unreflective action is a pervasive and fundamental mode in which human beings engage with the world. This becomes more important, as Dreyfus thinks that his appeal to unreflective action has significant philosophical implications. Dreyfus argues that a non-conceptualist account of unreflective action allows us to avoid what he refers to as "the mediational picture" of the relationship between the human being and the world, and to affirm a "contact theory" of this relationship. In this final section of the chapter, I will unpack this argument; doing so allows me to go on to clarify how a conceptualist account can in fact avoid that same Cartesian picture.

In the debate, Dreyfus predominantly refers to "the myth of the mental" in critiquing conceptual involvement. However, Dreyfus's critique of conceptual involvement is articulated more precisely in *Retrieving Realism* (2015), which he co-authors with Charles Taylor two years after the conclusion of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. The target of the "myth of the mental" becomes "the mediational picture". The mediational picture is an essentially *Cartesian* picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. Both Dreyfus and McDowell take traditional forms of philosophy to have difficulties affirming a "common sense", "natural", or "default" picture of the human being's relationship to the world[22]. That is, traditional philosophical frameworks struggle to provide a picture of the relationship between the human being and the world that fits the way in which we ordinarily understand ourselves to be engaged and

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[22] I owe the term "default" to DeGaynesford's work on McDowell (2004).

in touch with our familiar environment. For both Dreyfus and McDowell, traditional epistemological approaches have resulted in a picture where the human being is *disconnected* or *detached* from the external world (I referenced this idea in my definition of unreflective action in **1.2**). Such a philosophically unsatisfactory picture is termed "the mediational picture" by Dreyfus & Taylor.

What we want, of course, is a picture where the human being has direct access to the external world, where our experience, thought, and language seamlessly connect up to the external world. Smith rightly points out that Dreyfus's emphasis on unreflective action, particularly the *engaged* aspect, 'is meant as a corrective to Cartesian and empiricist conceptions of the mind as the realm of the 'inner', as a series of discrete mental items variously labelled 'ideas', 'impressions', 'sense data' and so forth' (Smith, 2013: 168). Dreyfus notes that he and McDowell have a similar general sense of what a satisfactory picture of the relationship between the human being and the world should entail. Dreyfus says that McDowell 'sounds as if he is channelling Heidegger when he speaks of "our unproblematic openness to the world",' (McDowell, 1994: 155; Dreyfus, 2005: 45). He also approvingly notes McDowell's affirmations that the human being is 'embodied, substantially present in the world that she experiences and acts on', and 'always already engaged with the world' (McDowell, 1994: 155; 134). Crucially, however, Dreyfus doesn't think McDowell can make good on these kinds of descriptions. Through his insistence on the involvement of conceptual capacities, Dreyfus argues, McDowell remains committed to the mediational picture.

Dreyfus & Taylor initially put the mediational picture in epistemological terms. The idea is that our knowledge of the external world is *mediated* by inner mental states:

> To sum it up in a pithy formula, we might say that we (mis)understand knowledge as "mediational." In its original form, this emerged in the idea that we grasp external reality through internal representations. Descartes, in one of his letters, declared himself "certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the ideas I have within me" (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015: 2)

Dreyfus & Taylor further clarify their description of this picture as "mediational"; 'We want to call this picture "mediational" because of the force of the claim which emerges in the crucial phrase "only through"[…] in knowledge I have a kind of contact with outer reality, but I get this only through some inner states' (2015: 2). For Dreyfus & Taylor, this mediational component to empirical knowledge implies an essential disconnect between the human being and the world. As we can see above, Dreyfus & Taylor trace this problem back to the dualist philosophy of Descartes, which Dreyfus sometimes refer to as entailing a "subject-object" picture (see Dreyfus, 2001: 49). In a *Cartesian* picture, the mind of the human subject – "the ideas I have within me" - is sharply distinguished from external objects – "what is outside of me". The mind is conceived as an interior realm, its connection to the external world in need of further philosophical explanation. Dreyfus's phenomenological background comes into play here. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that a Cartesian framework is always going to offer an unsatisfactory picture of the relationship between the mind and the world. He expresses the inherent problems with the separation of a subjective mental realm from an external world here:

> And no matter how this inner sphere may get interpreted, if one does no more than ask how cognition makes its way "out of" it and "achieves transcendence," it becomes evident that the cognition which presents such enigmas will remain problematical unless one has previously clarified how it is and what it is. (Heidegger, 1962: 87)

For Heidegger, if we presuppose the idea of an internal mental realm then our philosophical options become limited. We shore up the disconnection between the human being and the world to such a degree that scepticism becomes difficult to discount. Heidegger states that 'the problem of reality in the sense of the question whether an external world [...] can be proved turns out to be an impossible one' (Heidegger, 1962: 250). Dreyfus & Taylor follow Heidegger in arguing that once this dualism of subject and object is in place, any attempts to show how the subjective realm correlates with the objective realm are going to be unsatisfactory. Here, Dreyfus describes such a picture as a Cartesian ontology that motivates traditional epistemology:

> This ontology understands the subject as a self-sufficient mind related to the objects in the world by way of internal mental states that in some way represent those objects but in no essential way depend on them. The radical gap between what is inside the mind and is outside in the world must be mediated in order for a subject to have knowledge of the world, and epistemology is the study of this mediation (Dreyfus, 2004: 52).

The closest we will get to a point of contact is some sort of resemblance between the internal representation and the external state of affairs. Even in this case, the internal representations are not dependent on any states of affairs. Dreyfus & Taylor suspect that any account of how the *mind* gets connected to the world is not going to provide the sort of picture that we want to affirm as long as it remains within a Cartesian framework.

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Dreyfus & Taylor acknowledge that their focus on explicit, representational mental states may be a distortion of contemporary philosophy's approach to this topic. However, they do take the mediational picture to manifest in any philosophical account that appeals to capacities belonging to the mind. This is reflected in Dreyfus & Taylor's clarification of the differing forms the mediational picture can take. An important example here would be their description of the problems with developments in 20th Century philosophy of language. The idea that inner mental representations play the crucial role is tacitly or explicitly rejected in favour of a focus on 'sentences held true by an agent' (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015: 3). Dreyfus & Taylor do not spell out what this entails, but it is likely that they are referring to the ways in which we can attribute possession of a concept of an external state of affairs to a subject. As we saw in the introduction, possession of a concept can be spelled out in Fregean terms. I take it that Dreyfus & Taylor have something like a Fregean approach to concepts in mind when they refer to a focus on "sentences held true". McDowell's own specific understanding of "conceptual" will become important as my thesis progresses.

In any case, Dreyfus & Taylor recognise that the overall shift away from internal representations to a grasp of language may avoid an explicit Cartesian distinction between inner subjective experience and external reality. However, they recognise "the same basic pattern" of the mediational picture insofar as the linguistic turn still assumes that 'the reality is out there, and the holdings true are in minds; we have knowledge when these beliefs (sentences held true) reliably correspond to the reality; we have knowledge through the beliefs' (2015: 3). Dreyfus & Taylor's problem is not only with explicit reference to mental states,

but with any appeal to the sort of relation that is made possible by our cognitive faculties. In this way, Dreyfus & Taylor are also opposed to the idea that *perceptual experience* is essentially structured by capacities that belong to the mind. Here the mediational element appears 'as categorial forms, ways we have of conceptually structuring the input, of making sense of it for ourselves' (2015: 10). The idea that human beings relate to the world in virtue of their possessing concepts that "structure" sensory input is of course relevant to McDowell's conceptualism. McDowell's conceptualism, even specified in Fregean terms, remains within the mediational picture.

It is important to see how the mediational picture relates to Dreyfus's non-conceptualism about unreflective action and the perception involved. The crucial claim that Dreyfus makes here is that the involvement of concepts compromises our ability to unreflectively engage with the world. Conceptual involvement interrupts or arises in the interruption of our skilful engagement with the world. Dreyfus's principal example is the case of Chuck Knoblauch, a baseman for the New York Yankees. At some stage in Knoblauch's career, according to Dreyfus, he began to consciously "monitor" those aspects of his performance that gave him time to think – 'he couldn't resist exercising his capacity to reflect' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354). Now, Knoblauch 'could still play brilliant baseball in difficult situations – catching a hard-hit ground ball and throwing it to first faster than though' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354). However, other aspects of his performance saw an extreme dip in quality:

> What he couldn't do was field an easy routine grounder directly to second base, because that gave him time to think before throwing to first. I'm told that in some replays of such easy throws one could actually see Knoblauch looking with puzzlement at his hand trying

> to figure out the mechanics of throwing the ball. There was nothing wrong with Knoblauch's body; he could still exercise his skill as long as the situation require that he act before he had time to think (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354).

Dreyfus uses the case of Knoblauch to argue that 'the enemy of expertise is thought' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354). More precisely, Dreyfus argues that when conceptual thought arises, an agent who was previously engaged or immersed in an environment 'experiences himself as a thinking, acting, self-aware subject distinct from its world' (Dreyfus, 2013: 31). This description represents Dreyfus's phenomenological analysis of an experience like Knoblauch's, when he stares in confusion at the baseball. Dreyfus's view here rests in his understanding of what the involvement of concepts entails. Dreyfus takes concepts to play a principally descriptive, epistemic role – concepts are 'devoted to getting it right about a distanced reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 23). Dreyfus states that McDowell conceives of the world 'in largely descriptive terms, and our openness to it as distanced taking in' (Dreyfus, 2013: 22). Indeed, McDowell bemoans that Dreyfus does assume his conceptualism to restrict 'operations of conceptual capacities (capacities that belong to rationality) to their exercise in detached intellectual activity' (McDowell, 2013: 54). McDowell sums up Dreyfus's assumptions about the involvement of conceptual capacities here, substituting "conceptual capacities" or "rationality" for "mindedness":

> Dreyfus assumes, and thinks I accept, that if mindedness informs an experience, the subject has a detached contemplative relation to the world she experiences, and that if mindedness informs an action, the agent has a detached monitoring relation to what she is doing (McDowell, 2013: 41).

Of course, concepts do play an epistemic role; McDowell insists on their pervasiveness in experience at least in part to preserve a genuinely empiricist

conception of knowledge. Dreyfus's assumption about the role of concepts here is not completely unfounded – however, we will see that it is mistaken. So, for Dreyfus, conceptual involvement either interrupts or arises in the interruption of our skilful engagement with the world.

> When [a human subject] is totally merged with the world there is no place for *content*, neither experiential nor propositional – there is nothing that is in any sense inner […] there is no way [conceptual content] could be introduced into the absorbed activity of the coper in flow without abolishing that activity by creating a distance between agent and world (Dreyfus, 2013: 29)[23].

Dreyfus argues that the entrenched philosophical difficulty in relating the mind the world – "the mediational picture" – is caused by focusing on these isolated instances of conceptual involvement, where our engagement with the world is compromised and we become "detached". Our experience is describable in the Cartesian terms of a detachment between subject and object. For Dreyfus, the philosophical focus on this epistemic aspect of our experience of the world overlooks a non-epistemic, non-conceptual basis on which human beings first relate to the world. It overlooks the way in which human beings are skilfully, unreflectively, and non-conceptually absorbed into their environment. If philosophy were to focus on this *primary* way in which human beings were in contact with the world, the mediational picture wouldn't cause the difficulties it does. Dreyfus concedes that to completely overcome the mediational picture we would need to show how the epistemic, conceptual aspects of our relationship to the world arise from the practical, non-conceptual aspects (Dreyfus, 2005: 61).

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[23] Of course, Dreyfus makes the prior claim that there *is* a kind of "experiential" content at work in "absorbed activity", which we saw him refer to as "motor intentional content" (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360), which he seems to call into doubt here. There is seemingly a discontinuity in his position. However, I will continue to refer to the "motor intentional" or "affective" content in Dreyfus's account; as long as we consistently do this with clear reference to Dreyfus's own phenomenological descriptions (and bearing in mind that he himself has previously referred to it as "content"), there is no danger of distorting Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account.

However, at least one point of his emphasis on the non-conceptual character of unreflective action is to undercut a mediational picture of the human being and the world, and to undermine what he takes to be a Cartesian focus on bridging a gap between the mind and the world. His appeal to the primacy of motor intentional content is designed to avoid Cartesian assumptions about the relationship between the human being and the world.

1.6   Conclusion

I have defined "unreflective action" as intentional action that is unreflectively and skilfully performed in an engaged or absorbed manner. I outlined the way in which unreflective action poses certain problems for traditional conceptions of knowledge and intentionality – wherein knowledge of our actions or environment is "knowledge-that", and where intentionality is conceptually structured. Dreyfus draws upon existential phenomenologists to argue that unreflective action does not entail conceptual involvement, and that we might reasonably describe our familiar engagement with our environment as "motor intentional", following Merleau-Ponty. For Dreyfus, "motor intentional content" is a necessary condition of the involvement of conceptual content. Further, an appeal to the primacy of motor intentional content allows Dreyfus to avoid a problematic "mediational" or Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world.

In sum, this chapter presents Dreyfus's claims that a conceptualist account of perception and action cannot accommodate unreflective action, and that conceptualism shores up an unacceptably Cartesian picture of the

relationship between the human being and the world. Expounding Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account of unreflective action in detail was necessary for properly appraising his position in the debate. Going forward, I attempt to systematically call his non-conceptualist position into question. I build a picture of the involvement of conceptual capacities that demonstrates how a conceptualism like McDowell's can accommodate and better explain the phenomenon of unreflective action. The next two chapters focus primarily on how the involvement of conceptual capacities, or a conceptualist account of unreflective action, can avoid Dreyfus's view that they necessarily imply Cartesianism.

2   Conceptual Involvement and Cartesian "Detachment"

2.1   Introduction

In my previous chapter I defined unreflective action and the philosophical implications that Dreyfus draws from it. For Dreyfus, unreflective action proceeds without the involvement of concepts, and represents a fundamental intentional relation to the world that conceptual forms of perception and action is conditional on. This contrasts with McDowell's understanding of perceptual experience and intentional action, which he holds to be irreducibly conceptual. In the closing stage of the chapter, I emphasised that Dreyfus takes his non-conceptualism to avoid a "mediational picture" between the human being and the world. For Dreyfus, any account of the relationship between the human being and the world that emphasises the role of conceptual capacities is committed to a deeply philosophically unsatisfactory "mediational picture". This picture is Cartesian in nature, and philosophically unsatisfactory in that it indicates some detachment or disconnection between the human being and the world.

Dreyfus thinks that such a picture arises because of a traditional philosophical emphasis on episodes of reflection and conscious thought, ignoring the more pervasive and fundamental episodes of unreflective action. Crucially, Dreyfus makes a phenomenological claim that the involvement of conceptual capacities interrupts or scuppers our skilful engagement with the world. We become "detached" from the world, and our experience becomes describable in the Cartesian terms of a subject detached from an object. This chapter focuses on this claim, disputing both Dreyfus's phenomenology *and* his

interpretation of Heidegger, in line with my concern to re-evaluate the relevance of existential phenomenology to contemporary debates around intentionality.

In **2.2** I explore Dreyfus's interpretation and usage of Heidegger's phenomenology; Dreyfus purports to derive his hard distinction between conceptual involvement and its absence from Heidegger. This involves defining a number of Heideggerian concepts – the ready-to-hand, the present-at-hand, the understanding, and circumspection. In **2.3** I argue against Dreyfus's claim, demonstrating that conceptual involvement does not necessarily interrupt skilful engagement, and in some cases plays a necessary role in this engagement. In **2.4** I refer to Heidegger's conception of *interpretation*, which his account of explicit conceptual involvement. Contrary to Dreyfus's reading, Heidegger does not conceive of conceptual involvement as entailing a detachment between the human being and the world, and has much the same view about its necessity in our skilful engagement. In **2.5**, I briefly assess the resulting implications for Dreyfus's claim that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content. I conclude in **2.6**, highlighting how my argument here has undermined the association Dreyfus makes between conceptual involvement and Cartesianism, and how conceptual content such as judgements can be indispensable to human practically engaged experience.

2.2   Conceptual Content and the Present-at-hand

Dreyfus is influenced by a series of concepts and distinctions that Heidegger posits in *Being and Time* (1926). However, Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger's work, although influential and perhaps "dominant", is not

uncontentious. It should be kept in mind at this early stage that Dreyfus too readily associates Heidegger's conception of intentionality with the "motor intentional content" I outlined earlier. In what follows, I provide an account of Heidegger's conception of "understanding", and the associated notion of "circumspection", before discussing what Heidegger means by the "ready-to-hand" and the "present-at-hand". I emphasise how Dreyfus utilises Heidegger here to argue that conceptual involvement entails a detachment between the human being and the world that is explicable in terms of a Cartesian framework.

First of all, Heidegger uses the term "understanding" to denote a primary form of intentionality, which should look familiar to us. Heidegger emphasises that this term should not be taken with the traditional connotations of something cognitive. Rather, he states, it should have the 'signification of "being able to manage something", "being a match for it", "being competent to do something"' (Heidegger, 1962: 183)[24]. The "understanding" manifests specifically in what Heidegger calls "circumspection", which is Heidegger's name for the sort of perceptual experience that pertains to our practical engagement with our environment. Heidegger is popularly thought to be arguing for a *non-conceptualist* form of intentionality that bears resemblance to Ryle's work on knowing-how, and Merleau-Ponty's conception of motor intentionality. Carman defines the Heideggerian understanding as 'the way we make sense of entities by dealing with things available for use in everyday practical activity [...] Understanding means *knowing how*, and it precedes and makes possible cognition, or *knowing that*' (Carman, 2003: 207). Carman is emphasising here that the Heideggerian

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[24] In Chapter Five, I argue that Heidegger is not trying to throw out any role for the "cognitive", but is trying to show how cognition is integrated into practically engaged experience, thus avoiding those "traditional" connotations.

understanding is not a matter of *conceptual* understanding – "knowing that". Wrathall's description of the Heideggerian understanding emphasises the importance of practical skill over the involvement of mental capacities: 'in virtue of our skilful knowing-how to be in our world, rather than via any cognitive processes, the world itself, without any mental mediation, directly calls forth our intentionally shaped response' (Wrathall, 1998: 185). Elsewhere, Blattner takes Heidegger to be articulating how human beings are 'familiar with our environment and the paraphernalia that we encounter in it primarily through our skills and abilities, our competences, rather than cognition' (2006: 56). 'the space of possibilities in which we operate is wider and richer than can be described by our propositional resources […] we are capable of more than we describe. Understanding, as Heidegger uses the term, is this mastery of more than we can describe' (2006: 86). In the debate with McDowell, Dreyfus defines circumspection as 'the mode of awareness in which absorbed coping takes account of things without our *apprehending* them in *thought*' (2013: 18).

Now, it is important to highlight that Heidegger's use of terms like "thematic", "non-thematic", "thematised", and "unthematized" are conventionally taken to correspond to "conceptual" and "non-conceptual". Therefore, a statement like 'the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects', is taken to mean that we do not relate to our environment through conceptualising it. Elsewhere, Heidegger claims that "thematising" our understanding of the environment would 'reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind' (Heidegger, 1962: 185). Heidegger's concern about "reducing" our understanding of our environment down to a cognitive phenomenon speaks particularly to Blattner's point – that the way in

which human beings relate to their environment in a way "wider and richer" than our conceptual repertoire allows. Simply on these grounds, a non-conceptualist interpretation of certain aspects of Heidegger's work seems reasonable. It is worth noting, again, the popularity of this interpretation. Golob highlights that a non-conceptualist interpretation is the "dominant reading" of Heidegger on intentionality, quoting Dreyfus as the representative (and most influential) proponent of this reading: 'Dreyfus, for example, states bluntly that the primary level of [human] experience is "nonconceptual, nonpropositional, nonrational, and nonlinguistic" (Golob, 2014: 26; quote from Dreyfus, 2007b: 352). Golob is one recent commentator who has challenged this interpretation; I draw on his work in Chapter Five.

This non-conceptualist interpretation applies to the primary Heideggerian distinction between the ready-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*) and the present-at-hand (*vorhandenheit*). Readiness-to-hand is usually understood to refer to the environment and the objects within it insofar as they are perceived, or understood, and acted on in an unreflective manner in the context of everyday concerns (see Heidegger, 1962: 98). Heidegger's conception of the ready-to-hand corresponds to the kind of relation that one has to their environment in unreflective action. Presence-at-hand is usually understood to refer to the environment and the objects in it insofar as they are perceived, or understood, from a neutral, theoretical perspective that defines them in terms of their material or causal properties. The present-at-hand describes 'the ways in which things show up in a neutral mode, not in their significance for us, but as they appear to a disengaged agent, who is concerned just to make a neutral portrait of reality' (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015: 36).

There are two aspects of an object's being ready-to-hand. Heidegger is at times clear that the ready-to-hand denotes an unreflective mode of engagement. Heidegger uses the term "withdraw" to describe the way in which ready-to-hand objects seem to elude our cognitive attention: 'the peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically' (Heidegger, 1962: 99). John Richardson aptly demonstrates that Heidegger's emphasis on non-mental capacities is intended in term "ready-to-hand" – 'objects are ready-to-hand for Heidegger 'in the sense that the hand is prepared for them, ready to reach out to them, in order to use them, order them, or put them out of the way (2012: 93). A ready-to-hand object, Heidegger states, 'is not grasped thematically as an occurring thing' (1962: 98). We can reasonably conclude that "grasping" a ready-to-hand object is not a matter of conceptualisation. The ready-to-hand can reasonably be understood to be a non-conceptual phenomenon.

In this way, ready-to-hand objects are associated with Heidegger's conceptions of the understanding and circumspection; if the understanding connotes a mode of intentionality, it is a mode of intentionality that pertains to ready-to-hand objects; if circumspection is a mode of perception, it is a mode of perception that pertains to ready-to-hand objects. Dreyfus certain plays up the similarity of the ready-to-hand to motor intentional content. Dreyfus draws up a chart for McDowell that categorises the ready-to-hand with other characteristics of non-conceptual unreflective action: 'absorption in the flow', 'attractions and repulsions', and the inability 'to answer what and why questions' (Dreyfus, 2013: 32). As we have seen, Heidegger's descriptions of the ready-to-hand as "non-

thematic" and resistant to "deliberate thinking" lend Dreyfus's interpretation and use some textual support.

Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand is not only supposed to draw attention to the non-conceptual way in which we perceive and act upon objects in our skilful engagement with them. There is a contextual aspect to the ready-to-hand; something is ready-to-hand in virtue of belonging to what Heidegger calls a "totality of involvements". A hammer would be ready-to-hand in virtue of its relations to other ready-to-hand objects like nails and wood, its relations to tasks, and how those tasks fit into a wider set of human activities and existential concerns (see Heidegger, 1962: 98). Heidegger clarifies that readiness-to-hand not only defines those objects that we are unreflectively engaged with, but also all of the objects that make up our familiar everyday environment. In this way, Heidegger means the term to apply to any objects that we perceive in terms of their relation to human activity – from furniture, to buildings, and even to "natural" objects like forests and rivers (see Heidegger 1962: 100). We must note Heidegger's claim that we do not cognitively focus on the contexts that an object belongs to (Heidegger, 1962: 98). Again, this claim offers support to Dreyfus's non-conceptualist, motor intentional interpretation of Heidegger.

Crucially, it is possible to advance a non-conceptualist interpretation that doesn't rely on assumptions about what Heidegger means by "thematic". Heidegger talks explicitly about the involvement of linguistic judgements – he uses the term "assertion". By focusing on Heidegger's discussion of assertions, we can get a more precise idea of how Heidegger conceives of conceptual involvement. It is through this line of thought that Dreyfus derives his association of conceptual involvement with detachment and the mediational

picture. Heidegger seems to hold that when a ready-to-hand entity becomes an object of a judgement, the intentional content is qualitatively transformed. He claims that when an object becomes the subject of a judgement, its readiness-to-hand becomes "veiled". Heidegger explains that a ready-to-hand object articulated in a judgement becomes 'cut off from that significance, which, as such, constitutes environmentality' (Heidegger, 1962: 200 – 201). We can see that Heidegger is associating conceptual involvement with the possibility of our becoming detached from the objects of our practical concerns. At this point, his conception of the present-at-hand comes into play. In the cited passage, cutting the object off from its contextual significance and its practical role entails 'letting one see what is present-at-hand in a determinate way' (Heidegger, 1962: 201). That is, conceptual content does not capture the ready-to-hand objects of our perception and action, but renders them present-at-hand. This is how the prevalent interpretation of Heidegger on conceptual content generally runs; Schear states that it is a 'virtual consensus among commentators that judgement is correlated with present-at-hand entities' (2007: 136). In order to see what this correlation entails - to see what it means for conceptual content to render objects "present-at-hand" - we need an adequate definition of the present-at-hand.

The "present-at-hand" is a notion that plays a complex role in Heidegger's wider corpus. Rehearsing the core of the idea in *Being and Time* will be adequate for my purposes here. In one sense, we can characterise the present-at-hand as simply denoting perceived objects which are *not* ready-to-hand, either in the motor intentional or contextual sense. Present-at-hand objects are not part of a totality of involvements, they are not perceived and acted on in terms of their role in human concerns, and they are not unreflectively utilised by bodily

ability in skilful engagement. Again, Richardson defines the present-at-hand intuitively: 'entities-at-hand are "objects"; they are "at-hand" in the sense that they sit inertly before our idle hands as we consider them apart from our purpose' (Richardson, 2012: 93). So much can be inferred from Heidegger's claim that linguistic judgement cuts ready-to-hand objects off from their relevant contexts, and renders them present-at-hand. It is in this way that the present-at-hand is associated with simply *staring* disinterestedly at an object (McManus, 2014: 55). Staring, of course, stands in stark contrast to the kind of "circumspective" perception involved in skilful engagement.

However, it is not that objects become unintelligible as they switch from ready-to-hand to present-at-hand. The idea is more that we relate to them solely in terms of their material or causal properties. Paradigmatically, then, we might think of a present-at-hand object as the kind of object that natural science investigates. Preliminarily, it can be said that we relate to the present-at-hand only from a theoretical perspective that is aimed at explicating the causal and physical properties of natural objects, which serves to detach us from our skilful engagement with the world (see McManus, 2014: 56). Golob offers three definitions of the present-at-hand that are adequate to what I have said so far:

> […] a substance in either an Aristotelian, Cartesian, Leibnizian, or Kantian sense; an entity individuated by reference to its spatio-temporal and causal properties; an entity in so far as it is "cut off from" the holistic web of instrumental, social, and other relations which define the Heideggerian concept of "world" (Golob, 2014: 16-17)

If the present-at-hand is not reconcilable with the kind of objects that we encounter in our engaged, skilful activity, and conceptual content is indeed necessarily correlated with the present-at-hand, then we can understand

Dreyfus's opposition to a conceptualist account of our skilful engagement with the world. Of course, I want to argue that we should *not* make this correlation.

Before I move on to this line of argument, I want to link the present-at-hand a little more precisely to Dreyfus's concern about conceiving of the human being's relationship in terms of a Cartesian picture – that is, in terms of a detachment between the human being and the world. Dreyfus's concern is also informed by a reading of Heidegger, precisely because Heidegger intends the present-at-hand to represent the kind of ontology that we find in Descartes' subject-object model of the human relation to the world. In Heidegger's view, Descartes does not allow for a conception of objects as we relate to them through our skilful engagement; he defines objects as substances with material properties – the kind of objects 'which mathematical knowledge is exceptionally well suited to grasp' (Heidegger, 1962: 129). By "mathematical knowledge", Heidegger means the kind of theoretical knowledge which underpins natural science. Indeed, Heidegger describes our knowledge of the natural world as 'a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it' and further states that it 'lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look*' (Heidegger, 1962: 88). Descartes assumes that the only "genuine access" to the world 'lies in knowing, *intellectio,* in the sense of the kind of knowledge we get in mathematics and physics' (Heidegger, 1962: 128). Thus, the human being is defined in terms of their capacities to describe the world in scientific terms. This is where the distinction between a knowing, theoretically guided subject, and a world of material, calculable objects arises.

We have seen that Dreyfus wants to avoid the Cartesian picture of the human relationship to the world because it is phenomenologically inaccurate.

The kind of knowledge that is appropriate to mathematics and science clearly does not characterise our skilfully engaged relationship to the world. Heidegger's conception of the present-at-hand and the link he makes to conceptual content really lies at the heart of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, because it is under Heidegger's influence that Dreyfus has come to regard conceptual content as implying, in McDowell's words, 'detached intellectual activity' (2013: 54) of the kind appropriate to a scientific description of the world. McDowell's focus on the relation between the *mind* and the world, and his appeal to conceptuality to make that relationship philosophically palatable, becomes, for Dreyfus, a focus on the present-at-hand. Dreyfus advances this view explicitly in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. In the chart that Dreyfus draws up for McDowell, he categorises conceptual content with "subject-object" intentionality and the present-at-hand (Dreyfus, 2013: 32; box 1.2). Dreyfus also states that McDowell thinks of the world in 'largely descriptive terms, and our openness to it as distanced taking in' (Dreyfus, 2013: 22). In Dreyfus's view, conceptual content and its concomitant expression in linguistic judgement is directed toward material objects with material properties, and only possible on the basis of a detachment from contexts of human concern. In this way, conceptual content is incompatible with skilful engagement. He does not ever concede that conceptual content can perhaps capture the relevances and contextual aspects of the perceptual world.

Dreyfus's negative view of conceptual content is aggravated by Heidegger's account of why conceptual content might arise - the experiential transition from engaging with ready-to-hand objects, to theoretically grasping present-at-hand objects, appears in his analysis of what he calls the *unready-to-hand* (*unzuhanden*). This is a notion that Dreyfus draws on regularly. Heidegger

uses this term to refer to a disruption or a breakdown of an environmental situation that we were previously unreflectively engaged with. Our skilful engagement with the world is *interrupted* in some way. The classic example is a tool like a hammer breaking, or our finding that it is unfit for a particular task. These situations, for Heidegger, 'have the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of presence-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1962: 104).

In his 1991 commentary on Heidegger, Dreyfus describes breakdown cases as Heidegger leaving open 'a place for traditional intentionality' (Dreyfus, 1991: 70). Dreyfus states that in these cases – such as a hammer being too heavy for its purpose - 'a distance opens up between the coper and what he is acting on which is bridged by a situation-specific concept. The coper can make the judgement that the hammer is too heavy' (Dreyfus, 2013: 19). Notice that Dreyfus holds that an experiential detachment between a subject and an object occurs even in the case of a *situation-specific* concept. Dreyfus's reference to situation-specific concepts is, I think, an attempt to carve out a middle ground in order to make sense of the idea that 'unreadiness-to-hand is a "deficient mode" of readiness-to-hand, not a mode of presence-at-hand' (Blattner, 2006: 58). I will come back to this in some detail below. Dreyfus repeats his insistence on the link between conceptual content and detachment with reference to Heidegger's phenomenology of the unready-to-hand. When our skilful engagement with the world is interrupted due to a breakdown of some kind, the unreflective actor 'no longer experiences his absorbed coping as pervaded by mineness, but experiences himself as a thinking, acting, self-aware subject distinct from its world' (Dreyfus, 2013: 31).

We can question whether Dreyfus's phenomenology is accurate here. When something goes wrong in a practical situation we are skilfully engaging with, is there really a qualitative shift in the content of our experience? Do we experience a shift from engaging with the world to theoretically describing it? We might consider the possibility that Dreyfus is trying to articulate some kind of qualitative shift because of his deep-seated suspicion about conceptuality. Dreyfus continues to hold that conceptual content arises only interrupts or arises in the interruption of skilful activity, and renders our experience explicable in subject-object terms: '[…] there is no way [conceptual content] could be introduced into the absorbed activity of the coper in flow without abolishing that activity by creating a distance between agent and world (Dreyfus, 2013: 29). Now, we have seen that this "distance between agent and world" is associated for Dreyfus with the present-at-hand, with objects that are made intelligible by natural science and a theoretically guided subject. Heidegger does sometimes tend toward endorsing this picture in his analysis of the unready-to-hand. When we make a judgement like "the hammer is too heavy", Heidegger holds that the judgement allows us to assess the object in terms of its material properties, and this in turn represents a handover from the ready-to-hand to the present-at-hand (see Heidegger, 1962: 201). As with his previous comments on the nature of judgement, there again is the temptation to take Heidegger's existential phenomenological lesson to be that conceptual content entails a theoretical description of the physical world.

I should briefly summarise what I have said so far. Through an interpretation of Heidegger, Dreyfus arrives at the view that conceptual content is correlated with the present-at-hand – with a detached, theoretically guided

subject and material objects. He therefore assumes that conceptual content is incompatible with our skilful engagement with the world, which leads to the further assumption that conceptual content either interrupts or arises in the interruption of skilful activity.

Now, the first problem here is that Dreyfus fails to recognise that conceptual content does not necessarily de-contextualise or detach objects from our practical or existential concerns – Dreyfus unjustifiably treats all conceptual content as entailing a theoretical description of material or causal properties. Secondly, Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger simply ignores a whole raft of *other* textual evidence that suggests that Heidegger holds a far more philosophically innocent conception of conceptual content. McDowell is right in his assessment of the problem at the heart of the debate, that Dreyfus wrongly 'restricts operations of conceptual capacities (capacities that belong to rationality) to their exercise in detached intellectual activity' (McDowell, 2013: 54), and refuses to make concessions to the contrary. Accordingly, we need to start trying to fix this mischaracterisation. We should begin throwing doubt on the view that the involvement of conceptual content is a Cartesian phenomenon that implies the interruption of skilful activity, or detachment, or a subject-object model of the human relationship to the world. We can do this by showing how the *explicit* involvement of conceptual content is often necessary to that skilful, engaged activity that Dreyfus highlights.

2.3   Skilful Engagement and Conceptual Involvement

In her essay "A Dancer Reflects", Barbara Montero questions the idea that conceptual capacities, or mental capacities in general, cannot be at work in skilful activity. She seeks to correct Dreyfus's position that skilful activity is a function of non-conceptual bodily ability, only interrupted by conceptual involvement. She specifically argues against what she calls *the principle of automaticity:* 'When all is going well, expert performance significantly involves neither self-reflective thinking, nor planning, nor deliberation, nor mental effort' (Montero, 2013: 304). This principle manifests in Dreyfus's non-conceptual characterisation of unreflective action. Montero, as her title suggests, reflects on her experiences as a ballet dancer and notes how conceptual involvement was key in her skilful performances.

Now, Montero does not claim that all intentional action entails conceptual involvement – and again, this is not something that I am attempting to argue for in this chapter. She is prepared, for example, to accept that a return of serve in tennis does not involve conceptual capacities. Montero instead offers something like a set of counter-examples to Dreyfus's appeal to Knoblauch's loss of expertise. She states that 'even if returning a serve in grand-slam tennis does not involve thinking about what one is doing, performing the White Swan *pas de deux* very well might' (Montero, 2013: 312). Montero, again, is happy to concede that 'most dancers are not focusing primarily on such fine-grained details of their movements' (2013: 312), and as such allows for a non-conceptual form of intentional action. She only argues that such mental focus *does* arise, and often arises in order to supplement skilful activity, and certainly not to interrupt it, or detach us from it. Montero states that mental focus and conceptual involvement

'occurs even in the best performances […] for example, sometimes a very specific detail, such as "lift" direct at, say, my elbow, might be what is in mind' (Montero, 2013: 312):

> In addition to these sorts of thoughts, there were the willed commands (I *am* going to nail that coming balance!), which can be seen as a form of planning – as well as numerous thoughts about what the other dancers are doing on stage […] there are thoughts about lighting, sets, the floor (which I recall, was often a major concern: Is it slippery? Is it sticky? Where is the bump in the tape?), and so on […] some thoughts, such as reaching a mark on stage, are just part of the performance. (Montero, 2013: 313).

Montero's description of her skilful activity does not correspond to Dreyfus's phenomenology. Remember, Dreyfus claims that conceptual involvement only serves to interrupt skilful activity and move us from a state of engagement into a state of detachment. However, the involvement of conceptual capacities here is not interrupting the skilful activity. Conceptual involvement has not arisen because something has gone wrong, or because there has been an equipmental or environmental breakdown. When Montero thinks about the slipperiness of the stage, she is not experiencing herself as a subject detached from her engagement with the world. There is certainly no sense in which the concepts involved amount to a disinterested description of the immediate environment; the environment is not "cut off" from a context of interest, and the objects of Montero's thought processes are not "present-at-hand".

A significant problem with Dreyfus's phenomenological account of conceptual involvement is that it engenders a sharp divide between conceptuality and skilful engagement. It tends toward a picture that only makes

room for conceptual involvement at certain rare points which break us out of an unreflectively acting stupor. As we have seen, Dreyfus describes such a handover as suddenly experiencing oneself as a distinct subject, detached from a world of material objects (see Dreyfus, 2013: 31). Montero's analysis helps us to call the accuracy of this phenomenology into question. In Montero's account of her time as a dancer, conceptual involvement arises in the course of skilful activity, not in the interruption of it. Nicholas Smith makes a valuable connection between the McDowell-Dreyfus debate and Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work* (2004). Rose's target is the societal prejudice that practical vocations are less intellectually demanding. Rose reveals 'the operations of conceptual capacities in places where, due to ideological distortions, the denizens of modern societies least expect them: the carpenter's workshop, the physiotherapist's clinic, the hairstylist's salon, and so forth' (Smith, 2013: 172). Smith draws attention to a carpenter's description of the conceptual involvement inherent in their activity: 'there's always some element of awareness to the work, for safety, but also because the task at hand will have its own demands, require its own minor adjustments' (Rose, 2004: 78; Smith, 2013: 172).

We can therefore see that Montero's analysis applies to everyday practices as well as expert performance. Both Montero and Smith want to draw attention to how conceptual content is drawn upon in skilful activity for the *sake* of that activity. It is not that conceptual involvement arises for the sake of providing an accurate description of the environment. It is rather that skilful engagement with the environment often requires this conceptual involvement. The role that conceptual involvement plays is not restricted to the interruption

of skilful engagement with the world, but is often a necessary component of such engagement. In the context of his assessment of Heidegger's conception of assertion, or judgement, Schear notes much the same point.

> As I am wielding a hammer while hanging paintings, I make a series of situated judgements about whether the nails sufficiently protrude to serve as hooks. As I am salting the soup, I taste it and pass judgement about whether or not it needs more salt. The tasting and judging are essential *parts* of the activity of salting, not *other* than the activity. (Schear, 2007: 2)

Dreyfus does not consider examples like these in the debate with McDowell. He considers only those examples where conceptual involvement, such as judgements, compromises our skilful engagement with the environment – as in the Knoblauch case. He remarks: 'that thematising usually undermines expert practice suggests that thinking transforms the perceptual and social field. A field of forces only exists when there is no distance between the absorbed coper and the field' (Dreyfus, 2013: 27). In the examples I have canvassed so far, conceptual involvement is not undermining expert practice. Judgements like "this needs more salt" do not interrupt our skilful activity, and it is difficult to see where a "transformation" of our perceptual field is happening in these cases. Positing a philosophically substantive shift in experience when conceptual involvement arises is simply the result of inaccurate phenomenology. We might say that conceptual involvement "supplements" expert practice, but this is too weak. The conceptual involvement in these examples is inextricable from the expert practice itself – as Schear says, the conceptual content here is not *other* than the activity.

It is worth remembering here that Dreyfus thinks that non-conceptual unreflective skilful action is fundamental and pervasive in our everyday

engagement with the environment. One diagnosis might be that Dreyfus has an idealised conception of how human beings skilfully and unreflectively engage with their familiar environments. His account emphasises examples which demonstrate that such engagement works best when it is wholly unreflective. Carleton B. Christensen notes Dreyfus's idealistic conception of the self-sufficiency of our solely practical capacities: 'a simplified culture in an earthly paradise is conceivable in which the members' skill mesh with the world so well that one need never do anything deliberately or entertain explicit plans and goals' (Christensen, 1997: 102; Dreyfus, 1991: 85). This is to point out that Dreyfus takes our unreflective, skilful engagement with the world to proceed in an overwhelmingly smooth and effortless manner. Christensen offers some basic, everyday examples of skilful engagement in order to call Dreyfus's rose-tinted characterisation into question:

> Such occurrences as a man stepping out in front of me as I ride my bike to the university are quite common. It is not as if they only come along every so often, jolting us out of absorbed coping […] Everyday, effortless, unthinking bike riding consists in dealing smoothly with things which are by their nature refractory to one degree or another: never perfect for the job, never just where they ought to be, always obdurate and above all capable of interacting with other things in unexpected but relevant ways. (Christensen, 1997: 102 – 103)

Christensen's point here is that minor difficulties and unexpected barriers are thrown up all the time in our skilful engagement with the world. Much of the time, though, we do not experience these things as interruptions or breakdowns, even when we have to briefly deliberate or think about our best course of action – in short, when conceptual involvement arises. We might think of walking through a busy street or town square – there might be instances

where the best route through the crowd is not clear. A companion might say something like "this way" in response to the situation. At no point here is our skilful engagement with the world interrupted. In his own contribution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, Robert Pippin draws attention to the way in which we ordinarily take our skilful engagement to involve some form of conceptual awareness. He emphasises that in skilful engagement, 'I can be careless, sloppy lazy, or careful and extremely attentive. This is an indication of how an engagement is sustained and that is an indication of a structurally complex level of mindedness' (Pippin, 2013: 95)[25]. This is an intuitive point; it is something we ordinarily express about skilful activity in the course of everyday life. We might think of telling somebody to "be careful" or to "pay attention" if they are acting or working in a careless manner. If we are not sufficiently focused when making our way through the busy market square, someone might tell us to watch where we are going. Christensen makes this point particularly shrewdly, remarking that 'the law, if not Dreyfus, would not regard philosophical absentmindedness at the wheel as in any way exemplifying motoring expertise' (Christensen, 1997: 103).

What we get, then, is a picture of conceptual involvement where conceptual involvement is specific to the particular practical situation. Dreyfus does come close to conceding this point with reference to Heidegger's conception of the unready-to-hand. This analysis, however, is riddled with confusion. Dreyfus takes a situation-specific judgement like "the hammer is too heavy" as an example of propositional content that is appropriate to a particular practical situation. Dreyfus still insists that this propositional content can only

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[25] As we will see, this point is also applicable to wholly unreflective action with no straightforward sense of conceptual involvement.

occur in the interruption of skilful engagement with the world: 'in the face of a disturbance, a distance opens up between the coper and what he is acting on' (Dreyfus, 2013: 19). However, he then says that this distance 'is bridged by a situation-specific concept […] the coper can make the judgement that the hammer is too heavy' (Dreyfus, 2013: 19). His admission that situation-specific conceptual involvement is possible may signal a concession that this does not necessarily entail detachment, the present-at-hand, or a subject-object model of human experience. The idea that the distance is "bridged" by a concept, Dreyfus notes, brings this 'account of action into proximity to McDowell's' (Dreyfus, 2013: 19). Dreyfus is presumably happy to accept McDowell's account of conceptual involvement in these cases.

However, Dreyfus takes a situation-specific judgement like "the hammer is too heavy" to contrast with a non-situation specific judgement like "the hammer weighs five pounds" (Dreyfus, 2013: 32). As we would expect, Dreyfus categorises this latter judgement with the present-at-hand, insofar as it is conceptual content. However, he categorises situation-specific judgements with "motor intentional content" (Dreyfus, 2013: 32)[26]. It is unclear what the distinction between conceptual and motor intentional content amounts to in this case. Even if "motor intentional content" is supposed to signify situation-specificity, the fact that this content is expressed, or at least expressible, in a linguistic judgement means that it is incontrovertibly *conceptual* content. Further, it is unclear how Dreyfus intends to sustain such a distinction. What stable metric could one establish for determining which judgements count as "motor

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[26] As I noted in Chapter One, my use of the term "motor intentional content" in this thesis as a whole is informed by Dreyfus's use of it in (2007a). His usage of it here is very different, in line with his clarified view that unreflective experience cannot be characterised in terms of "content" at all, "motor intentional content" comes to be associated with the unready-to-hand.

intentional" and situation-specific, and which do not? For example, one could easily imagine a practical situation to which a judgement like "the hammer weighs five pounds" would be specific. Dreyfus should concede that conceptual involvement can simply be situation-specific[27].

To better understand Heidegger's purposes, we should contextualise his discussion of the unready-to-hand. Heidegger's analysis features in a section of *Being and Time* entitled "How the worldly character of the environment announces itself in entities within-the-world" (1962: 102). Heidegger means to demonstrate how the contextual structure of equipment, tasks, and existential concerns become explicit, or "thematic" to us. An example here is useful. Heidegger analyses a routine practical situation in which one finds a tool has gone missing: 'our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*' (Heidegger, 1962: 105). It is through these situations that an environmental context we usually operate unreflectively within becomes "lit up" or "announces itself" (Heidegger, 1962: 105). At least one of the purposes of the unready-to-hand is to demonstrate how we come to have an explicit grasp of the contexts that we usually operate within in an unreflective manner. Heidegger's conception of "interpretation" provides the underpinnings for this analysis. Further, pursuing Heidegger's phenomenology here provides valuable evidence that conceptual involvement is not correlated with the present-at-hand.

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[27] In **3.5**, I begin to extrapolate the technical details of how conceptual content can be "situation-specific".

2.4   Heidegger on *Interpretation*

Leaving aside inconsistencies in Dreyfus's analysis, the general picture that he attributes to Heidegger is one wherein conceptual involvement either interrupts or arises in the interruption of skilful engagement with the world. Conceptual involvement becomes correlated with the present-at-hand. In fact, Dreyfus misrepresents Heidegger's view of conceptual involvement, and the kinds of practical situations in which conceptual involvement can arise. We should not attribute Heidegger a definite position on conceptual involvement on the basis of the narrow range of evidence we find in his discussion of the unready-to-hand. Heidegger's discussion of conceptual involvement is more wide-ranging. In the main, his account of conceptual involvement accords with my overall argument in this chapter: that conceptual involvement does not imply detachment, is not incompatible with skilful engagement, and is in many cases *essential* to skilful engagement.

We have seen that Heidegger's conception of "understanding" is popularly taken to denote something like a non-conceptual "knowing-how" in relation to the range of practical situations that form our everyday lives. I have noted the textual evidence for this reading. Heidegger's discussion of "understanding" is followed by a discussion of what he calls "interpretation". Heidegger's account of interpretation focuses on those cases in which we can no longer rely on our "know-how", but where we require the involvement of concepts. We begin to "thematise" our experience. It is uncontentious to associate Heidegger's conception of "interpretation" with "conceptualisation". Heidegger makes clear that when we linguistically articulate our "interpretative"

experience – that is, in a proposition – the content of that proposition already 'lay before us as something expressible' (Heidegger, 1962: 190). Heidegger compounds this point here: 'the fact that when we look at something, the explicitness of assertion can be absent, does not justify our denying that there is any articulative interpretation in such mere seeing' (Heidegger, 1962: 190). That the content of a perceptual experience is linguistically expressible means that it is conceptual.

It is likely that Heidegger envisions his account of interpretation as underpinning his account of the unready-to-hand. Both accounts deal with conceptualising some aspect of a practical situation. Now, Dreyfus claims in his commentary that Heidegger does not discuss the "practical" use of linguistic propositions (Dreyfus's example is "see you at six"). Dreyfus states that, for Heidegger, an "assertion" presupposes that there has been some sort of disturbance' (Dreyfus, 1991: 208). This claim is inaccurate. In Heidegger's discussion of interpretation, conceptualisation is not limited to equipmental or environmental breakdowns, as in his discussion of the unready-to-hand. Heidegger identifies certain common activities that he takes to involve interpretation: 'preparing, putting to rights, repairing, improving, rounding-out' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). Heidegger's examples here are not as precise as we might like. However, he clearly has in mind activities that we would deem to be part of the fabric of everyday engagement with our environment. These are not cases where we have encountered a problem which jolts us out of our skilful engagement.

Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger emphasises only one particular type of assertion that Heidegger considers, a 'theoretical assertion about

something present-at-hand' (Heidegger, 1962: 201). It is reasonable to suppose that this type of assertion does entail detachment, given Heidegger's clear assessment of the present-at-hand. However, Dreyfus ignores other types of assertions that Heidegger identifies: 'assertions about the happenings in the environment, accounts of the ready-to-hand, "reports on the situation", the recording and fixing the "facts of the case", the description of a state of affairs, the narration of something that has befallen' (Heidegger, 1962: 201). Perhaps "the description of a state of affairs" might be understood as a detached, theoretical judgement. However, Heidegger claims that 'we cannot trace back these "sentences" to theoretical statements without essentially perverting their meaning' (Heidegger, 1962: 201). Heidegger is arguing that we simply cannot understand the meaning of such assertions in the absence of a practical context where they have a function. Such assertions, for Heidegger, can articulate 'the kind of interpretation which is still wholly wrapped up in concernful understanding' (Heidegger, 1962: 201). Heidegger does not envision interpretation as representing the interruption of skilful engagement, and certainly does not envision it as entailing a detachment between a subject and an object. Schear concludes that 'making a judgement or offering an assertion about something, Heidegger here insists, is a mode of concerned engagement with it, not a way of staring at it' (Schear, 2008: 22).

We may recall the testimony of the carpenter, cited by Rose. The carpenter's awareness of the minor adjustments and demands that their work requires may plausibly entail "interpretation", as Heidegger understands it. Harrison Hall is one commentator who tries to emphasise the role of conceptual involvement in Heidegger's account of "circumspection". Hall uses

the example of a carpenter working in an awkward space: 'The carpenter looks to see that her nail is going in straight when the confined space in which she works alters the skilful movement with which she would routinely drive the nail' (Hall, 1993: 128). Hall emphasises that such moments do not entail a shift to the present-at-hand, or a form of "detached" experience: 'At no point in such circumspection is she just looking at the environment and noting disinterestedly the objective characteristics of the items perceived' (Hall, 2003: 128). Indeed, one way to discount the correlation between conceptual involvement and the present-at-hand is to emphasise that conceptual involvement can still pertain to the ready-to-hand.

Heidegger is clear that conceptual involvement can indeed pertain to the ready-to-hand. As such, there is no necessary connection between conceptualisation and the present-at-hand, for Heidegger. In cases of interpretation, for Heidegger, 'the ready-to-hand comes *explicitly* into the sight which understands' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). Now, nowhere in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate does Dreyfus draw attention to the idea that the ready-to-hand can be "explicitly" perceived. Dreyfus argues that conceptualisation renders objects present-at-hand, focusing on Heidegger's description of the unthematic nature of the ready-to-hand. However, there is clearly no sense here in which Heidegger conceives of the conceptualisation of the ready-to-hand as necessitating a transition to the present-at-hand. In making the ready-to-hand "explicit" through interpretation, there is no sense in which we experience a detached perspective on a meaningless environment. "Thematising" the ready-to-hand, for Heidegger, involves 'the circumspective question as to what this particular thing that is ready-to-hand may be' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). This

question 'receives the circumspectively interpretive answer that it is for such and such a purpose' (1962: 189). The conceptualisation inherent in interpretation works precisely to capture the function of a particular object in the wider context of our skilful engagement with it. The explicitness of the ready-to-hand represents conceptual involvement without implying detachment, de-contextualisation, or theoretical description. It is clear that Dreyfus's correlation of conceptual involvement and the present-at-hand is mistaken. As McManus puts it, we should resist the dominant temptation to 'fixate on the "headline" and think that Heidegger believes that assertions *as such* reveal the *Vorhanden* [present-at-hand]' (2014: 62).

What, then, do we make of the connection that Heidegger explicitly makes between conceptual content and the present-at-hand? We saw Heidegger claim that linguistic judgement cuts off objects from the contextual significance in which we perceive and act upon them as ready-to-hand (1962: 201). Firstly, I think, we have to see that conceptual content certainly makes the present-at-hand *possible*. Take the case of the unready-to-hand. Heidegger is reticent to say that an unready-to-hand object is devoid of readiness-to-hand. This is because he recognises that the object still belongs to a totality of involvements, and is still being conceptualised in relation to our skilful engagement. However, he also recognises that in certain situations we will reflect on the object's material and causal properties – its presence-at-hand – and that this is not possible without conceptual content. In the same vein, Golob argues that Heidegger is indeed interested in the connection between judgements and the present-at-hand, but only because judgements can be subjected to a philosophical mode of analysis that does not focus on the judgement's pragmatic role in engaged activity, but in

its logical form (2013: 53). Accordingly, Golob argues that Heidegger takes judgements to be correlated with the present-at-hand only when they are taken up by logical analysis. Such analysis would offer 'an improved grasp of the inferential status of relations in general', in contrast to 'a *particular* set of relations, namely the social and instrumental context within which acts of assertion actually take place' (Golob, 2014: 53)[28].

Heidegger appreciates the role that conceptual content and linguistic articulation play in our engagement with the world, but he is also aware, in much the same way as the later Wittgenstein, that philosophy has been guilty of subjecting such content to the kind of analysis that strips of it of this role. Dreyfus's view on conceptual content comes down to an improper appreciation of what a philosophical focus on conceptual content entails. Dreyfus associates conceptual content with a Cartesian split between the mind and the world that McDowell himself is trying to overcome. In trying to overcome a Cartesian account of the mind, he attempts to purge any reference to mental and conceptual involvement, even involvement that clearly does not imply Cartesianism. To conclude the current line of reasoning, I want to briefly reflect on Schear's diagnosis of the philosophical assumptions associated with linguistic judgement, and his recommendation that we rethink those assumptions:

> Our capacity for judgement, that is, must not be given away to the traditional modern construal of the subject as a being standing apart from the world. Judgement does not belong sealed up in a box with traditional epistemology, only then to be overcome, by the proper appreciation of Heidegger's work […] After all the exercise of our capacity for judgement is our concerned engagement with entities at work, no

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[28] These relations are a central focus of Chapter Five.

less situated amid entities than our less cognitive skills (Schear, 2008: 37).

Here, I take Schear to be implicitly endorsing a particular philosophical approach to judgement that, again, we might associate most famously with analytic figures like J.L. Austin, Ryle, and the later Wittgenstein – an approach that assesses judgements in terms of their practical roles. I think his purpose is to remind those interested in Heidegger and existential phenomenology that such approaches do exist, and apply to the kind of conceptual content that the commentary on Heidegger has overwhelmingly associated with Cartesian epistemology. We need to acknowledge – as Heidegger in fact does – that conceptual content does not imply some picture of the relationship between the human being and the world that is anathema to an existential phenomenological project.

2.5   Further Implications

Acknowledging that our skilful engagement with the world can and routinely does involve conceptual content means that we ought to revisit the distinction Dreyfus makes between conceptual content and motor intentional content. Remember, this distinction is weighted so that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content. That is, we must have a non-conceptual skilful grasp of our environment before a conceptual relation is possible. Dreyfus states that 'the background condition of the possibility of making judgements that such and such is the case, then, must be already pervasively operative […] for Heidegger, what is required are non-conceptual coping skills that disclose a space in which things can then be encountered as

what and how they are' (Dreyfus, 2013: 21). Even if we affirm that conceptual content is something that can arise in our skilful engagement with the world, we might still have to concede to Dreyfus that it is a philosophically secondary phenomenon.

In Chapter Five, I come to the problem of whether Heidegger's "understanding" really is a non-conceptual form of intentionality. For now, I just want to briefly demonstrate how acknowledging the role of conceptual content in our skilful engagement with the world might begin to problematize Dreyfus's claim that it is separable and derivative from motor intentional content. In Chapter One, we saw briefly that Dreyfus acknowledged that conceptual content could assist us in developing a skill or ability. Dreyfus says much the same thing here: 'it might seem an argument for the pervasiveness of conceptuality that we often have to use concepts to find our way about in an unfamiliar situation' (2013: 18). Dreyfus is drawing attention, again, to the role of conceptual content in acquiring and developing "know-how". It seems, then, that he conceives of *another* role for conceptual content, besides breakdown cases. However, Dreyfus makes no distinction between the role of conceptual content in skill acquisition and the role of conceptual content in breakdown cases; they both represent the interruption of skilful engagement. At the very least, he sees no philosophically interesting distinction between them; he categorises "improving" and "coaching" with the "motor intentional content" of a judgement like "the hammer is too heavy" (Dreyfus, 2013: 32, box 1.2). Because he dedicates more space to the phenomenon of breakdown cases in the debate, I chose to focus the above discussion on that. I want to deal with Dreyfus's account of skill acquisition properly in **3.3**, where I can consider it within the

relevant philosophical literature. For now, we can accept his phenomenological claim that 'our situation gradually comes to make sense to us in a non-conceptual way as we learn our way around it […] once a skill is acquired, concepts used in learning the skill need play no further role' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Now, Dreyfus clarifies that he does not think that conceptuality *necessarily* plays a role in skill acquisition – 'our ability to act normally is usually picked up by imitating authorities without concepts playing any conscious role' (2013: 18). However, this clarification is fatally underdeveloped.

Take the two claims that Dreyfus makes about the relationship between conceptual involvement and motor intentionality. First, that conceptual involvement is only possible on the grounds of having a set of non-conceptual skills that constitute our familiarity with an environmental situation with something like a lecture hall. Second, that in at least some cases concepts play a role in developing our non-conceptual skilful grasp of a situation. Following my main discussion, we can also add that conceptual content can play a role in maintaining this grasp. Now, Dreyfus presumably holds that for those cases in which concepts do a play in role in the development of our skilful engagement, we would be able to identify a further set of non-conceptual skills which act as the enabling background for *those* concepts. However, it is a problem that his account does not demarcate sets of skills that would definitely not require conceptual involvement for their development, or types of skilful engagement that would definitely not require the involvement of conceptual content. To halt the regress, we would logically have to identify a set of skills that were acquired before conceptual involvement was possible – i.e. those acquired by prelinguistic infants. It is likely then, that a decisively non-conceptual background for

conceptual forms of perception and action could be the infant development of spatial perception and basic kinaesthetic ability. Indeed, Kelly notes that motor intentionality, for Merleau-Ponty, primarily refers to our 'bodily, situational understanding of space and spatial features' (2002: 377). It has been noted even by those with no phenomenological allegiance that the perception of space is a plausible candidate for non-conceptual content (see Allais, 2009).

Perhaps, for argument's sake, we could accept a general claim about the primacy of motor intentionality in the sense that our perceptual and active grasp of non-conceptual "space and spatial features" underpins our intentional relationship to the world, and never requires the involvement of conceptual content. This is a philosophically interesting claim, but it is some distance from Dreyfus's claim that our skilful engagement with any given situation, such as a lecture hall, is fundamentally motor intentional. Unlike, say, the necessarily pre-conceptual acquisition of spatial perception, Dreyfus cannot assure us that conceptual involvement was not present in acquiring our skilful familiarity with the lecture hall, and – based on what I have demonstrated in this section - cannot assure us that conceptual involvement plays no role in our ongoing skilful engagement with the lecture hall. It is unclear how Dreyfus can claim that the motor intentional aspects of our skilful engagement with the world always take explanatory priority over the conceptual aspects if he is not locating the acquisition of these motor intentional aspects in pre-linguistic infancy. I will build on this in Chapter Four, but at this stage it seems as though Dreyfus's prioritisation of motor intentionality over conceptual content seems unsustainable if we are compelled to refer to both phenomena in our characterisation of skilful engagement.

2.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I challenged Dreyfus's claims that conceptual involvement interrupts, or arises in the interruption of, skilful engagement with one's environment. When conceptual involvement arises, the human being's relation to their environment becomes one of a disinterested subject detached from a world of material objects. Conceptual involvement is therefore incompatible with a practically engaged or absorbed perspective. Traditional "Cartesian" epistemology takes these instances of conceptual involvement as the default way in which human beings relate to their environment, and we accordingly become saddled with what Dreyfus calls a "mediational picture". Dreyfus derives such a picture from an interpretation of Heidegger. I disputed both Dreyfus's phenomenology of unreflective action *and* his interpretation of Heidegger. I argued that conceptual involvement – specifically, linguistic judgement - is compatible with skilful engagement and does not imply or entail a "subject-object" model of experience. In fact, conceptual involvement is a frequently necessary component of our skilful engagement with the environment. This position correlates with Heidegger's conception of "interpretation" in *Being and Time*. I further demonstrated how this line of thought problematizes Dreyfus's claim that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of the involvement of conceptual content.

However, my purpose has not been to argue that conceptual involvement is pervasive, or "always operative", in unreflective perceptual experience and intentional action. That is, I considered the explicit involvement of conscious thought and judgement - which Dreyfus of course agrees to have

conceptual content [29]. This was the first step in breaking down Dreyfus's assumptions about what conceptual involvement entails. I did not suggest how conceptual capacities can be "operative" in those forms of perceptual experience and action which *do not* involve conscious thought and judgement – that is, overtly unreflective action. The next two chapters do suggest how this can be the case. Excising the link between conceptual capacities and Cartesianism allows us to appraise how McDowell's conceptualism can accommodate the unreflective, practically engaged experience that Dreyfus draws attention to.

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[29] Although, as I noted, his view that "unready-to-hand" judgements have "motor-intentional" content complicates this. As I argued there, however, this specification, and accordingly Dreyfus's revised use of "motor intentional content", does not amount to anything.

3   Perception, Conceptualism, and Cartesianism

3.1   Introduction

We have seen that Dreyfus contends that an unreflectively acting agent's perception should not be characterised as a conscious awareness of our environment – of the kind that could be articulated in an epistemic judgment. Dreyfus rejects the kind of conceptualist account of perceptual content that McDowell recommends; the mind, and specifically the operation of conceptual capacities, is not implicated in the kind of perception that pertains to unreflective action. Further, for Dreyfus, a *non*-conceptualist account of perceptual content avoids a Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. This chapter assesses McDowell's conceptualist account of perceptual content as it relates to his debate with Dreyfus. I demonstrate McDowell's motivations for conceptualism, focusing on the requirement that our intentional responses to the perceived world, responses like epistemic judgements and actions, have a justificatory character. I go on to demonstrate how McDowell's conceptualism is constitutively designed to avoid such a Cartesian picture, and argue accordingly that conceptualism does not distort the phenomenon of unreflective action.

In **3.2** I introduce McDowell's position in the context of a familiar critique of a Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. McDowell's philosophical project is in fact aimed at overcoming such a picture; he regards his conceptualism as an attempt to avoid what Dreyfus calls a "mediational picture". Where Dreyfus attempts to undercut the mediational

picture with a non-conceptualist "contact theory", McDowell affirms the role of conceptual capacities to avoid what Sellars calls "the myth of the given", which entails the idea that we can get normatively shaped responses from non-normative relations to non-conceptual stimuli. I detail this point in **3.3**. In **3.4** I expound McDowell's account of the particular way in which conceptual capacities are "operative" in perceptual experience. I do this by focusing on the components of McDowell's account that relate to Dreyfus's non-conceptualist objections and appeals to unreflective action. First, I emphasise McDowell's description of the *passive* way in which concepts are drawn into operation. This gives us a sense of how conceptualism can still accommodate the unreflective character of the actions Dreyfus appeals to. In **3.5**, I focus on McDowell's account of the role of *de re,* or "object-dependent", conceptual content. McDowell's work here targets Cartesian assumptions about the mind's relation to the world. This latter issue, I note, has a crucial relevance for the debate that I consolidate in the closing stages of Chapter Four. This chapter provides an account of how a conceptualist account of perception can avoid Dreyfus's objections. Further, it provides a framework for understanding the practical significance of conceptual content.

3.2   McDowell and the Cartesian Tradition

For McDowell, holding that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual enables us to 'credit the experience of rational subjects with the epistemological significance it intuitively has' (McDowell, 2013: 41). McDowell is committed to the idea that human beings derive knowledge of the world through their experience of it, and that our empirical beliefs and judgements can

be justified by our experience of the world[30]. McDowell therefore remains committed to a form of empiricism. Dreyfus denies that the perceptual experience pertaining to unreflective action plays such an epistemological role. In many cases, the unreflectively acting agent may not be consciously aware of many features of their environment, even those features directly relevant to their current activity: 'when we are ready to leave a familiar room we not only do not need to *think* that the door affords going out. We need not even respond to the door as affording going out. Indeed, we needn't apprehend the door at all' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18).

Further, Dreyfus takes the epistemological motivation behind McDowell's conceptualist account of perception to necessarily imply a picture wherein 'we are never *merged* with the world […] We always stand over against it bringing our subjective perspective to bear on an independent objective reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 17). That is, a conceptualist account of perception commits McDowell to the mediational picture: 'he still accepts the Cartesian separation between the world and the perceivers and agents to whom the world is given' (Dreyfus, 2013: 17). Dreyfus takes McDowell's conceptualism to be informed by Cartesian assumptions about the role of the mind. For Dreyfus, a Cartesian framework is present in any account of the relationship between the human being and the world that emphasises the role of conceptual capacities. Such an account, cannot, by definition, escape the mediational picture.

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[30]This commitment - which has something seemingly truistic about it – contrasts, for example, with an "inferentialism" argued for by McDowell's colleague Robert Brandom, who argues that there is no need for a conception of experience which plays a transcendental role in justifying our beliefs (see Brandom, 1994). As I am going to discuss McDowell's debt to Sellars, it is worth noting that McDowell and Brandom disagree over whether Sellars wants to retain a place for some form of empiricism in his philosophy after his comprehensive critique of its traditional assumptions (see McDowell, 2009c).

McDowell's philosophical project, however, is constitutively aimed at avoiding the kind of Cartesian picture that Dreyfus thinks he is committed to. In Chapter One, I noted that both Dreyfus and McDowell want to vindicate some form of "common sense", "natural", or "default" picture of the human being's relationship to the world that traditional philosophical frameworks struggle to provide. Further, McDowell recognises that affirming a role for conceptual capacities can indeed cause difficulties of a Cartesian sort. Dreyfus & Taylor's diagnosis of the mediational picture clearly resembles McDowell's own understanding of a Cartesian picture of the mind-world relation:

> In a fully Cartesian picture, the inner life takes place *in* an autonomous realm, transparent to the introspective awareness of its subject; the access of subjectivity to the rest of the world becomes correspondingly problematic, in a way that has familiar manifestations in the mainstream of post-Cartesian epistemology (McDowell, 2001: 236).

McDowell takes the Cartesian distinction between a subject and object to entail 'a self-contained subjective realm, in which things are as they are independently of external reality' (McDowell, 1998: 241). McDowell argues that the right way forward is to dismantle such a Cartesian framework, and undermine the assumption of an autonomous inner realm. In papers that predate *Mind and World*, we can find him stating that his work seeks to 'undermine pervasive and damaging prejudices in the philosophy of mind' (McDowell, 1984: 294). McDowell's project, in an important respect, mirrors Dreyfus & Taylor's phenomenologically informed goal of overcoming Cartesianism. It is important to note another crucial similarity. McDowell does not take his project to be narrowly epistemological – that is, he argues that the relevant question is not

simply 'How is it possible for there to empirical knowledge?' (1994: xiii). The

philosophical difficulties are more basic than that approach allows:

> It is true that modern philosophy is pervaded by apparent problems about knowledge in particular. But I think it is helpful to see those apparent problems as more or less inept expressions of a deeper anxiety – an inchoately felt threat that a way of thinking we find ourselves falling into leaves minds simply out of touch with the rest of reality, not just questionably capable of getting to know about it. (McDowell, 1994: xiii)

Dreyfus might be concerned that McDowell only wants to bypass

Cartesian difficulties about *knowing* the world, and that there may still be a

remnant of Cartesianism in the assumption that human beings are primarily

knowers insofar as it implies some disengaged, neutral perspective that simply

formulates judgements about an environment. However, McDowell is clear that

is the human being's very access or relation to external reality that is the issue.

The concern, above, is that Cartesian philosophy of mind "leaves minds

simply out of touch with the rest of reality". This is a concern about our

conception of intentionality, a concern about how our intentional content bears

substantively on a world external to our minds. We can therefore contextualise

McDowell's talk of 'our unproblematic openness to the world' (McDowell, 1994:

155), which we have seen Dreyfus quote approvingly (Dreyfus, 2005: 45).

Maximilian DeGaynesford characterises McDowell's project in terms of

intentionality, asserting it to be 'about whether our experience is even of the

world, whether our thoughts are even directed onto the world, whether we even

speak about the world' (2004: 10). DeGaynesford argues that it is appropriate to

characterise McDowell's project as 'fundamentally concerned with

intentionality', in that it is 'about whether our experience is even of the world,

whether our thoughts are even directed on the world, whether we even speak about the world' (2004: 10). Tim Thornton usefully links McDowell's critique of Cartesianism to these concerns about intentionality here:

> McDowell aims to show how Cartesian scepticism is the result of a picture of the mind that separates mental states and the world. This division leads to a *loss of the world* rather than merely doubts about the possibility of *knowledge* of the world, because even when beliefs are true, on this picture, the mind *never* reaches as far as the world. (Thornton, 2004: 164)

The Cartesian picture of internal mental states separated from the states of affairs they supposedly represent does not only cause problems for our conception of empirical knowledge, but for intentionality. Indeed, McDowell has said that his aim is to become 'philosophically comfortable with intentionality' (McDowell, 2009a: 3). That is, McDowell wants to overcome a Cartesian framework of the mind-world relation by making sense of intentional content.

Importantly, McDowell is clear that a conceptualist account of intentional content can cause difficulties of a Cartesian shape. In *Mind and World*, McDowell uses Donald Davidson's "coherentism" to represent the kinds of problems that arise from emphasising conceptual capacities. Elsewhere, Davidson speaks about the need to re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar object whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false' (Davidson, 1973: 198). This is a good description of the sort of picture of the relationship between the human being and the world that we want to secure. McDowell does note that such a concern should make the project of *Mind and World* 'fully congenial to Davidson' (1994: 138). However, in "A Coherentist Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1986), Davidson argues that external states of

affairs play only a *causal* role in justifying our empirical beliefs. The key slogan here is that 'nothing can count as holding a reason for a belief except another belief' (Davidson, 1986: 310). External states of affairs (Davidson's "familiar object", for instance) do not play a role in our framework of beliefs. In *Mind and World*, McDowell expresses what such a position entails: 'we risk losing our grip on how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgements about the world […] what we wanted to conceive as exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game' (McDowell, 1994: 5). There is no *justificatory* relation between the external world, and our framework of beliefs. McDowell sometimes puts this in terms of a "constraint" – what we want is a picture of the external world *constraining* what we can believe about it, a picture of how our thought owes something to how the world really is. A coherentist picture is in some sense a specific version of a mediational picture. Such a picture 'does not accommodate any external constraint on our activity in empirical thought and judgement' (1994: 8). What we end up with is an autonomous space of beliefs that are only *purportedly* empirical.

It is crucial to recognise that McDowell identifies an underlying dualism of normative phenomena and a modern conception of natural phenomena. According to scientific naturalism, natural phenomena can be exhaustively explained by the resources of science. In McDowell's terms, natural phenomena belong the explanatory space of "the realm of law". However, we cannot understand normative phenomena – such as conceptual thought – by placing it in this explanatory space. Conceptual thought is characterised by justificatory or inferential relations, rather than the causal relations of the realm of law. The explanatory "space of reasons", therefore, 'collects rational items together

(concepts, premises, conclusions etc.) with a layout appropriate to those items (inference, justification, etc.)' (DeGaynesford, 2004: 23). McDowell recognises that the space of reasons and the realm of law are difficult to reconcile; that 'the structure of the space of reasons stubbornly resists being appropriated within a naturalism that conceives nature as the realm of law' (McDowell, 1994: 73). Beyond the sort of "detachment" entailed by a Cartesian "subject-object" model, there is a danger of conceiving of our conceptual capacities and their operation as ontologically distinct from the natural world.

McDowell's view is that our modern conception of the natural is far too narrow, and should be expanded to admit normative items. An important aspect of this move is conceiving of the operation of conceptual capacities – including their epistemic role - as a natural propensity of human beings. It is in this way that we can vindicate Aristotle's conception of the human being as a rational *animal*. As DeGaynesford puts it, 'it is gaining the correct stance on the natural order which assures of our openness to the world in experience […] conversely, all current illusions luring us away from openness ultimately resolve into a handful of views about the natural' (2004: 45). While I do not agree that McDowell could put his project into "a handful of views about the natural", it is true that a satisfactory picture of the relationship between the human being and the world shows us how to accommodate conceptual thought within the natural world, as well as showing us how conceptual thought is constrained by natural states of affairs. I will return to this particular dualism in **3.4**, revisiting it intermittently.

So, McDowell and Dreyfus share a concern that an emphasis on the role of conceptual capacities can imply a Cartesian picture of the relationship

between human being and the world. Dreyfus thinks that this implication is *necessary* – any account of intentionality that appeals to capacities belonging to the mind remains beholden to a Cartesian framework. As such, McDowell's conceptualism is necessarily committed to a Cartesian or mediational picture. As we have seen, Dreyfus's phenomenological non-conceptualism takes the route of bypassing or undercutting the idea of "mediation" by appealing to the idea that non-conceptual perceptual and bodily capacities are reliably and directly "keyed on" to our familiar environment. This entails a "contact" theory. The motor intentional content that pertains to unreflective action is directly in *contact* with the world, and is not susceptible to the difficulties encountered by conceptual forms of intentionality. For McDowell, however, this is an unacceptable route. McDowell argues that the satisfactory picture we want to secure will necessarily involve a role for conceptual capacities. Dreyfus's appeal to something "non-conceptual" in securing this relation is not fit for that purpose, because non-conceptual content cannot secure the normative constraint that is required. McDowell's view here is decisively shaped by Sellars' critique of "the myth of the given".

3.3   The Perceptual "Given"

Here, I outline a critique of any strategy which seeks to undercut the role of conceptual capacities by appealing to what I will refer to as a "perceptual given". I do this in order to demonstrate why affording a role to conceptual capacities is crucial, and accordingly to highlight the central problem with Dreyfus's appeal to motor intentional content. McDowell's debt to Sellars is decisive here. In "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956), Sellars states

that his goal is to dismantle 'the framework in which traditional empiricism makes its characteristic claim that the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge' (1963: 134). Understanding the problems with such a notion of the "perceptually given" allows us to understand why McDowell wants to affirm the role of conceptual capacities. This leads us to the conceptualism and naturalism that McDowell presents in *Mind and World*, which aims to leave behind both a Cartesian framework *and* the framework of traditional empiricism.

What, then, is the 'claim that the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge'? (Sellars, 1963: 134). The idea that empirical knowledge requires a foundation naturally follows from a consideration about the justification of empirical judgements, or beliefs. An empirical judgement can be related to another judgement. That is, one can justify a judgement through an inferential relation to another judgement. This latter judgement is justified in relation to another such judgement. Of course, the problem with this picture of justification is that we end up with a chain or network of judgements which ends up being either circular – a judgement is at some stage repeated – or infinite – there is always a judgement in need of further justification. The important thing here is that the justification for empirical judgements or beliefs operates in a seemingly autonomous sphere – we should recognise the mediational or Cartesian elements of this picture. From the perspective of traditional empiricism, it makes sense to halt the regress by appealing to a justificatory foundation for the whole framework of judgements. In doing so, we are able to demonstrate how the justification for our empirical beliefs is genuinely empirical, and not operating in a framework that never quite makes justificatory contact

with the external world. The idea is that there is some kind of empirical judgement or belief that is *directly* caused by a perceptual experience. Some aspect of the world is "given" to us through perception, without us needing to do any inferential work to justify our belief about it. There is no "mediational" element.

The "perceptually given", for Sellars, might be something like a basic visual experience of some basic physical property. Sellars remarks that the traditional empiricist regards 'a sensation of a red triangle as the very paradigm of empirical knowledge' (1963: 134). Russell's conception of "knowledge by acquaintance" is a prime example of this empiricist line of thought.[31] Russell states that knowledge by acquaintance entails being "directly aware" of something in a way that amounts to knowledge of that thing. Crucially, Russell claims, this awareness proceeds 'without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths' (Russell, 1997: 46). It might seem, therefore, that we can simply bypass the mediational problem by holding that we have at least some unmediated awareness of the external world. Knowledge by acquaintance entails being "directly aware" of some aspect of the world. Russell tends to emphasise our primary acquaintance with sense-data: 'the first and most obvious example is *sense-data* [...] When I see a colour or hear a noise, I have direct acquaintance with the colour or the noise' (Russell, 1951: 153). These basic sorts of unmediated acquaintances provide the justificatory foundation for our framework of empirical knowledge; Russell accordingly states that 'all our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon

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[31] I have chosen the example of Russell here because it has further relevance to my discussion of McDowell's conceptualism in **3.5**.

acquaintance as its foundation' (Russell, 1997: 48). A picture of acquaintance is in line with a broadly Humean empiricist tradition. This line of thought may not escape from a Cartesian picture, in Dreyfus & Taylor's view – our knowledge is still largely characterised in terms of goings on internal to the mind – but it does seem to secure what McDowell refers to as "external constraint", our thought making direct contact with the external world. McDowell provides a clear articulation of this initial picture of the "perceptual given" and the epistemological advantages it entails:

> The idea is that when we have exhausted all the available moves within the space of concepts, all the available moves from one conceptually organised item to another, there is still one more step we can take: namely, pointing to something that is simply received in experience. (1994: 6)

Again, it should be emphasised that the traditional empiricist takes these basic perceptual experiences to be foundational in the sense that they do not depend on any pre-existing knowledge, or possession of concepts, or any sort of conceptual abilities. All that is required for this foundational knowledge are the sort of perceptual capacities that we share with animals (see Sellars, 1963: 131). McDowell therefore states that 'in traditional empiricism, experience is taken to yield noninferential knowledge in a way that presupposes no knowledge of anything else' (2009b: 222). Elsewhere, McDowell notes that 'having something Given to one would be being given something for knowledge without needing to have capacities that would be necessary for one to be able to get to know it' (McDowell, 2009c: 256). Here we have our first sense of how such an appeal to the perceptual given might be wrong-headed. McDowell adds: 'And that is incoherent' (McDowell, 2009c: 256).

It is useful to have a final, particularly clear example of how this picture of empirical knowledge and the perceptual given hangs together. Robert Brandom's exegetical work on Sellars provides a helpful description of how the appeal to the perceptual given bears out in the case of someone judging that there is a "STOP" sign in front of them:

> [...] it is because there is a red object with an octagonal facing surface in front of me that I find myself with a sensing of a red-and-octagonal sense content. It is because I have such a sense content that I acquire the non-inferential belief that there is a red and octagonal object in front of me. And it is because I have this belief, together perhaps, with other beliefs, that I am justified in the further inferential belief that there is a stop sign in front of me. (Brandom in Sellars, 1997: 127)

It is Sellars' goal in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" to demonstrate the fatal incoherence of such a picture. Sellars distinguishes between two kinds of capacity that must be in play in order to acquire empirical knowledge from perceptual experience. First, the perceiving subject must have what Brandom calls a "*reliable differential responsive disposition*". In the case of perceiving a red object, one would have to possess the *disposition*, or capacity, to be *responsive* to the perception of a red object in a way that *reliably differentiates* the redness of the object from other colours. Traditional empiricism assumes that this capacity is a necessary and sufficient condition for empirical knowledge. Brandom states that 'if we strip empiricism down to its core, we might identify it with the insight that knowledge of the empirical world depends essentially on the capacity of knowing organisms to respond differentially to distinct environing stimuli' (2002: 524). Acknowledging this capacity seems to secure the idea that something perceptually given, like the redness of an object, can provide us with knowledge that doesn't rely on an internal framework of justification. The

responsiveness, in this case, would be the eliciting of a linguistic response like "this is red-and-octagonal", which would then serve as an externally derived premise that provides the justificatory grounds for our internal framework of knowledge along with other such premises.

However, Sellars' overall point is that while the capacity to reliably respond to different stimuli is a necessary condition of empirical knowledge, it is not a sufficient one. The correlation between a linguistic response "this is red" and the state of affairs is not sufficient to attribute the responsive subject with knowledge. Firstly, the capacity to have one's responses correlated or reliably causally associated with states of affairs is not distinctly human; a thermometer has the capacity to reliably discriminate between different temperatures (see Sellars, 1963: 167). Along precisely the same lines, Brandom remarks that 'a parrot could be trained to respond to the visible presence of red things by uttering the noise "That's red"' (Brandom, 2002: 515). The capacity in question is specifically natural. It seems possible, on this line of thought, to conceive of knowledge in naturalistic terms, where knowing is simply a matter of something in the world having a causal impact on one's sensory capacities. However, it only makes sense to attribute knowledge in cases where the subject can specify the relevant justification. The idea that the causal relation between some empirical state of affairs and our sensory capacities also entails a *justificatory* relation seems dubious. A parrot's ability to reliably respond to red objects does not entail knowledge, because there is no question of the parrot's being able to justify their response. Sellars regards the idea that attributions of knowledge can be reduced to physical facts as a 'radical mistake – a mistake of a piece with the so called naturalistic fallacy in ethics' (Sellars, 1963: 131). That a subject's

response is reliably causally associated with a state of affairs does not mean it *ought* to be, or is *justified* in being.

This is why McDowell remarks that 'the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications' (1994: 8). In a satisfactory picture of the human relationship the world, the idea of having direct access to the world, or unproblematic openness to the world, comes with the caveat that we must also make sense of the idea that we are not simply beholden to causal impacts on our sensory capacities. McDowell puts this in terms of the difference between being "exempt from blame" and having some modicum of responsibility in accepting the world as our perceptual experience presents it to us. We are otherwise only open to the world in the same sense as animals. This is the basic problem with Dreyfus's idea that non-conceptual, "motor intentional", perceptual experience and action secures a kind of "contact" with the world. The concern is simply that such "contact" does not carry with it any sense in which our "reliable responses" to our environment – whether those responses are unreflective actions or epistemic judgements - entail anything that the perceiving and acting agent has any say in. Sellars' critique of the given, and McDowell's appropriation of that critique, pertain to intentional responses in general. I say much more about this point in Chapter Four, particularly as it relates to intentional action.

I want to consolidate Sellars' critique with reference to one particular line of thought in his essay. Now, the traditional empiricist would prefer to construe the "perceptually given" in terms of something *appearing, looking*, or *seeming* to be green. The relevant sort of verbal response would be "x looks green", rather than

"x is green". The former construal is immune to the epistemic doubt of the latter, because while one can doubt that x *is* green, one cannot doubt that something *looks* green. Knowledge of how things *look*, then, is the prime candidate to act as the justificatory foundations for our framework of empirical knowledge. This is a mistake, for Sellars, and his analysis provides us with sufficient grounds for rejecting the idea that we can explain knowledge of the external world with reference to non-conceptual content. Sellars imagines a situation in which "John" works in a tie shop and routinely uses statements like "x is green" to describe the colour of ties (Sellars, 1963: 143). It is only after someone demonstrates to John that the specific lighting conditions in the store distort the appearances of colour that he learns to use statements of the form "x looks green". For Sellars, "looks" claims are derivative of "is" claims because one only begins to utilise looks claims when one has acquired a reason to doubt their experience. Characterised in terms of doubt, such experiences cannot then serve as any sort of epistemological foundation. Sellars argues that "looks claims" entail a *withdrawal of endorsement*: the statement "X looks green to Jones" differs from "Jones sees that x is green" in that whereas the latter both ascribes a propositional claim to Jones' experience *and endorses it*, the former ascribes the claim but does not endorse it (Sellars, 1963: 145) [32].

What I want to emphasise here is Sellars ascription of a propositional claim to a subject's perceptual experience, which he clarifies here:

> For to say that a certain experience is a *seeing that* something is the case, is to do more than describe the experience. It is to characterize it as, so to speak, making an assertion or claim and – which the point I wish to stress – to *endorse* that claim' (1967: 144)

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[32] He switches from the "John" of the story to a general perceiving subject "Jones".

Here Sellars is opposing a straightforwardly naturalistic construal of the role that perceptual experience plays in our acquisition of empirical knowledge. A necessary condition of our deriving knowledge from perceptual experience is that we *endorse* what perceptual experience presents us with (in the above quote, Sellars construes the idea that perceptual experience "presents us" with a state of affairs as the perceptual experience "making a claim" about that state of affairs). Again, the idea is that the perceptual given presents us with the basic premises that provide an external and foundational justification for our framework of empirical knowledge. In the case of those basic perceptual experiences that are supposed to serve as the foundation for empirical knowledge, crucially, we have to understand what it takes for the perceiving subject to be able to endorse what the experience presents them with. For Sellars, a response like "this is green" or "x is red" must not only be reliably correlated with green or red objects, but the reliability must '*in some sense* be recognized by the person' (Sellars, 1963: 168). For traditional empiricism, 'to know what it is for something to be green', or to possess the concept "green" is just a matter of having one's response "this is green", reliably correlated with or caused by a perception of a green object. This is the epistemological picture of the given. Sellars responds:

> Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the colour of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate. And while this does not imply that one must have concepts before one has them, it does imply that one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. (Sellars, 1963: 147 – 148)

The supposedly foundational status of the perceptual given is scuppered by the necessary involvement of conceptual capacities. In order for *any* perceptual experience to result in knowledge, an existing conceptual framework

needs to be in place. Knowing something "by acquaintance" is only possible if one possesses the concepts to know that one's acquaintance might appropriately be described as "knowing" in the first place. Sellars therefore provides a critique of the perceptual given that requires us to affirm a primary role for conceptual capacities. The natural capacity to be reliably responsive to different aspects of the perceived environment is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for knowledge. We also have to posit conceptual capacities. Natural and conceptual capacities are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge. They are also necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the kind of relationship to the world that human beings enjoy.

McDowell's philosophical project is decisively influenced by Sellars' critique of the given. In *Mind and World*, McDowell describes the epistemological appeal to the perceptual given as 'the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere' (McDowell, 1994: 7). That is, our conceptual activity can take justificatory cues from something outside of the sphere of concepts. Sellars' critique convinces McDowell that this cannot be the case. However, McDowell's conceptualism is also driven by the essential limitation of Sellars' position. By accepting a critique of the given, we arrive at a picture of intentionality that must afford a primary role to conceptual capacities. However, the familiar threat of a "mediational", or "Cartesian" picture arises once more. That is, in McDowell's terms, the threat that there is no external constraint on our framework of beliefs returns. The external world, conceived simply in terms of causal impacts on sensory capacities, plays no justificatory role in our conceptual thought.

McDowell states that 'it can seem that if we reject the Given, we merely reopen ourselves to the threat to which the idea of the Given is a response, the threat that our picture does not accommodate any external constraint on our activity in thought and judgement' (McDowell, 1994: 9). The concern again arises that our conceptual thought is not 'recognizable as bearing on reality at all' (McDowell, 1994: 9). We once again become committed to a Cartesian separation between the contents of the mind, and the external world. We are then in danger of what McDowell calls an "interminable oscillation" between the mediational picture and the appeal to a perceptual given. When we realise the problems with conceptual capacities, 'we come under pressure to recoil back into appealing to the Given, only to see all over again that it cannot help' (McDowell, 1994: 9). McDowell's project in *Mind and World* is to escape this "interminable oscillation", or as he also remarks, 'to find a way to dismount from the seesaw' (McDowell, 1994: 9). He does this by clarifying the way in which concepts figure in perceptual experience in a way that doesn't lapse into a Cartesian picture of the mind.[33]

3.4   Passivity and Second Nature

So far, we have seen that McDowell shares a concern with Dreyfus about the way in which the philosophical tradition has pictured the relationship between the human being and the world. Both Dreyfus and McDowell want to affirm a picture where the human being is in direct contact with the external world, or is "open" to the world in a substantive sense. Dreyfus claims that an

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[33] He also clarifies the way in which concepts figure in intentional action in the same way, but I treat this in the following chapter. The topic of intentional action is no less crucial, for McDowell.

appeal to conceptual capacities *necessarily* causes an unsatisfactory "mediational picture" that is underwritten by Cartesian assumptions about the mind and its contents. We have seen that McDowell acknowledges that Dreyfus's concern is not unfounded. However, McDowell argues that we must appeal to conceptual capacities on pain of an epistemologically incoherent appeal to a perceptual given. We end up in a situation where one ends up rejecting one unsatisfying position, only to endorse the other – and this process repeats itself. McDowell attempts to resolve this "interminable oscillation" by making important clarifications about the role of conceptual capacities in perceptual experience. I want to start with a central aspect of McDowell's conceptualism that is of clear and crucial relevance to his debate with Dreyfus. McDowell specifies that concepts are drawn "passively" into operation, and draws upon a Kantian epistemology to make this clear.

In *Mind and World*, Kant's account of the relationship between sensory capacities and conceptual capacities becomes decisive for McDowell. For Kant, we have to conceive of empirical knowledge as being constituted by a co-operation of two faculties of the human mind. Human first have a faculty of "sensibility", which is responsible for receiving sensory information, or *intuitions*. Kant describes this faculty in terms of its *receptivity* – it *passively receives* information through sensory capacities. Human beings also have a faculty of "understanding", which is responsible for applying *concepts* to these intuitions. Kant describes this faculty in terms of its *spontaneity* – its active freedom to apply concepts (see Kant, 2007: 86). Kant states that 'To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought' (Kant, 2007: 86). Kant

concludes this passage with the famous slogan: 'thoughts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (Kant, 2007: 86). Kant therefore rejects the idea that a perceptual "given" – intuition – is a sufficient condition of empirical knowledge.

This is a clear precursor to Sellars own critique of the given; Sellars in fact acknowledges the Kantian impulse in his thought, apparently claiming that we want to move philosophy from its Humean phase into its Kantian phase (Rorty in Sellars, 1997: 32)[34]. McDowell argues that the way in which to "dismount the seesaw" between givenness and coherentism is to remind ourselves of the 'original Kantian thought […] that empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity' (McDowell, 1994: 9). Crucially, McDowell specifies that we must affirm that 'receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation' (McDowell, 1994: 9). This results in the view that perceptual experience is never a matter of bare intuition, but conceptual in the first instance: 'our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way to the world's impact on our receptive capacities' (McDowell, 2007a: 338).

In this way, McDowell recognises that it may sound "off-key" to 'speak of *exercising* conceptual capacities at all', because the term "exercising" suits 'an activity, whereas experience is passive' (McDowell, 1994: 10). His claim is therefore this:

> In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together

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[34] This is anecdotal, thus the citation of Rorty.

oneself, as when one decides what to say about
something (McDowell, 1994: 10).

Conceptual involvement is not some sort of afterthought that we bring to bear on non-conceptual perceptual experience. Although McDowell follows Sellars in thinking that a perceptual experience of some state of affairs has the same conceptual content as an explicit judgement about that state of affairs, conceptual capacities are not at work in the same way. In the case of an empirical judgement, 'there would be a free responsible exercise of the conceptual capacities', whereas in the perceptual case 'they would be involuntarily drawn into operation under ostensible necessitation from an ostensibly seen object' (McDowell, 1998b: 458). Experience is a matter of passively taking in some state of affairs. McDowell means to insist on the "minimal point" that 'how one's experience represents things to be is not under one's control' (McDowell, 1994: 11). There is, therefore, a sense of "givenness" in McDowell's conceptualist account of perceptual experience. The perceptual experience of mature human beings just *already is* conceptual. McDowell therefore prioritises perceptual experience, and accords it the status of a "tribunal", acting as an external constraint on our conceptual thought. In perceptual experience, McDowell states, what one takes in is 'that things are thus and so': 'That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement [...] so it is conceptual content' (McDowell, 1994: 26). McDowell emphasises how this picture secures his "external constraint" on our empirical thought in a way that is *justificatory* rather than causal: 'Experience enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks' (McDowell, 1994: 26). This involves McDowell's conception of second nature.

A satisfactory picture of the relationship between the human being and the external world shows us how to accommodate conceptual thought within the natural world, and vice versa. Otherwise, we are still committed to some Cartesian view in which our conceptual capacities and the thought they enable stand in a dualistic opposition to the natural world, understood in the scientific terms of perceptual experience, 'what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*' (McDowell, 1994: 26). That is, one perceives a state of affairs in the world that is expressible in propositions: '*That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also the content of a judgement [...] So it is conceptual content' (McDowell, 1994: 26). This means that there is no difference, for McDowell, between 'the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case' (McDowell, 1994: 27). McDowell takes this to be a truism, something that 'cannot embody something metaphysically contentious, like slighting the independence of reality' (McDowell, 1994: 27). McDowell argues that we should not conceive the natural world in terms of the realm of law, understood in scientifically naturalistic terms.

What is natural, for McDowell, is not exhausted by scientific conclusions: 'if we identify nature with what natural science aims to make comprehensible, we threaten, at least, to empty it of meaning' (McDowell, 1994: 70 – 71). For McDowell, the natural world as it impinges on our sensory capacities has the kind of structure apt for conceptualisation – in this way, it makes perfect sense to hold that our perceptual experience is always already conceptual, insofar as it will always have the sort of structure that finds expression in language. This becomes more plausible as McDowell comes to clarify what he takes "conceptual" to entail. Thornton rightly sees McDowell identifying the content of experience

in perception with 'the same sort of items that constitute the layout of reality' (2004: 217). This insight is one that Dreyfus doesn't think bears out phenomenologically. For McDowell, however, concepts do not figure as "mediating entities" at all in McDowell's picture – acquiring a concept is simply acquiring the ability to judge how the world appeared in perceptual experience all along. Indeed, coming to be able to recognise the "layout of reality", that things are thus and so, depends on the acquisition of the relevant concepts, which we acquire as we are socialised into a linguistic community. This is to be inculcated into the space of reasons.

As we have seen, the space of reasons – the space of concepts, inferential relations, justifications, judgements, knowledge, and so on – seems to have a certain autonomy from the natural world conceived as the realm of law (scientific naturalism). Our natural, "animal" being seems disconnected from those aspects of our being that belong to the space of reasons. McDowell appeals to an Aristotelian notion of "second nature" to offset this idea (McDowell, 1994: 84). The idea is that our inculcation into the space of reasons – our acquisition of a language – is part of a human being's *nature*. The basic idea here is that conceptual capacities are *natural* capacities, they are not something "alien" to the natural world. If we conceive of our conceptual capacities as a natural propensity, these capacities already give us a "foothold" in the realm of law (McDowell, 1994: 85). McDowell says that by conceiving of our conceptual capacities in this way, 'we can say that the way our lives are shaped by reason is natural, even while we deny that the structure of the space of reasons can be reintegrated into the layout of the realm of law' (1994: 88). Now, it is important to see that McDowell wants a unified, rather than dualistic, conception of the human

being's relationship to the world – I have provided a brief sketch of the way in which he approaches this from a naturalistic point of view here. The importance of such a unified picture is thrown into sharper relief when we contrast it to Dreyfus's own account of perceptual experience, and crucially when we compare the accounts each philosopher gives of human *action*. It can seem that Dreyfus's insistence on the non-conceptual nature of our perceptual experience and action returns us to the dualistic separation of conceptual and natural capacities. I will emphasise this point further in Chapter Four.

Now, Dreyfus's critique of McDowell's conceptualism partly turns on the idea that conceptualism is not a good fit for the sort of perceptual experience involved in unreflective action, because there is no kind of thought process that could entail conceptual capacities. However, we can see here that it is important to McDowell that concepts are not only operative at the level of a thought process, but also in the sort of passive experience that might belong to unreflective action. McDowell makes this point in the debate a number of times. Here is a typical passage:

> Dreyfus thinks the very idea of conceptual capacities, as I exploit in this claim brings into my picture of experience a detached self, standing over against and contemplatively oriented towards an independent reality. But this has no basis in the way the idea of conceptual capacities figures in my picture. (McDowell, 2013: 41).

We saw in Chapter Two that Dreyfus is wrong to take conceptual involvement to necessarily entail a Cartesian detachment between the human being and the world. There, I explored conceptual involvement at the explicit level, where conceptual content arose in linguistic judgements or conscious

thought. Of course, McDowell agrees with Dreyfus that one does not actively consider the conceptual content inherent in one's perceptual experience. Even in a distinctly unreflective experience, McDowell claims, one is put into a position to be able to judge that things are as one's perceptual experience presents them to be. For McDowell, this requires that the perceptual experience is conceptual. This turns on the idea that articulating one's perceptual experience does not entail a qualitative handover of intentional content. McDowell states that 'If a perceptual experience is world-disclosing […] any aspect of its content is present in a form in which it is suitable to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity' (McDowell, 2007a: 346). This amounts, for McDowell, to the Gadamerian thought that 'if a distinctively human relation to the world is in the space of linguistically expressible thought, it is pervasively conceptual' (McDowell, 2007a: 346).

Of course, this jars with Dreyfus's conception of motor intentional content; Dreyfus claims that practically engaged perceptual experience is characterised by what I have called "affective content", which does not have any sort of conceptualizable form (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). Of course, affective content is particularly phenomenologically distinctive; Dreyfus describes it in terms of "attractions and repulsions", "lines of force", and so on. I treat this distinctive content from a conceptualist perspective in Chapter Four. What I want to dwell on here is Dreyfus's denial that our perceptual experience has any sort of content in which the ordinary environmental objects that we are dealing with figure (see Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Crucially, Dreyfus does not think that practically engaged perceptual experience is characterised by any sort of awareness of our environment, and certainly no awareness that could be construed in terms of

perceiving environmental objects; he draws on Heidegger's description of an affording object "withdrawing" from our attention (Dreyfus, 2013: 18; Heidegger, 1962: 99). Dreyfus states that the phenomenology shows that 'the world we are drawn into when we are absorbed in coping does not stand over against us as a set of facts that can be captured in propositions but rather is *directly lived* by the absorbed coper as a shifting field of attractions and repulsions' (Dreyfus, 2013: 17 - 18). Again, I want to appraise the idea of perceptual content as "attractions and repulsions" separately, and assess the idea that unreflective perceptual experience is a mode where the agent is not consciously aware of, or "taking in" features of the environment.

I first want to point out that McDowell's conceptualist account of perception, broadly conceived, is not an unorthodox position in contemporary philosophy. Even in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", Sellars seems to endorse what looks to be a full-blooded conceptualism about perceptual experience, insofar as perceiving some state of affairs is a matter of conceptualisation. Sellars view is that is that perception entails intentional states that resemble *empirical claims.* Further, Sellars argues that an epistemological critique of the perceptual given forces us to 'recognise that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it' (Sellars, 1963: 176). The way in which Sellars describes the "ability to notice a sort of thing" implies concepts are not only involved in our ability to derive knowledge from experience, but involved in any perceptual experience that *could* give rise to knowledge. In this way, Brandom takes Sellars to be arguing that 'all awareness is a conceptual affair' (2002: 539).

McDowell similarly claims that when Sellars talks about states of knowing, or epistemic states, this simply means "concept-involving" perceptual experiences (McDowell, 2009a: 8). Indeed, McDowell comes to see that Sellars' conception of experiences as "containing claims" is very much like the one he proposes in *Mind and World*, where he unfortunately does not recognise the likeness to Sellars' position (McDowell, 2001: 179).

However, we don't necessarily need to take an epistemological route to a conceptualist conclusion. Alex Byrne remarks that it isn't unreasonable to think that 'conceptualism should be the default position' (Byrne, 2010: 245). Byrne notes that it is intuitive to think that 'perceiving is very much like a traditional propositional attitude, such as believing or intending' (Byrne, 2010: 245). In my introduction, I drew attention to the idea that perceiving might be construed as an intentional state, and as such has propositional content composed of Fregean senses[35]. All Byrne is emphasising here is that perception is always *of* something, always *about* or *directed toward* something, and as such has intentionality. Just as we *believe*, or *know*, or *think that* "the tree is green", we *perceive that* "the tree is green". On a reasonable understanding of what perceiving entails, then, it seems natural to attribute conceptual content to it. However, I noted Brandom's remark that awareness is a conceptual affair, and Dreyfus denies that practically engaged perceptual experience is a matter of awareness.

Referring to Dreyfus's emphasis on Heidegger's description of objects "withdrawing", Doyon notes that the implication here is that Heidegger thinks that 'familiar objects do not appear *at all* in everyday background coping' (Doyon,

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[35] I should note here that I am only expressing the philosophically orthodox characteristics of an intentional state – Dreyfus's non-conceptual, non-propositional conception of an intentional state is not a standard way to understand intentionality.

2015: 123)[36]. Even in phenomenological terms, this claim seems implausible. Specifying that perceptual experience can be unreflective does not entail that we only experience those affective "forces" that Dreyfus describes. In Chapter Two, I discussed Dreyfus's phenomenology of breakdown cases, where the agent's unreflective action is interrupted. In Dreyfus's view, this entails that there is a qualitative shift in the intentional content of one's perceptual experience. I said that it was difficult to see where such a qualitative shift from non-conceptual "unawareness" to conceptual awareness was As Siegel notes, if this were actually the case, then 'our conscious lives would be interrupted with waking but blank durations, like seizures sprinkled throughout the day, triggered by habitual actions like putting away a tennis racket, filling up one's tea kettle, or opening the mailbox' (Siegel, 2014: 60).

In my view, it is actually difficult to distinguish those experiences in which Dreyfus argues that objects simply don't feature on any conscious level, from those experiences where they manifestly do. Siegel also articulates something like this concern here: 'It's a familiar occurrence that we complete a habitual action, realize afterward we were paying little attention to what we were doing, and yet can still remember how other parts of the scene looked as we were completing it' (Siegel, 2014: 60). My point is that remembering how the scene looked reveals no difference in how it looked in the course of unreflective experience. It is difficult to establish a set of criteria telling us exactly where the qualitative shift from non-conceptual, non-representational content to conceptual representational content takes place. Relatedly, it is difficult to establish how

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[36] In Chapter Five, I argue that this is not Heidegger's view, and that Heidegger's position can reasonably described as a conceptualist.

bringing a conceptual capacity to bear on some feature of a previously unreflective experience changes how it figured for us in that experience.

This, in fact, is the point of McDowell's claim that 'features of the environment are perceptually present to us in a way that provides us with opportunities for knowledge' (McDowell, 2013: 42). Conceptual capacities are able to capture the content of our perception without distorting the distinctive character of our experience, even our unreflective ones. This point becomes crucial to my argument in the closing stages of Chapter Four, where I consider the distinctive character of motor intentional content. To prepare the ground for that argument, it is necessary to appraise McDowell's clarified notion of conceptual content.

3.5 *De Re* Conceptual Content

Dreyfus argues that McDowell cannot overcome traditional philosophical conceptions of intentionality simply by clarifying the role of conceptuality; 'one can stipulatively redefine the traditional mentalistic terms any way one pleases but one can't at the same time claim one is overcoming traditional philosophy' (Dreyfus, 2007b: 376). Dreyfus has no grounds for this rebuke. Even if Dreyfus's phenomenological objections to McDowell's form of conceptualism hold, McDowell would still in principle be able to claim a significant step beyond "traditional" ways of conceiving the involvement of concepts. We have already seen that McDowell specifies the "passivity" of the way in which concepts are drawn into operation in perceptual experience. It is crucial to secure McDowell's notion of perceptual demonstrative thought, and the concomitant notion of object-dependent, or *de re*, conceptual content.

In the closing stages of Chapter Four, I utilise McDowell's refined conception of what it means for some content to be conceptual in order to offer a resolution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Essentially, McDowell takes issue with the idea that something counts as "conceptual" only if pertains to a linguistically codified definite description. McDowell's objection to this idea is in play in *Mind and World* and the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, but his substantive arguments and their implications are drawn out properly in papers preceding *Mind and World*. McDowell states that he wants to 'undermine pervasive and damaging prejudices in the philosophy of mind' (McDowell, 1984: 294). This amounts to undermining a Cartesian conception of the way in which concepts "mediate" between the mind and the external world. Grasping McDowell's point here provides us with a way of avoiding a Cartesian picture without having to appeal to a non-conceptual "given".

Focusing on the "object-dependence" of a singular demonstrative thought complements McDowell's project of showing how worldly states of affairs "constrain" our conceptual thought, and works to undermine a mediational picture of the relationship between the human being and the external world. Russell's contrast between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance becomes relevant here. Knowledge by description corresponds to conceptual content which is not *dependent* on the presence or existence of some state of affairs. "Conceptual content" on a Russellian view entails a definite description which specifies the application of a concept to an object: 'whenever a thought is directed at a particular object, part of its content is given by a specification of the object in general terms: conceptual terms […]' (McDowell, 1994: 105). For example, the concept "table" would entail a general description

of a set of properties which are necessary and jointly sufficient for a particular object to be the subject of a proposition or thought which has the concept as a constituent. This requires that conceptual content is understood as wholly "predicative", as McDowell puts it, or linguistically codifiable. Frege puts this requirement as the idea that 'the complete expression of the thought' entails only 'the mere wording, as it can be preserved in writing' (Frege, 1978: 10; cited in McDowell, 1998a: 216) McDowell. Fregean senses, understood as concepts pertaining to a referent, or object, are associated with this descriptive and linguistic model of conceptual content. However, one can grasp the conceptual content of a proposition or thought without it being related to a particular object. Russell therefore conceives of conceptual content – of knowledge by description, or Fregean senses – as object-*independent*[37]. McDowell describes this picture in "*De Re* Senses" (1984) as follows:

> '[…] it is commonly believed that a Fregean philosophy of language and thought can represent an utterance, or a propositional attitude, as being about an object only by crediting it with a content that determines the object by specification, or at least in such a way that the content is available to be thought or expressed whether the object exists or not' (McDowell, 1998a: 214).

Here, McDowell emphasises that possessing some conceptual content does not necessarily relate one to some state of affairs in the external world. McDowell sees in this understanding of conceptual content the threat of a mediational picture, the idea of an autonomous Cartesian realm of thoughts.

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[37] I am of course omitting a full account of Russell's theory of descriptions, which entails the idea that (most) singular propositions do not actually refer, but are existentially quantified definite descriptions. This solves the problem of how singular propositions that have no referent are meaningful. See Russell's "On Denoting" (1905).

Knowledge by acquaintance, in contrast, corresponds to propositions which *do* pick out some specific state of affairs in the world, in such a way that makes them dependent on that state of affairs. Russell argues that the only such propositions are *demonstratives* of the form "this x" or "that x". Further, the only kind of demonstratives that Russell thinks are genuinely object dependent – that is, entail acquaintance with a particular object – are those that refer to some sense datum[1]. As Thornton puts it, 'in singular thought the mind makes contact with the world without a description. Instead, the object itself, singled out in this case through perception, plays the role of fixing the subject matter of the thought' (Thornton, 2004: 142 – 143). One way of putting this is that singular thoughts cannot simply belong to an autonomous, interior mental space consistent with a Cartesian picture. That these demonstratives are meaningful guarantees contact with the world. Gareth Evans defines a "Russellian" singular thought as 'of such a kind that it simply could not exist in the absence of the object or objects which it is about' (Evans, 1981: 71). We can see that there are resources here for a generalisable way of avoiding a Cartesian picture of the conceptual realm, where the descriptions entailed by conceptual content can, in McDowell's terms, degenerate into a 'frictionless spinning in a void', where the lack of friction describes the lack of a justificatory relation to, or justificatory dependence on, some state of affairs in the world (McDowell, 1994: 66).

In McDowell's view, the right way to develop this line of thought about object-dependence is to first of all lift Russell's restriction of acquaintance to include ordinary objects, rather than just sense-data: 'we can extract the notion of acquaintance from that epistemological framework, and apply it to at least some perceptual relations between minds and ordinary objects' (1998b: 231). Russell

places such a restriction on epistemic acquaintance in order to avoid the possibility of being acquainted with an object that was in fact illusory. Russell does not think that acquaintance with sense-data suffers from this sceptical problem (see Sellars' discussion of "looks", above). McDowell argues that we should not expect our capacity for perceptual knowledge to be absolutely infallible, and we should not allow the possibility of fallibility to force us to disregard the "epistemic status" of our ordinary perceptual experience (McDowell, 1998b: 231)[38].

Secondly, McDowell needs to deal with the possible objection that an appeal to Russellian singular propositions is simply an appeal to a perceptual given. On the face of it, this seems straightforward to deal with – we simply have to say that singular demonstrative thoughts draw on our conceptual capacities. However, a concern then arises that the conceptual content is then independent of the object in a way that returns us a Cartesian framework. Take what McDowell says in *Mind and World*:

> A perceptual demonstrative thought surely homes in on its object not by containing a general specification, with the object figuring in the thought as what fits the specification, but by virtue of the way this sort of thinking exploits the perceptible presence of the object itself (1994: 105).

It is difficult to see how this could be the case. The specification entailed by the conceptual content is not dependent on the perceptible presence of the object, as Martin points out here: 'the very same demonstrative thought or utterance could have occurred on an occasion on which there was no appropriate

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[38] I should note here that I am not going to focus on epistemological scepticism, as nothing in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate turns on it – appeals to radical scepticism are not part of Dreyfus's objections to McDowell's conceptualism. All that matters here is that McDowell can demonstrate that conceptual capacities do not necessarily imply Cartesianism.

object to be thought about' (Martin, 2002: 195). It also looks as though there could be two visually distinct perceptual experiences that have the same conceptual content. The necessary relation to an individual object seems to be lost, and we no longer have a convincing conception of object-dependent conceptual thought.

There is a way out of this impasse. By focusing on thoughts and propositions, it may seem as though McDowell has lost sight of perceptual experience, and how conceptual capacities are in operation there. However, McDowell's discussion is still focused on how the content of perceptual experience is of a conceptual form *prior* to reflective thought and the articulation of experience into propositions. This feeds into McDowell's answer to the problem of how singular demonstrative thoughts can be genuinely object-dependent and yet still be conceptual. The sort of perceptual experience of the world that human beings have contains content that is expressible, whether expressed or not – it is conceptual content. Take a case in which one's experience of an individual object in a particular environmental context is expressible in a demonstrative - "*that* hammer". The demonstrative locates the object in the particular spatio-temporal environmental context that one experiences it as being in. McDowell describes the way in which demonstrative identification of an object 'depends on the subject's locating the object; location matters because where the object is, at a particular time, is fundamental to its being the particular object (of its kind) that it is' (McDowell, 1990: 155).

Now, the concept "hammer" is a constituent of the demonstrative. "Hammer" is not object-dependent because its content does not depend on the "perceptible presence" of the object. However, the *particular environmental context*

that individuates the instance of the hammer is also a constituent of the demonstrative, necessarily expressed in the very form of the proposition "*that* x". This makes the demonstrative genuinely object-dependent, because the "*that*" only has content in the context of our demonstratively pointing out an object. We might think that the contextual component of the demonstrative is *non-conceptual*. On this account, the content of our perceptual experience 'cannot be fully captured by inner representations because [it depends] on non-descriptive contextual links to worldly objects' (Thornton, 2004: 150). Of course, it looks as though we are allowing a perceptual "given", in the form of the contextual link to the object, to determine our empirical thinking. However, the idea that we have a genuinely conceptual grasp of such a context - our particular perspective on the object, the object's particular spatial location, the object's particular temporal location – is the problem. It might seem that this requires us to possess a concept or set of concepts that entail a Russellian definite description. Such a description would have to account for the particularity of every specific context we could possibly experience, which is of course an unacceptable conclusion.

This problem directly relates to a compelling objection to McDowell's conceptualism. As above, the objection is that McDowell's conceptualism implies that we must have a conceptual repertoire equal to the visual complexity of our perceptual experience, including perspectival properties[39]. A common example here is our perceptual experience of colour. One reason for thinking that perceptual experience cannot be wholly conceptual is that our experience of colour isn't exhausted by the relatively narrow range of colour concepts one like

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[39] I stay with the perceptual modality of vision for simplicity – the same considerations apply to hearing, taste, and so on.

is likely to have. A representative of this objection may be found in the work of Gareth Evans[40]:

> One consideration that impresses Evans is the determinacy of detail that the content of experience can have. He claims that this detail cannot all be captured by concepts at the subject's disposal. "Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?"(McDowell, 1994: 56; Evans, 1982: 229).

For McDowell, this line of thought stems from a wrongheaded view of how perceptual experience is conceptual, and more generally what it means for something to count as "conceptual". McDowell here is pushing back here against the view that something can only be conceptual if it entails a general specification, a definite description. He starts by asking why we should accept 'that a person's ability to embrace colour within her conceptual thinking is restricted to concepts expressible by words like "red" or "green" and phrases like "burnt sienna"?' (McDowell, 1994: 56). We could say precisely the same thing about the sorts of environmental contexts that one perceptually experiences particular objects as belonging to. McDowell notes that 'it is assumed in advance that the role of intuition in their constitution prevents us from counting these capacities as (purely) conceptual' (McDowell, 1994: 59). This is important – Dreyfus's notion of "motor intentional content", which he holds to be non-conceptual, might be understood in terms of the "intuition" that McDowell is discussing here.

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[40] It is important to note that McDowell's response to Evans here is actually made possible by Evans's work on Fregean senses. I have largely omitted talking about senses in favour of simply talking about conceptual content. However, McDowell formulates this line of thought in reference to Evans's view that Fregean senses are not limited to Russellian definite descriptions (see Evans, 1982; McDowell, 1986). On the subject of non-conceptual content, McDowell takes Evans to have simply taken a wrong turn on an otherwise correct route. Indeed, McDowell says in *Mind and World* that 'It is easy to recast Evans's main contentions, even about perceptual demonstrative thought, without mentioning non-conceptual content' (1994: 106).

Now, there is no doubt that we do perceptually experience specific shades of colour and objects in specific environmental contexts, and that we can refer to these through demonstratives. McDowell states that 'one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like "that shade", in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample' (1994: 57). The demonstrative "this hammer" exploits the object's being perceived in a particular context. What matters here is whether this content can be preserved beyond the experience itself. If so, McDowell argues, then 'what we have in view is genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity' (1994: 57). We can see this by thinking about the role in which such a demonstrative can play in inferential thought.

Take two different demonstratives of the same linguistic form that each express different perceptual experiences – "this hammer". The perceiving subject can both grasp and distinguish between these two demonstratives because they are able to judge the different truth conditions – we know the differing contexts in which the demonstrative had direct application, even though we do not have the linguistic resources to provide definite descriptions. These demonstratives might serve as quite different premises in our inferential thought[41]. McDowell emphasises the way in which demonstrative concepts depend on the memory of the relevant perceptual experience:

> In the presence of the original sample, "that shade"
> can give expression to a concept of a shade; what
> ensures that it is a concept [...] is that the associated
> capacity can persist into the future, if only for a
> short time, and that, having persisted, it can be used
> also in thoughts about what is by then the past, if

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[41] I think that this point is something that Thornton's treatment of the issue misses (see 2014: 150).

> only the recent past [...] even in the absence of a sample, the capacity goes on being exploitable as long as it lasts, in thoughts based on memory: thoughts that are not necessarily capable of receiving an overt expression that fully determines their content. (McDowell, 1994: 57)

We can substitute "that shade" for "that object", understanding this latter demonstrative to pick out an object in a particular environmental context that can be preserved beyond the perception of this state of affairs. Our perceptual experience has object-dependent conceptual content in that such content is expressible in ways that can capture its specificity, and the expression only has content - or meaning - in the light of the "perceptible presence" of a particular object. In McDowell's early treatment of this issue, he takes issue with the idea that Fregean senses are equivalent to Russellian definite descriptions. He cites Frege's disagreement with this equivalency (this is to use the quote from Frege above in full):

> 'In all such cases the mere wording, as it can be preserved in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought; the knowledge of certain conditions accompanying the utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought, is needed for us to grasp the thought correctly' (Frege, 1977: 10).

McDowell states that Frege 'is writing of thoughts which are not completely expressed by words abstracted from contexts of utterance, but he is precisely *not* conceding that the thoughts are not completely expressed' (McDowell, 1984: 285). The important thing is how the *context* of the perceptually experienced object 'contributes to the expression of a fully expressible but nevertheless *de re* thought' (McDowell, 1984: 285).

This object-dependency of McDowell's conceptualism is crucial. Specifying the passivity of the way concepts are operative in perceptual

experience gets us so far, but demonstrating how we can conceive of relevant concepts as genuinely object-dependent shows us how we can escape a Cartesian framework of thinking about the relationship between the human being and the world. It helps us to eschew an account of conceptual content which is inherently "mediational", wherein we have a realm of descriptive content which floats free from a necessary relation to any aspect of external reality. It is worth noting that these object-dependent concepts, thoughts, and propositions play a "structurally basic" in McDowell's conceptualism:

> It is from precisely those simple experiences expressed by perceptual demonstrative thoughts that concepts derive. These experiences provide identifying reference to the basic items about which we think and talk and whose totality makes up the world' (DeGaynesford, 2004: 142).

In a Cartesian framework, we have to bridge a gap between a complete propositional description that does not depend on the object, and the object itself. The content of *de re* thought, on the other hand, is only graspable through the perceptible presence of the object. The "structurally basic" nature of *de re* thought allows us to conceive of the conceptual realm of something substantively in touch, or in "contact" with the external world. McDowell notes that 'countenancing *de re* Fregean senses […] yields thought which are both *de re* and part of the thinker's cognitive world' (McDowell, 1984: 293 – 294). Fulfilling both of these criteria reveals that McDowell is charting a course out of the oscillation of "givenness" and "coherentism" prior to the project of *Mind and World*. Thornton makes the important point that securing an idea of object-dependent concepts 'helps reveal the fallacious underpinnings of a Cartesian picture of the mind as an internal realm separated from the rest of the world' (Thornton, 2004: 142). We should dismiss a concern that McDowell's

conceptualism belongs to a Cartesian picture, insofar as we understand that as a philosophically unsatisfactory conception of a realm of thoughts disconnected from a world of objects.

I have focused here on the way in which McDowell understands conceptual content to avoid a Cartesian framework for thinking about the way in which conceptual content relates to the "external" world. I should say that McDowell's work on this issue becomes relevant when thinking about the distinction between "knowing-how" and "knowing-that", and is utilised by Gascoigne & Thornton (2013) and Stanley & Williamson (2011), as we will see in Chapter Four. In fact, McDowell's clarification that "conceptual" is not equivalent to "general linguistic specifications" is crucial for offering a resolution to the debate with Dreyfus. We saw that Dreyfus utilises a conception of "motor intentional content", which he argues cannot be the made the subject of a proposition (see Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). McDowell, in my view, does not exploit this clarification enough. I therefore return again to this line of thought in Chapter Four.

3.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that McDowell's understanding of the operation of conceptual capacities does not commit him to a Cartesian picture of intentional content. In fact, McDowell's conceptualism is constitutively designed to avoid such a picture, alongside avoiding that incoherent appeal to the "perceptual given", identified by Sellars. McDowell has similar philosophical motivations to Dreyfus, to articulate a satisfactory picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. McDowell departs from Dreyfus,

crucially, in holding that non-conceptualism could not secure such a picture. The point here, therefore, was to further undermine Dreyfus's assumptions about the nature of the operation of conceptual capacities – that such operation implies a detached subject characterised by an internal realm of mental activity.

I therefore focused on McDowell's notion of the *passive* way in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in perceptual experience, which he distinguishes from their operation in deliberative judgement. I noted that McDowell's conceptualism simply makes sense of the intentional nature of perceptual experience. I appraised Dreyfus's notion that in unreflective experience the agent simply has no awareness of the kind that would require the operation of concepts, concluding that his phenomenology here was flawed. I then went on to provide an account of *de re* singular thought, which can be expressed in demonstrative propositions. I did this firstly in order to consolidate the anti-Cartesian nature of McDowell's conceptualism. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate how this line of thought concerning demonstrative conceptual content can provide a resolution to the principal and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

4   Consolidating Conceptual Involvement

4.1   Introduction

Since the close of my first chapter, I have tried to call Dreyfus's assumptions about the "operation" of conceptual capacities into question. Dreyfus takes an appeal to conceptual involvement to imply some commitment to a Cartesian or "mediational" picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. Through his assumption that conceptual involvement must entail reflection or conscious thought, he argues that it is by definition incompatible with unreflective action. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that conceptual involvement of the explicit kind, formulated in a conscious thought, or a judgement, does not entail the interruption of skilful engagement or a detachment between the human being and the world – in many cases, conceptual involvement plays a necessary role in such engagement. In Chapter Three, I provided the motivations behind McDowell's conceptualist account of perception – and intentional responses in general. I clarified the way in which McDowell understands concepts to be drawn passively into operation, without involving reflective judgements, in an object dependent manner.

In this chapter, I focus on how conceptual capacities are in operation in unreflective action that does not feature the sort of explicit conscious thought, reflection, or judgement that I dealt with in Chapter Two. That is, I am now in a position to provide a synoptic picture of how conceptualism can accommodate the phenomenon of unreflective action and the distinctive "motor intentional" content that Dreyfus highlights through his phenomenology. The topic of

perception therefore remains crucial here; both Dreyfus and McDowell conceive of unreflective action as responsiveness to one's perceptual content, but of course disagree over how the response and the content should be characterised. McDowell's clarification about the nature of conceptual content in **3.5** becomes crucial. This chapter should be understood as consolidating a conceptualist account of intentionality, perceptual experience, and intentional action, and providing a resolution to the principle, pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

In **4.2**, I critically assess Dreyfus use of phenomenological methodology. Dreyfus claims that if conceptual capacities do not show up at the phenomenologically descriptive level, they are not operative or involved. I demonstrate that Dreyfus unjustifiably discounts the idea that conceptual capacities might form part of the "background" he appeals to. I relate this to the distinction between "descriptive" and "normative" accounts of conceptual involvement. I go on to argue that the intentional nature of unreflective action means that we must ascribe possession of the relevant concepts to the agent. This line of thought makes sense of McDowell's first claim that unreflective action is a matter of "realising practical concepts". In **4.3**, I consider McDowell's second claim that unreflective action should be understood as "responsiveness to reasons". I therefore return to Bengson's question of how perceptual experience can be said to "produce" unreflective action. I concurrently clarify why McDowell recommends this normative characterisation. In **4.4**, I appraise Dreyfus's critique of McDowell's two claims, which involves his appeal to "motor intentional content", which I have construed as a relation between the "knowledge-how" of appropriate bodily responses and "affective"

perceptual content. Drawing on McDowell's appeal to demonstrative conceptual content, I conclude that although such content is phenomenologically distinctive, it can only play an appropriately normative role in virtue of being integrated into a framework of operative conceptual capacities. I conclude in **4.5**, summarising how the principle disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate can be resolved through the line of thought I have presented in this chapter.

4.2   Intentions, Phenomenology, and Conceptual Involvement

McDowell makes two claims about the nature of intentional action in the debate, both of which he takes to apply to unreflective action. The first claim is that an unreflective action is a "realisation" of a practical concept, or a concept of a thing to do (McDowell, 2013: 49). The second claim is that intentional action is a matter of 'responsiveness to reasons' (see McDowell, 2007a: 340, for example). In this section, I want to focus on the first claim, that unreflective entails the "realisation" of practical concepts. Of course, Dreyfus argues that this claims distorts the phenomenon of unreflective action, and that there is no such conceptual content at work in our unreflective activity (see Dreyfus, 2007a: 360).

In response to Dreyfus's view that conceptualism cannot accommodate the phenomenon of unreflective action, or "embodied coping", McDowell writes that 'I do not have to ignore embodied coping, I have to hold that, in mature human beings, embodied coping is permeated with mindedness' (McDowell, 2007a: 339). He therefore holds that conceptual capacities are "operative" in unreflective action. McDowell means to undermine what he calls a "disenchanted" account of intentional action (see McDowell, 1994: 88). Rietveld

recognises that conceiving of unreflective action as nevertheless conceptual is McDowell's 'way of making sure that unreflective action is not misunderstood as a brute causal event' (Rietveld, 2010; 186). In one sense, McDowell is concerned to distinguish the action of human beings from "non-rational" animals. We saw that McDowell follows Sellars in critiquing the idea of the "myth of the given": the idea that something non-conceptual can intelligibly cause us to have conceptual knowledge. This idea, roughly speaking, cannot account for the justificatory component of knowledge. I said that Sellars' critique applies not only to those epistemic intentional responses, but to intentional responses in general – including unreflective actions. In my first chapter, I emphasised that the *intentional* nature of an action signalled that the action was agential, that the unreflectively acting agent could take responsibility for their action. If we do not attribute any form of conceptual understanding to the agent, however, it does not seem as though the agent stands in any justificatory relation to their action, their actions simply being *caused*[42]. For McDowell, if we separate out the conceptual capacities of the human being from those capacities that are in play in intentional, skilful bodily movements, we end up with a familiar, philosophically unsatisfying dualism of mind and body, or reason and nature.

McDowell therefore remarks that 'it comes to seem that what we do, even in those actions we think of as bodily, is at best to direct our wills, as it were from a distance, at changes of states in those alien objects' (McDowell, 1994: 91). We find an early indication of McDowell's view of action in *Mind and World*. We have seen that McDowell refers to a Kantian configuration of concepts and intuitions to provide a conceptualist account of perception.

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[42] This point has additional force in the context of McDowell's conception of unreflective action as "responsiveness to reasons", which I appraise in **4.3**.

McDowell attempts to apply this configuration to an account of intentional action:

> Kant says "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind". Similarly, intentions without overt activity are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency […] intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated (McDowell, 1994: 89).

It is worth pointing out here that McDowell's specification that 'intentions without overt activity are idle' is directed against conceptions of intentional action that attempt to conceive the "intentional" component as part of a 'specially conceived interior realm', that takes the 'guise of inner items, pictured as initiating bodily goings-on from within' (McDowell, 1994: 90). He associates the idea that intentions are 'shut out from the realm of happenings constituted by movements of ordinary natural stuff' with the assumptions made by a Cartesian philosophy of mind (McDowell, 1994: 90; 90n2). McDowell is therefore sympathetic to Dreyfus's emphasis on the embodied, skilful way in which human beings engage with the world, and the anti-Cartesian motivation behind that emphasis. However, he argues that we need to understand those embodied skills as 'expressions of agency' in order to discount the idea that they simply belong to what he calls the realm of law – and accordingly conceived of as "brute causal events" - rather than the space of reasons. McDowell wants essentially, to 'hold on to the idea that the natural powers that are actualized in the movements of our bodies are powers that belong to us as agents' (McDowell, 1994: 91). In the debate with Dreyfus, McDowell partly expresses this point in that first claim that an unreflective action is nevertheless a matter of realising a practical concept, or a concept of thing to do. (McDowell, 2013: 49). I want to

assess how we can make sense of this idea of "realising" a practical concept by taking a route through Dreyfus's denial that conceptual capacities could be operative in unreflective action, in that way.

I want to begin by highlighting two important aspects of Dreyfus's argument, helpfully articulated by Gottlieb. First, Dreyfus claims that 'for concepts to contribute to experience, reflection must be involved' (Gottlieb, 2011: 345). Gottlieb calls this Dreyfus's "general assumption" because 'Dreyfus fails to defend it and he takes the assumption to hold for all concepts' (Gottlieb, 2011: 345). This assumption of Dreyfus's should by now be familiar to us. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how McDowell takes perception to have conceptual content without the involvement of reflection. The assumed necessary connection between conceptual involvement and reflection informs Dreyfus's phenomenological conclusions about the involvement of concepts in unreflective action. Dreyfus emphasises that conceptual involvement – in the form of reflection, or conscious thought – does not show up at the phenomenologically descriptive level. Phenomenological description does not include reference to the involvement of concepts. There is a further assumption, on Dreyfus's part, that this sort of phenomenological description has the final say on an account of what is contained in a particular experience. Gottlieb argues that Dreyfus is committing what he calls *the phenomenological fallacy*: 'the phenomenological fallacy is to make negative existential claims (e.g. there is no x) when all that is licensed by the method are positive descriptive assertions about appearances or manifestations in consciousness or experience' (2011: 350). That is, Gottlieb argues that Dreyfus is not entitled to conclude that concepts are not "operative" in unreflective action simply on the basis of phenomenological

description: 'Dreyfus makes the move from "it does not appear phenomenologically" to "it is not there, operative, or does not contribute' (Gottlieb, 2013: 350). In fact, it is important to question whether Dreyfus's methodology in this particular case counts as phenomenological in a stricter, substantive sense. The concern might be that – when it comes to the question of conceptual involvement – Dreyfus lapses into a weak, rudimentary form of phenomenology that essentially equates to "a description of experience".

I want to anticipate a later stage of my argument by noting that this sort of phenomenology can bring out some substantive conclusions. Dreyfus's contentious account of the motor intentional content of perception – "attractions and repulsions" – relies on detailed phenomenological description. Gascoigne & Thornton's impatience with Dreyfus's prioritisation of phenomenological accuracy is worth drawing attention to here. They consider Dreyfus's phenomenological conclusion that "mindedness" is not involved in unreflective action, remarking that 'talk of being "true to the phenomenon" is one of those irritating methodological tics inherited from the phenomenological tradition' (2013: 156). Their critique begins with the idea that something unreflective and non-conceptual cannot be articulated in a reflective and conceptual phenomenological description, especially in the light of Dreyfus's claim that conceptual involvement interrupts or scuppers skilful engagement: 'if reflection destroys the skilful coping of the expert then reflection destroys the very phenomenon that one is aiming to describe in a phenomenology of expertise!' (2013: 157). I agree with Gascoigne & Thornton that reflection does not "destroy" skilful coping, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two. They are right that Dreyfus's example of Knoblauch is scant evidence for this claim. However, I am

unsure of Gascoigne & Thornton's claim that if experience is non-conceptual, then Dreyfus is barred from offering a phenomenological description that would conceptualise such experience. They explain that it is 'not clear what it would mean to be "true" to some nonconceptual "given"', and that 'it is not evident how one would know that one's description satisfied a criterion of truth' (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013: 157). There are two strands to a counter-objection to Gascoigne & Thornton.

First, we have to distinguish a positive specification of what *is* contained in an experience, from a negative specification – what is *not* contained in the experience. In this case, Dreyfus makes the negative specification that concepts are not involved in unreflective experience. Such a negative specification is surely immune to Gascoigne & Thornton's objection. Otherwise, we would disbar ourselves from ever even *considering* whether an aspect of our experience is non-conceptual, and no other non-conceptualist – from, say, the analytic domain – has been expected to restrict themselves in this way. It also seems possible to make a positive specification of purportedly non-conceptual experience. There can be different *types* of purportedly non-conceptual content. For example, our perception of space is a popular candidate for non-conceptual content (see Allais, 2009; Kelly, 2003). Experiencing a pain, or another sensation, may also reasonably count as non-conceptual content. Discriminating between these types of non-conceptual content is to offer a positive specification of the relevant non-conceptual experience. I say more about the place of these purportedly non-conceptual elements in the closing stages of this chapter.

Dreyfus's wish to be "true to the phenomenon" is not as trite as Gascoigne & Thornton make out. Their goal in *Tacit Knowledge* is to show how

apparently non-conceptual abilities ("knowledge-how") entail conceptually structured knowledge. They utilise the same kinds of examples as Dreyfus; those distinctive instances of unreflective action where the involvement of concepts or "knowledge-that" is unclear. The account of knowledge-how that Gascoigne & Thornton argue for is an attempt to be true to these distinctive phenomena. The crux of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is Dreyfus's puzzlement over how we would characterise an unreflective intentional action as conceptual when we do not refer to the involvement of concepts at a descriptive level. It is uncharitable to dismiss this as an "irritating methodological tic" when Gascoigne & Thornton spend a great deal of time figuring out exactly *how* to make this characterisation while remaining "true to the phenomenon".

Although I disagree with Gascoigne & Thornton's dismissive perspective on Dreyfus's phenomenological methodology, I agree with Gottlieb that it causes him certain problems in the debate. Gottlieb argues that we cannot rely on the kind of phenomenological description that Dreyfus uses in establishing whether concepts are operative in unreflective action, or not.

> Dreyfus's phenomenological analysis does not allow him to move a level of generality where the conditions contributing to the possibility of absorbed action in general can be specified, conditions that designate some role for conceptuality and the I. The move to a further level of generality would consist in recognizing what does appear in a phenomenological description of experience, and then specifying at a more general level of analysis not available to phenomenological description the conditions required for the possibility of that phenomenon. (Gottlieb, 2011: 350).

That is, Dreyfus's phenomenological methodology, amounting as it does to a simple description of experience, does not attempt to specify the constitutive conditions for that experience. Gottlieb is exactly right in his recommendation

that we must enquire after conditions of possibility. However, Gottlieb implies that such a level of generality is distinct from phenomenological methodology. This is not the case; a significant strand of phenomenology has *transcendental* purport. Phenomenology can seek to establish the conditions of possibility for a particular form of experience, or intentional state. Now, we needn't insist on a transcendental approach that meets the methodological demands of either Husserl or Heidegger. What I want to point out is that Dreyfus is selective about where he exploits such an approach. Where Dreyfus allies himself with any such transcendental approach, he does so with reference to Heidegger.

Dreyfus argues for the apparently Heideggerian claim that non-conceptual bodily and perceptual capacities provide a foundation, or "background" upon which conceptual intentionality is possible. We should recall that Heidegger refers to this primary mode of intentionality as "understanding". Dreyfus claims that Heidegger 'primarily wants to describe what makes the concepts necessary for relating mind and world themselves possible' (Dreyfus, 2013: 19). Crowell & Malpas note that Heidegger 'clearly follows Kant in his idea that what distinguishes philosophical enquiry from empirical science its concern with "a priori" conditions of experience, that is, conditions that do not themselves derive from experience' (2007: 4). They note his departure from Kant in a way that chimes with Dreyfus's interpretation: 'Equally clearly, however, he rejects Kant's idea that these conditions stem from a faculty of pure reason' (Crowell & Malpas, 2007: 4). Dreyfus recognises that Heidegger and McDowell agree that making propositional judgements requires certain "a priori conditions", but that 'they differ as to what these a priori conditions consist in and what they reveal' (Dreyfus, 2013: 21):

> For McDowell making judgements requires operative concepts that correspond to a propositionally structured totality of facts. For Heidegger what is required are non-conceptual coping skills that disclose a space in which things can then be encountered as what and how they are. (Dreyfus, 2013: 21).

Dreyfus takes the "a priori conditions" of propositional judgements to be those non-conceptual bodily and perceptual capacities through which the human being is already intentionally "familiar" with its environment. Dreyfus appeals to Heidegger's description of the possibility of making a propositional judgement about a badly positioned blackboard in a lecture room. For this possibility to arise – to recognise the board is badly positioned - we must first have become familiar with the lecture room as a 'meaningful mini-world' through 'the cumulative skill we have built up through our attending and giving lectures over the years. It is this know-how that orients us in the lecture room and enables us to deal with the things in it' (Dreyfus, 2013: 20; see Heidegger, 1995: 343). Presumably, then, such "cumulative skill" is a condition of possibility for our familiar, unreflective experience and action as well as those experiences in which we make propositional judgements[43]. That is, Dreyfus recognises that we can explain certain intentional states with reference to conditions of possibility.

As I showed in Chapter Two, Dreyfus recognises that conceptual capacities can play a role in acquiring the familiarity with a particular situation

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[43] Clearly, there is some confusion here; in the cited passages, Dreyfus seems to regard unreflective practically engaged experience as *itself* a background for conceptual intentionality, and as *itself* requiring a background of the relevant perceptual and bodily capacities. My view is that Dreyfus identifies the technical sense of "background" with the non-conceptual perceptual and bodily familiarity with a particular situation that makes our practical engagement with that situation possible. The practical engagement itself does not form a background in a strict sense, but is simply a more primary phenomenon than, say, making conceptual judgements. I disagree with this account, of course; my view is that we develop such a familiarity by practically engaging *and* making conceptual judgements, which is a point I make in Chapter Two, and I am concerned to make here.

required for our unreflective engagement with it. He argues that 'we often have to use concepts to find our way about in an unfamiliar situation' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). However, 'our situation gradually comes to make sense to us in a non-conceptual way as we learn [*sic?*] our way around in it' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Then, of course, we get the familiar picture of unreflective action, where 'once our situation becomes familiar our skilled dispositions respond directly to the solicitations of the relevant affordances' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). It is unclear, then, why possession of the relevant conceptual capacities does not form a part of the background Dreyfus appeals to above. Gottlieb notes that if Dreyfus's phenomenological argument 'can be used to undermine the role of concepts, it can also be used to discount the role of skills […] when I unreflectively act, I have no phenomenological awareness of the contribution of skills, but this does not license me to discount their general contribution' (Gottlieb, 2013: 350).. We can acknowledge that "skilled dispositions" may take over from the explicit involvement of conceptual capacities. However, referring to our possession of those conceptual capacities helps us, first, to make sense of how we are *able* to recognise and respond to the specifics of the familiar situation, and, second, to make sense of how those habitual skills are at the same time 'expressions of agency' (McDowell, 1994: 89). I will treat both of these ideas in some detail below. For now, I simply mean to highlight how Dreyfus's recognition that intentional states have "conditions of possibility" should allow him to countenance the involvement of conceptual capacities at the transcendental level. That is, it should allow him to at least entertain McDowell's claim that practical concepts are "realised" in unreflective action. However, Dreyfus is unjustifiably selective in his use of a "background" for intentional states.

I said that referring to our possession of conceptual capacities can make sense of how our habitual skills, or "bodily dispositions", are at the same time 'expressions of agency' (McDowell, 1994: 89). In order to draw this out, we should first briefly attend to unreflective activities that don't have a distinctly embodied aspect. In fact, there are unreflective activities that clearly entail the involvement of conceptual capacities. For example, we might think of the unreflective and immediate way in which certain people can do complex mathematical problems. Rouse recognises that engaging in conversation or speech can be an unreflective activity, and as such represents 'clear analogs to Dreyfus's examples of blitz chess […] we sometimes speak very rapidly, so much so that we cannot explicitly think about what we want to say' (Rouse, 2013: 256). In fact, Dreyfus cites McDowell's similar description of a "master orator": The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 209). However, Dreyfus uses this description in service of the argument that conceptual involvement compromises expertise. In the case of the orator, the sort of conceptual involvement that entails conscious thought and reflection may well compromise their expert performance. There is surely a way in which conceptual capacities *are* involved in this case – the orator is using language and forming complex propositional sentences. Such an ability by definition depends on the orator's possession of the relevant conceptual capacities. We should recall Dreyfus's "general assumption", that 'for concepts to contribute to experience, reflection must be involved' (Gottlieb, 2011: 345). Unreflective performances such as oratory are a clear counter-point to the assumption. It may the case that Dreyfus would accept that an orator's performance involves conceptual capacities. It is clear, though, that he would

refuse to generalise this point to include those distinctively bodily forms of unreflective action which he appeals to.

At this point, it is important to clarify our definition of "conceptual". Rouse argues that Dreyfus is operating with a different definition of "conceptual" to McDowell. Rouse notes that 'one of the most important dividing lines among philosophical accounts of the conceptual domain is whether to provide a descriptive or a normative account of conceptually articulated content' (Rouse, 2013: 250). Dreyfus's phenomenological descriptions, for Rouse, are only 'relevant challenges to *descriptive* accounts of the conceptual domain' which he defines as the view that 'to use a concept is to have something in mind, or something causally implicated in what one does' (Rouse, 2013: 252)[44]. Rouse accepts that concepts *on this descriptive account* are not operative on the basis of Dreyfus's phenomenology of unreflective action. Indeed, Dreyfus's phenomenology persuasively shows that token mental states in which concepts feature descriptively are often not in play. Rouse goes on to introduce a "normative" account of the conceptual domain. Normative approaches hinge on the idea that intentional states or actions are evaluable with reference to conceptual norms:

> […] whether certain [conceptual] representations or structures are actually contained or causally efficacious in a particular thought or action then does not matter, but only whether that thought or action is sufficiently accessible and potentially responsive to conceptual assessment' (2013: 251).

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[44] Rouse takes Jerry Fodor's *Concepts* to be representative of descriptive accounts: 'in Fodor's specific version, conceptual use involves having token mental states that possess representational content' (Rouse, 2013: 250). See also Margolis (2007) for a contrast between a mental representation theory of concepts, and an abstract object theory of concepts.

On the normative approach, there is no connection between conceptual involvement and reflection. Concepts do not have to be "causally efficacious" to be operative in unreflective action, and we should not be surprised when the relevant concepts do not turn up at the phenomenologically descriptive level. Rouse notes that while Dreyfus emphasises the unreflective way in which chess and baseball players perform, John Haugeland – a former student of Dreyfus – engages in 'the exact opposite use of chess and baseball examples' (Rouse, 2013: 252). Haugeland understands these unreflective activities in terms of the distinctive conceptual abilities of human beings: 'playing a game governed by constitutive standards is a non-trivial *achievement*; dogs and ordinary monkeys, for instance, are utterly incapable of it' (Haugeland, 1998: 253). The unreflective actions of the blitz chess player, for instance, are assessable with reference to the rules of that game.

McDowell's claim that unreflective action is a matter of "realising" concepts should, in my view, be understood as actions "manifesting" possession of the relevant concepts. What I want to say here is that unreflective action *manifests* the agent's grasp or possession of the relevant rules and standards of a certain activity. Rouse articulates the relevant conceptualist picture of intentional action here:

> No nonhuman animal can play chess, because no animal grasps the relevant concepts; animals can't recognize pieces and moves, the legality of those moves, or their strategic significance toward winning or losing. Moreover, players' perceptual and practical skills at recognizing positions and making moves must be responsive and accountable to those concepts and the norms they articulate (Rouse, 2013: 252; see Haugeland, 1998: 241 – 247).

In the same way we ascribe an agent possession of those concepts that are the constituents of intentional states like believing, and indeed perceiving, so too can we ascribe concept-possession to agents intentionally acting, whether unreflectively or otherwise. I made clear in Chapter One that the unreflective actions under discussion in the debate are nevertheless intentional. I noted, however, that the unreflective nature of those actions makes it difficult to account for that intentional component. In order to make sense of how an unreflective action is an expression of agency, an action the agent is responsible for, we must emphasise how the action manifests the agent's conceptual understanding. One way of putting this is that intentional actions are only explanatorily *intelligible* in the light of the agent's possession of the relevant concepts.

We can apply this line of thought to a distinctly "embodied" activity like playing tennis. In Chapter One, I described the professional tennis player's return of a fast serve as a paradigmatic case of skilful unreflective action. On the normative model of conceptual involvement, we can specify that the activity of tennis involves those actions being intelligible only in relation to particular conceptual standards, and as such manifests a grasp of various concepts. Unreflectively returning a fast serve manifests a conceptual understanding of the rules of tennis, including the understanding of where one has to return the ball to in order for it to be a successful return of serve. Further, the agent manifests at least some broad concepts of strategic purpose; unreflectively returning to the ball to an area of the court where an opponent is weak, for example. We can also construe this in epistemic terms; we can ascribe the unreflectively acting agent *knowledge* that the opponent is weak in a particular area of the court.

Although Gottlieb references the conceptual standards which must govern unreflective activity, he is mainly focused on McDowell's latter claim about practical concepts. Gottlieb makes the basic claim that once we characterise an action as intentional, the content of the intention contains a practical concept (Gottlieb, 2011: 349). Dreyfus agrees that unreflective action can be characterised as intentional, and even considers the possibility that 'in so far as a basic action like eating dinner or going for a walk is concerned, there will always be an "I" planning and initiating the overall action' (2007b: 374) – but fails to recognise he commits himself to here. The very intentions involved in an unreflective action entail the concepts of those basic actions in a way that makes the unreflective action itself intelligible only as a manifestation of the possession of those concepts. As Gottlieb says: 'If the intention does not require attention or reflection, then neither does the content of that intention' (Gottlieb, 2011: 349). Gottlieb notes that there can be various practical concepts entailed by someone acting on their intention to make a chess move: 'the first-order practical concept involves the physical moving of the piece to the position the piece should land on the board, say moving the pawn one space forward. The second-order practical concept might be accomplishing checkmate' (Gottlieb, 2011: 349). The idea of "manifesting" or "realising" these sorts of conceptual capacities should not be associated with any process of reflection or thought. To affirm the role that one's possession and grasp of the relevant concepts plays in intentional, intelligent, skilful activity, one need not also posit 'inner items, pictured as initiating bodily goings-on from within' (McDowell, 1994: 90). Dreyfus's assumption that conceptual capacities can only be operative in unreflective action in the form of some mental event is therefore mistaken. Without positing the operation of the

relevant conceptual capacities, we are unable to account for the intentional component of the unreflective action.

In the debate, McDowell provides the example of a person unreflectively catching a frisbee, perhaps so fast she does not immediately recognise the object as such – such an action may run close to being "autonomic", or a genuine case of non-intentional bodily reflex. However, McDowell specifies that there is still a concept being "realised", or "manifested" here: 'Even if she does not have the concept of a Frisbee, there is a concept that she is realizing, perhaps the concept of catching *this*' (McDowell, 2013: 48)[45]. McDowell recognises that this is a 'limiting case of practical rationality at work', in the sense that the reason the person might give for catching the Frisbee might be 'No particular reason; I just felt like it' (McDowell, 2013: 49). McDowell's account of the operation of conceptual capacities in unreflective action is only fully specified by bringing his account of "realising" practical concepts together with his account of "responsiveness to reasons". The Frisbee-catching agent's manifestation of a practical concept is inextricable from the *reason* for acting in the way they did. We must move on to appraise McDowell's second claim, that unreflective action is a matter of "responsiveness to reasons".

4.3   Reasons and Unreflective Action

My aim from here is to explicate McDowell's account of unreflective action as "responsiveness to reasons" in relation to his account of "realising" practical concepts", and then assess how his completed conception of the

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[45] Note that McDowell is relying on demonstrative conceptual content here; this becomes decisive in **4.4**.

operation of conceptual capacities might accommodate Dreyfus's notion of "motor intentional content". I want to make sure that my discussion is framed in terms of the question I highlighted in Chapter One, that of how perception can be said to *produce* intelligent, or intentional, action (Bengson, 2016: 26). As I noted, this question captures the unreflective nature of how we largely act in response to our environment. Bengson notes that 'perceiving things to be a certain way may in some cases lead directly to action of a certain kind […] there is no intervening conscious steps or transitions […] one perceives, and, straightaway, one acts – not mindlessly, but *intelligently*' (2016: 26).

We have seen that Dreyfus's conception of motor intentional content provides some answer to this question[46]. Dreyfus's view is that our skilful bodily dispositions are reliably keyed on to the stimuli of our developed perceptual capacities. McDowell's view, on the other hand, is that the content of our perceptual experience entails reasons for the agent to act in a particular way; unreflective action is a matter of "responsiveness to reasons". This depends, of course, on his conceptualist account of perceptual content. Affirming conceptualism does not only work to secure the epistemic significance of perception. The conceptual content of a practically engaged agent is, for McDowell what allows them to immediately and unreflectively respond in an intelligent manner.

It is important to return to McDowell's Aristotelian naturalism here. I previously outlined McDowell's appropriation of an Aristotelian conception of "second nature" in relation to the human being's perceptual experience of the

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[46] Again, neither Dreyfus nor McDowell are responding directly to this question of how perception produces intentional action, but I think that their positions in the debate are partly intelligible as answers to this question.

world. McDowell's account of second nature is supposed to capture the way in which the development of conceptual capacities is intelligible as a natural propensity of the human being. McDowell clarifies that the operation of conceptual capacities 'is to be understood in close connection with the idea of rationality […] conceptual capacities are capacities that belong to their subject's rationality' (McDowell, 2007a: 338). Our conceptual capacities, and the concomitant abilities for rationality and reasoning, are developed through maturation in a linguistic community. This characterisation has the advantage of accommodating conceptual capacities, and the normative character of human thought, within the natural world. Acquisition of the relevant concepts is essential to becoming "open" to the layout of reality, to being able to see, and to know, that things are 'thus and so' (McDowell, 1994: 18). Now, McDowell is clear that he derives this conception of "second nature" from Aristotle's discussion of ethical behaviour.

In the opening stages of the debate, both Dreyfus and McDowell draw on Aristotle's conception of the *phronimos*, the possessor of practical wisdom, the "moral expert". Through proper education and practice, the *phronimos* becomes habituated into responding appropriately to ethical situations. There is therefore a close connection to second nature. For McDowell, just as acquiring and developing conceptual capacities allows one to become sensitive to empirical states of affairs, so too does it allow one to become sensitive to the *ethical* dimension of life. McDowell puts this as follows: 'The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities' (McDowell, 1994: 82). That is, our responsiveness to the

ethical requirements of a given situation is dependent on our acquisition of the relevant concepts. McDowell understands the cultivation of ethical behaviour as a cultivation of rationality. Forman writes that 'to feel the force of ethical demands is, then, constitutive of the ethical character one acquires through the proper ethical training, an ethical character that is therefore a *second* nature' (2008: 569). "Feeling the force of ethical demands" means being responsive or sensitive to *reasons* for acting in a particular way. This conception of ethical behaviour informs McDowell's thinking about non-ethical forms of action, and applies to unreflective practical activity: 'If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature' (McDowell, 1994: 84). Further, he writes: 'Moulding ethical character […] is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which includes responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics' (McDowell, 1994: 84). The acquisition of a second nature results in 'habits of thought and action' in general (McDowell, 1994: 84). McDowell's picture of intentional action centres around the idea that one acts in response to reasons, or "rational demands", thanks to one's acquisition of the relevant concepts. Further, responding to a reason need not entail reflection – one can respond immediately and unreflectively to a reason.

Throughout the debate, McDowell argues that his account does not entail or imply a detachment from a practical situation, or a loss of engagement in activity. McDowell does not want to play down those embodied, engaged, and unreflective aspects of how human beings relate to their environment that Dreyfus highlights. McDowell does not attempt to dispute Dreyfus's

phenomenology. Rather, McDowell attempts to correct Dreyfus's understanding of how conceptual capacities can be "operative" in unreflective action in the way that he claims. For McDowell, it is not the case that 'someone can be acting for a reason only if her action issues from distanced critical reflection of the situation in which she is acting' (McDowell, 2013: 46). Rationality, for McDowell, is not an antonym to unreflective engagement, as it is for Dreyfus. Rather, unreflective engagement is rationality at work. It may have been helpful for McDowell to refer to his earlier work on virtue and reason. There, McDowell is keen to emphasise that we should not see the workings of rationality in virtuous action as 'a balancing of reasons for and against' (McDowell, 1979: 335). The refined ability that a *phronimos* possesses allows them to immediately recognise that the perceived situation mandates some particular action. Such a recognition is described by McDowell in a way that accommodates its unreflective aspect: 'some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reason for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation […] but as silencing them' (McDowell, 1979: 335).

McDowell's insistence that unreflective action should be explained in a 'way that turns on the idea of responsiveness to reasons as such' (McDowell, 2006: 236) is designed to avoid the danger that human intentional action is simply a matter of mechanistic responsiveness to stimuli; that perceptual stimuli simply *cause* the human being to act in a particular way. Responsiveness to reasons *as such* means that one responds to a reason *in virtue of its being a reason*, responding to a reason *qua* reason. Responding to a reason as such means that

one responds to it in terms of its being something that can favour one course of action over another. McDowell takes the case of an animal fleeing from danger:

> […] fleeing is a response to something that is in an obvious sense a reason for it: danger, or at least what is taken to be danger. If we describe a bit of behaviour as fleeing, we represent the behaviour as intelligible in the light of a reason for it (McDowell, 2007c: 2).

We can of course specify that the animal fled for a *reason* – for example, a deer flees because it hears the sound of a gunshot. However, the animal did not respond to the gunshot *as a reason* for their action – the gunshot was not taken by the deer to favour a particular course of action. That is to say, although the animal acted for a reason, the reason itself did not figure in their action. The deer has an ingrained disposition to flee – it is *caused* to flee – by a stimulus such as the sound of a gunshot. McDowell accordingly specifies that an animal's fleeing is not a response to a reason *as such*. For an action to be a response to a reason *qua* reason:

> […] we would need to be considering a subject who can step back from an inclination to flee, elicited from her by an apparent danger, and raise the question whether she *should* be so inclined – whether the apparent danger is, here and now, a sufficient reason for fleeing (McDowell, 2007c: 2).

In characterising an intentional action as a response to a reason *as such*, we are specifying that the response stands in some justificatory relation to the stimulus one is responding to. That is, the stimulus can be evaluated in terms of whether it justifies the action, whether it counts in the action's favour, or in fact counts *against* the action. The stimulus has a normative status in that its justification of a particular action can be evaluated. Take a person who flees what they take to be a dangerous situation. They may realise that the situation

was not, in fact, a dangerous one, and the aspects of the situation they were responding to did not justify their response. Now, if we take the intentional action of "fleeing" here to be simply *caused* by the relevant aspects of the situation, we cannot make sense of the agent's recognition that their action was mistaken. Of course, this all entails that the perceived aspect of the situation was conceptual – if it is not the conceptual content of perception that the intentional action responds to, then the intentional action is not in response to a reason, and the agent's action cannot stand in a justificatory relation to the perceptual stimulus. There is therefore a necessary connection, for McDowell, between one's intentions and one's perceptual content. McDowell describes this as a 'sane account of what acting for a reason is' (McDowell, 2013: 48).

In order to offer a clear sense of what a "complete" conceptualist account of the relationship between perception and action looks like, we can look to Bengson's own account of how perceptual content "produces" intentional action. As we have seen, McDowell draws from Aristotle's conception of the *phronimos,* a virtuous agent who responds immediately and appropriately to the perceived particulars of a given situation. For McDowell, developing into such a virtuous agent depends on refining one's perceptual capacities through one's inculcation into the space of reasons – that is, through acquiring the relevant concepts. Bengson's account can be read as charting the contours of McDowell's Aristotelian conception of the development of the *phronimos*. For Bengson, the conceptual content of perception can contain what Bengson calls "actionable concepts", our possession of which entails our being "poised" to perform a particular intentional action upon perception of the relevant situation with the

relevant features. That is, we have a disposition to act that is predicated upon our possession of relevant conceptual capacities.

One example here might be the actionable concept '*my being in immediate danger*' – our possession of this concept entails being 'in a position to perform certain actions (e.g., fleeing or fighting) in a way that one who fails to understand this concept is not' (Bengson, 2016: 39). That is, possessing the concept of being in immediate in danger in some sense *necessarily* entails a connection to a possible action. Bengson also provides the example of perceiving a "weary, pregnant woman standing on public transport" (2016: 46). The conceptual content here may be "actionable" if one's grasp of it also entails grasping that a particular response is merited. Bengson is clear that the connections between the conceptual content of perception and the relevant concepts of acting are *norm governed* – in the case of responding to the weary, pregnant woman standing on public transport, we can understand the concept of, say, giving up one's seat to her as owing to a concomitant grasp of a social or ethical norm (Bengson, 2016: 46). We should therefore recall that in order for us to make sense of the "intentional" component of unreflective action, we have to attribute the agent possession of the relevant concepts, including the rules and norms that govern the activity that they are engaging in.

What we have here is a justificatory relation between a perceptual experience, the, content of which is conceptual, and intentional action. To use Bengson's example, the perceptual content "there is a weary, pregnant woman standing on this subway train" bears a normative relation to a practical concept of "giving one's seat up", a concept which McDowell would describe as being

"realised" when one unreflectively acts in response to that perceived situation. Further, a conceptual understanding of certain social norms and ethical precepts are similarly indispensable in our account of the relationship between unreflective action and perceptual content. Bengson's account provides a compelling picture of the internal mechanics of how McDowell's two claims, about "realising" practical concepts and responding to reasons, are necessarily related.

Dreyfus objects, firstly, to McDowell's picture of responsiveness to reasons on the basis that 'it does not follow that, once we have gotten past the learning phase, these *reasons* in the form of habits still *influence* our wise actions' (Dreyfus, 2005: 51). Dreyfus's main contention in this case is that an appeal to rationality cannot account for the way in which an expert – ethical or otherwise – can respond appropriately to highly specific situations. For Dreyfus, conceptual rationality could only figure in the guise of general rules for acting. McDowell's notion that one is "realising" practical concepts cannot account for the specific ways in which an agent must respond to a given situation. One cannot have a practical concept for every such unreflective response. Dreyfus argues that the notion of "responsiveness to reasons" ignores the way in which developed perceptual capacities give rise to a kind of content which cannot be construed as "facts" or "states of affairs", which he calls "motor intentional content". I now move on to assess Dreyfus's phenomenological non-conceptualism in a way that provides some resolution to the debate.

4.4   Assessing Motor Intentional Content

So far, I have demonstrated McDowell's claims that unreflective action can be conceived of as first manifesting – or "realising" practical concepts, and second as responsiveness to reasons. In arguing that intentional action is only intelligible in the light of the agent's grasp of the relevant concepts, I undermined Dreyfus's assumption that the operation of conceptual capacities necessarily entails reflection or conscious thought. Further, understanding unreflective action in this way enables us to understand the clear normative, agential component of such action. Dreyfus argues that neither of McDowell's claims can accommodate the phenomenon of unreflective action, and his own conception of "motor intentional content" is better suited to do so. In this final stage, I provide a critique of Dreyfus's conception of motor intentional content. I argue that although such content indeed plays a central role in our practically engaged experience, it can only play this role in virtue of being integrated into an operative conceptual framework. In providing this critique, I show how we can resolve the principle and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. I want to begin by focusing on Dreyfus's basic critique of McDowell.

Dreyfus objects to McDowell's picture of an unreflectively acting agent responding to reasons on the basis that 'it does not follow that, once we have gotten past the learning phase, these *reasons* in the form of habits still *influence* our wise actions' (Dreyfus, 2005:51). Dreyfus argues that an appeal to rationality cannot account for the way in which an unreflectively acting expert – ethical or otherwise – can respond appropriate to highly specific situations. Firstly, the notion of "responsiveness to reasons" ignores the way in which developed

perceptual capacities give rise to a kind of "motor intentional content" which cannot be construed as "facts" or "states of affairs" that could represent reasons for one's actions. Further, McDowell's notion that one is "realising" practical concepts cannot account for the specific ways in which an agent must respond to a given situation. One cannot have a practical concept for every unreflective response. For Dreyfus, conceptual rationality could only figure in the guise of general rules for acting that are not tailored to the specific situation that one is engaging with and responding to.

McDowell describes this basic understanding of rationality here: 'Dreyfus pictures rationality as detached from particular situations – as able to relate to particular situations only by subsuming them under content determinately expressible in abstraction from any situation' (McDowell, 2007a: 339). Dreyfus therefore takes issue with McDowell's appropriation of Aristotle. For Dreyfus, the Aristotelian *phronimos* is best described by Heidegger's own reading of the concept. Dreyfus quotes Heidegger as follows:

> [The *phronimos*]… is determined by his situation in the largest sense… The circumstances, the givens, the times and the people vary. The meaning of the action… varies as well… It is precisely the achievement of *phronesis* to disclose the [individual] as acting *now* in the *full* situation within which he acts. (Heidegger, 1997: 101; quoted in Dreyfus, 2005: 51).

In Dreyfus's estimation, the Heideggerian *phronimos* becomes 'a master at responding to the *specific situation* […] *phronesis* shows that socialization can produce a kind of master whose actions do not rely on habits based on reasons to guide him' (Dreyfus, 2005: 45 – 46). Crucially, Dreyfus specifies that the *phromimos's* 'perceptions and actions at their best would be so responsive to the

specific situation that they could not be captured in general concepts' (Dreyfus, 2005: 51). Dreyfus therefore takes McDowell's interpretation of Aristotle to clash with Heidegger's – McDowell's corrects Dreyfus on this point, as we will see directly below. First, it is important to clarify the non-conceptualist account that Dreyfus takes to characterise the "the achievement of the *phronimos*". Dreyfus describes unreflective perceptual experience as having motor intentional content, or what I have suggested might be described as "affective" content, operating as it does on the level of bodily feeling. Dreyfus describes this content in terms of "attractions and repulsions", "lines of force", and "bodily tension", and in general being "drawn" to act in a particular way. Accordingly, such content is bound up with the bodily skills of the perceiving agent, the embodied "knowledge-how" which governs the agent's response to the specific situation. I will recapitulate Dreyfus's description of this process:

> As the agent acquires skills, these skills are "stored", not as representations in the mind, but as more and more refined dispositions to respond to the solicitations of more and more refined perceptions of the current situation' (Dreyfus, 1999: 1).

It is this through a non-conceptualist account of this process that Dreyfus claims to be able to preserve the situation-specific responses that are inherent in unreflective action. McDowell's account of the relationship between perception and action is unable to capture the distinctive kind of affective content at work in our unreflective experience, and is unable to capture the distinctive form of situation-specific "know-how" at work in our unreflective bodily responses. I will further specify the details of this process and its perceptual and active components as I proceed through my critique.

I want to give a brief overview of how McDowell responds to Dreyfus. This provides us with a sense of the general strategy of my critique. McDowell corrects Dreyfus's understanding of the Aristotelian influence on his thinking: 'I reject the idea that the content of practical wisdom, as Aristotle understands, can be captured in general prescriptions for conduct, determinately expressible independently of the concrete situations in which the *phronimos* is called to act' (McDowell, 2007a: 340). In fact, McDowell takes the achievement of the *phronimos* to possess a cultivated ability to recognise the unique situation as respond to it accordingly. It is the *specifics* of the situation that represent *reasons* for the *phronimos* to respond as they do. It is important to note that reasons, for McDowell, many not be specifiable 'independently of the concrete situation' (McDowell, 2007a: 340). McDowell emphasises that to think otherwise is to fall into a 'hopeless conception of the domain of language, and thereby of the domain of the conceptual' (McDowell, 2007a: 342). What McDowell is referring to here is that traditional, Cartesian misapprehension of what conceptual content entails. In Chapter Three, I focused on McDowell's work on *de re* conceptual content, where McDowell argues that the content of singular demonstratives, directed not just at sense-data but at ordinary states of affairs, do not entail a Russellian definite description where the content is linguistically codified independently of its reference to that states of affairs. In *Mind and World*, McDowell articulates this line of thinking:

> 'A perceptual demonstrative thought surely homes in on its object not by fitting a general specification, with the object figuring in the thought as what fits the specification, but by virtue of the way this sort of thinking exploits the perceptible presence of the object itself' (McDowell, 1994: 105).

A central theme of the final stage of this chapter is to bring this line of thought about demonstrative conceptual content to bear on the principle and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Essentially, the goal here is to disprove Dreyfus's claim that 'no "aspect" of motor intentional content is "present" in a "form" which is "suitable to constitute the contents of conceptual capacities"' (Dreyfus, 2007b: 360). I want to focus first on the "knowledge-how" which is characteristic of our skilful bodily responses. In this way, I want to return to the epistemic, Rylean approach to unreflective action that I took in **1.3**.

Bodily Ability and Knowing-How

It useful here to refer to Foster-Wallace's description of how the development of one's bodily skilful responses outstrips any propositional knowledge of how to act. Foster-Wallace refers to the development of our skilful bodily responses in terms of refining the "kinaesthetic sense":

> Refining the kinaesthetic sense is the main goal of the extreme daily practice regimens we often hear about […] Hitting thousands of strokes, day after day, develops the ability to do by "feel" what cannot be done by regular conscious thought […] a sense of each change's effects that gets more and more acute even as it recedes from consciousness (Foster-Wallace, 2006).

We must supplement Foster-Wallace's description here with the specification that such a "kinaesthetic sense" in in service of an overall intentional action. Given what I concluded in **4.2**, we can specify that a particular action, even when it is being performed with a high level of unreflective expertise, manifests possession of a concept of an action like

"serving to an opponent's backhand". Dreyfus hints that he *could* possibly concede this point to McDowell, but emphasises that no such concept-possession could capture the *way* in which the intention is carried out. In Dreyfus's view, the knowledge-how involved in unreflective action represents an abdication of responsibility to the body – we might recall Merleau-Ponty's description of an expert typist, where the relevant knowledge is 'in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 166). McDowell points out that the knowledge-how on display in master-level chess need not rely on any reflection on what to do – i.e. what overall course of action to take – *or* how to do it. After the fact, the chess master can answer the relevant "Anscombean" questions about what they were doing and why they were doing it. In providing such answers, McDowell claims, the chess-master gives 'expression to knowledge he already had when he was acting in flow' (McDowell, 2013: 46). Dreyfus disputes that the knowledge involved could be abstracted out from the state of flow that the chess-master finds themselves in: 'when we want to describe the activity that contributes to the basic action but is not in itself a basic action, we find we don't experience an ego doing it' (Dreyfus, 2007b: 374). For Dreyfus, the skilful way of acting here belongs to a sphere inaccessible by rational capacities. That is, it does not belong to the space of reasons in any sense[47]. What we need to do is demonstrate how the knowledge-how manifested in one's skilful bodily response might be brought into the space of reasons, and accordingly the realm of the conceptually expressible.

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[47] The question then arises of whether the skilful way of acting belongs to the realm of law, of causal scientific explanation, for Dreyfus. Dreyfus does hold that there is a normativity inherent in his account which represents a middle ground between McDowell's explanatory space. I deal with this normativity in relation to Dreyfus's account of perceptual experience.

We should therefore return to the epistemic approach I took in Chapter One. There, I demonstrated how Ryle argues that "knowing-how" to do something is not a matter of possessing any conceptually structured knowledge. Recent "intellectualist" approaches to knowledge-how, however, dispute the orthodox Rylean position here. Such approaches deny that knowing-how to do something – such as returning a world-class serve – in a non-conceptual form of knowledge. Stanley & Williamson's "Knowing How" (2001) has been particularly influential in this regard. I should note that Stanley & Williamson do not refer to Dreyfus or any phenomenological account of unreflective action. Ryle attacks approaches to intentional action where intentional action 'is a process introduced and somehow steered by some ulterior act of theorising' and is 'guided by the consideration of a regulative proposition' (Ryle, 1945: 1 – 2). Ryle's regress argument is a central line of attack against that account. As we saw, Ryle identifies a regress wherein the consideration of a "regulative proposition", or rule, would require a further such act, and this latter act would itself require a further act, and so on[48]. Of course, we know that Dreyfus further argues that the consideration of rules simply does not show up in phenomenological descriptions of unreflective action.

First, Stanley & Williamson undercut the regress argument – they deny that the ascription of a conceptual form of knowledge *would* require the reflective consideration of conceptual rules: 'it is simply false that manifestations of

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[48] Stanley & Williamson express the regress as follows, where 'the content of knowledge how to *F* is, for some φ, the proposition that φ(F), and where "C(p) denotes 'the act of contemplating the proposition that *p*': 'Suppose that Hannah Fs. By premise (1), Hannah employs the knowledge-how to F. By RA, Hannah employs the knowledge that φ(F). So, by premise (2), Hannah C(φ(F))s. Since C(φ(F)) is an act, we can reapply premise (1), to obtain the conclusion that Hannah knows how to C(φ(F)). By RA, it then follows that Hannah employs the knowledge that φ(C(φ(F))). By premise (2), it follows that Hannah C(φ(C(φ(F)))). And so on' (2001: 414).

knowledge-that must be accompanied by distinct acts of contemplating propositions' (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 415). The phenomenological insight that conceptual capacities are not in play in that *descriptive* sense that Rouse highlights is perfectly acceptable to the intellectualist. Stanley & Williamson cite Carl Ginet to make this point:

> I exercise (or manifest) my knowledge *that* one can get the door open by turning the knob and pushing it (as well as my knowledge *that* there is a door there) by performing that operation quite automatically as I leave the room; and I may do this, of course, without formulating (in my mind or out loud) that proposition or any other relevant proposition (Ginet, 1975: 7).

As we have seen, McDowell prefers to describe intentional action in terms of "realising" conceptual capacities. McDowell's description of the chess master giving 'expression to knowledge he already had when he was acting in flow' (McDowell, 2013: 46) makes this point in epistemic terms. Ryle's identification of a regress does not apply to this sort of moderate intellectualism. As such, Stanley & Williamson point out that only if the intentional action really did require a prior act of considering a rule that a regress would take hold. They deny that conceptual knowledge must be attributed in this way. Attributing conceptual knowledge to an unreflectively acting agent means, rather, that 'knowledge is thought of as encoded in a propositional form for the speaker, whether consciously *or* unconsciously' (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013: 56). Such a specification is in line with the point I have made throughout this chapter. Unreflective action can be understood as a manifestation of concept-possession, rather than an instance of those concepts being reflectively drawn upon, or "causally efficacious", in the action itself. Stanley & Williamson therefore reject

what Gottlieb calls Dreyfus's "general assumption" about the relationship between conceptual involvement and reflection or conscious thought.

We should recall the issue of situation-specificity. For Dreyfus, the context-dependent way in which an agent can unreflectively respond with an appropriate and skilful bodily action shows that the agent's possession of any conceptual knowledge can only play a limited role. Unreflective action depends on responding to a unique situation in a specific way. One's repertoire of conceptual knowledge, for Dreyfus, is not equal to all of these unique situations or specific responses. The right response is rooted in a non-conceptual bodily ability, which is a result of something like Foster-Wallace's development of a "kinaesthetic sense". For McDowell's part, he denies that the knowledge that informs one's unreflective response 'can be captured in general prescriptions for conduct, determinately expressible independently of the concrete situations in which the *phronimos* is called to act' (McDowell, 2007a: 340). Stanley & Williamson similarly deny that conceptual knowledge is limited to context-dependent specifications of rules. Their account works to assuage Dreyfus's concerns that conceptual articulation cannot ever capture situation-specificity. Stanley & Williamson's candidate for conceptually structured knowledge-how is a certain type of proposition. These propositions capture '*ways of engaging in actions*' (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 427). These "way of engaging in actions" are 'properties of token events' (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 427). We can understand this on the model of an overall intentional action – a token event – and the specific way in which that overall intention is carried out – the property of that event. This focus on particular ways of engaging in actions represents a

promising attempt to accommodate the situationally sensitive bodily skills that Dreyfus emphasises.

To be clear, the "token event" should be understood as an intentional action that, given what I concluded in **4.3**, manifests the agent's possession of the relevant practical concept. In epistemic terms, it manifests the conceptual knowledge of what one is trying to do, and what one is trying to achieve. The possibility of ascribing conceptual knowledge of the "property" of that token event, of the *way* of engaging in the overall intentional action, is what is up for debate here. Stanley & Williamson's move is to propose that demonstrative propositions can capture these properties of intentional actions. Recall McDowell's appeal to demonstrative conceptual content in undermining Cartesian assumptions about the role of the mind. The non-conceptualist might argue that our conceptual capacities are outstripped by the fine-grained content of perceptual experience. In response, McDowell argues that demonstrative propositions can capture fineness of grain, such as "*that* shade of colour". I will recapitulate the details of this line of thought as their relevance arises.

Now, Stanley & Williamson claim that demonstrative propositions can apply similarly to "fine-grained" actions, so to speak. Just as a perceiving agent might use a demonstrative proposition like "*that* shade of colour" to articulate the content of a perceptual experience that she does not have a linguistically codified concept for, so too can she use a demonstrative proposition like "*that* way of riding a bicycle", or even "*this* is the way to return *that* kind of serve" to articulate a *way* of engaging in a token intentional action. Further, just as the demonstrative proposition "*that* shade of colour" has its content in virtue of what

McDowell refers to as the 'perceptible presence of the [shade of colour] itself' (1994: 105), the demonstrative proposition "*that* way of riding a bicycle" has its content in virtue of the perceptible presence of the *practical demonstration* of the action. Thus, Stanley & Williamson hold that an ascription of knowledge like "Hannah knows how to ride a bicycle" is true if Hannah knows that *a particular practically demonstrated way* of riding a bicycle is a way for her to ride a bicycle (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 426). There is a certain kind of knowledge, then, that is only articulable in the presence of a practical demonstration. Crucially, this articulation brings a way of acting, or a way of responding, into the realm of conceptual thought. We can ascribe the unreflectively acting agent *knowledge-that* one can return a serve in *this* or *that* particular way. Knowledge-how is therefore a kind of knowledge-that. I will draw out some of the philosophical details and implications here presently. I first want to address an important objection that might arise here, particularly from Dreyfus's non-conceptualist perspective.

An intellectualist account relies on the practical demonstration of ways of acting. Stanley & Williamson hold that an ascription of knowledge like "Hannah knows how to ride a bicycle" is true if Hannah knows that *a particular practically demonstrated way* of riding a bicycle is a way for her to ride a bicycle (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 426). That is, there is a certain kind of knowledge that is only articulable in the presence of a practical demonstration. Again, recall McDowell's comments on perception of shades of colour, that 'in the presence of the original sample, "that shade" can give expression to a concept of a shade' (McDowell, 1994: 57). Gascoigne & Thornton defend a similar account of the knowledge on display in unreflective action (they call it "tacit knowledge"):

> Tacit knowledge is practical knowledge or know-how. Further, in some sense at least, it resists being put into words […] it does have a content, but not one that can be captured in context-independent or purely linguistic terms. The articulation of the content requires practical demonstration. But […] this does not imply that the content lies outside the space of concepts (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013: 191).

As in McDowell's account of demonstrative propositions, this rests upon the idea that something's being "conceptual" does not mean that it is equivalent to a definite description. Content can be "conceptual" without falling under a generic linguistic specification. Again, we should pay attention to McDowell's claim that the content of a demonstrative is 'genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity' in that 'the associated capacity can persist into the future, if only for a short time, and that, having persisted, it can be used also in thoughts about what is by then the past' (1994: 57). The temporal persistence of the demonstrative's content means, as Gascoigne & Thornton point out, that the content can 'play a role in reasoning – via inferences, for example – and thus count as genuinely conceptual' (2013: 62). As I noted in my discussion of perception, two linguistically identical demonstratives can serve as quite different premises in reasoning. I will exploit this idea further below, when I discuss the non-propositional character of affective content, and how such content belongs nevertheless to the conceptual realm.

Following Merleau-Ponty, Dreyfus holds that the knowledge on display in unreflective action is inseparable and un-abstractable from a set of embodied skills that are accompanied by that "kinaesthetic sense" that Foster-Wallace describes. Again, Dreyfus holds that 'embodied skills, when we are absorbed in enacting them, have a kind of content which is nonconceptual, non-

propositional, non-rational (even if rational means situation-specific), and non-linguistic' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). Dreyfus's point here has force against this "intellectualist" account of knowledge-how, which relies on demonstrative conceptual content which expresses *ways of acting* that are being *practically demonstrated*. We should make a distinction between the conceptual knowledge of an *observer*, who doesn't have the ability to perform the action being practically demonstrated, and the knowledge-how of the practitioner, who *does* have the requisite ability. Bengson & Moffett refer to the "couch potato" watching sports to emphasise this distinction, noting that it causes problems for the intellectualist's demonstrative account of knowledge-how:

> […] it might be suggested that one result is that any couch potato can know how to throw a perfect spiral because he knows, on the basis of watching television that *that* is the way John Elway (who has a distinctive throwing style) throws a football' (2007: 52).

Bengson & Moffett therefore speak to the concerns of Dreyfus when they note that 'a way of throwing a perfect spiral involves a significant number of kinaesthetic properties, and thus it is reasonable to think that no purely perceptual demonstrative concept or set of concepts could constitute a correct and complete conception of a way of doing so' (2007: 52). A "kinaesthetic property", I take it, might refer to something like a very particular tension in one's arm when setting up to throw the football – that is, something that is not observable but available only to the demonstrator. The couch potato's knowledge that John Elway's way of throwing a football is a way to throw a "perfect spiral" is not the same kind of knowledge that John Elway himself possesses. Stanley & Williamson account for this distinction through "practical modes of presentation" (see Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 429). Gascoigne &

Thornton note that 'what the practical mode of presentation is designed to capture is the connection between practical knowledge-how and ability' (2013: 71)[49]. The "practical mode of presentation" is the *sense* – to refer to its Fregean heritage - associated with the way of acting when the demonstrative is issued from the first person perspective of the agent engaging in that way of acting (see Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 428). Thus the demonstrative issued from the perspective of the observer has a different sense, and thus a different conceptual content, from the perspective of the agent engaging in the way of acting. Thus, the conceptual content of knowledge-how need not be codifiable in a way that can be shared with another person without informational loss – the knowledge can be distinctly personal.

The demonstrative issued under this practical mode of presentation therefore includes those relevant kinaesthetic properties that only the agent engaging in the way of acting can experience. To paraphrase McDowell, the demonstrative "exploits" the "perceptible presence" of the various kinds of kinaesthetic properties involved in, say, setting up for a return of serve. We can easily imagine a tennis player in training, who finally arrives at a particularly effective *way* of returning a serve – a way, of course, that involves subtle arrangements, tensions, and movements of limbs – and concluding that "*this* is the way to return a serve" [50]. The demonstrative would conceptualise exactly what it would need to conceptualise in preserving that way of acting in the

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[49] There is a disagreement in the literature on whether knowledge-how always entails ability – Stanley & Williamson deny that there is a necessary connection. In context, Gascoigne & Thornton here are pointing out that Stanley & Williamson's appeal to practical mode of presentations may commit them to the connection that they deny. For a discussion of the issue, Bengson & Moffet's "Know-how and concept possession" (2007) is directly concerned with the "puzzle" of why 'some know-how attributions entail ability attributions while others do not' (31).
[50] To bolster the possible situation-specificity of a way of acting; the tennis player may be practicing a way of returning a particular type of serve - one with a particular, speed, spin, or trajectory - perhaps one that they know an upcoming opponent will utilise.

player's memory. Indeed, simply the fact that player would remember the relevant practical technique means that a conceptual capacity is being brought to bear on that technique, and the knowledge is encoded in a propositional form available to the player. We should recall McDowell's claim that the content of a demonstrative is 'genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity' in that 'the associated capacity can persist into the future, if only for a short time, and that having persisted, it can be used also in thoughts about what is by then the past' (McDowell, 1994: 57). The temporal persistence of the demonstrative's content means, as Gascoigne & Thornton point out, that the content can 'play a role in reasoning – via inferences, for example, and thus count as genuinely conceptual' (2013: 62). As I noted in **3.5**, two linguistically identical demonstratives can serve as quite different premises in reasoning – precisely because they have quite different referents that are nonetheless preserved in the content of the demonstrative.

Another example may help here. Foster-Wallace remembers a particularly good shot that Federer managed to make in an almost insuperably difficult situation against Andre Agassi: 'what Federer now does is somehow instantly reverse thrust and sort of skip backward three or four steps, impossibly fast, to hit a forehand out of his backhand corner, all his weight moving backward, and the forehand is a topspin screamer down the line past Agassi at net' (Foster-Wallace, 2006). Everything in this description, the speed, the situation-specificity, the distinctly bodily expertise, represents what Dreyfus attempts to capture in his non-conceptualist, motor intentional account of unreflective action. What I have tried to show here is that Federer is manifesting knowledge of a way to get out of that situation. Of course, the demonstrative

form of conceptual knowledge needn't be expressed, or even consciously entertained by the player. As McDowell describes in the case of the chess master, if they *do* entertain or express their conceptual knowledge in the relevant demonstrative, they give 'expression to knowledge [they] already had when [they] were acting in flow' (McDowell, 2013: 46). Federer might identify through the use of a demonstrative that what he did was a way of hitting a winner from that position – and this is to bring what he did into the conceptual realm. This cannot be a trivial conceptualisation. The way of acting here needs to be identified in order for it to be able to serve as a premise in the kind of reasoning that must surely go along with any human intentional activity where a level of competence is required. If Federer had been in that same situation and engaged in a way of acting that resulted in him losing the point, then a conceptual identification of how he responded to that situation would be essential. That he can engage in a certain line of substantive reasoning – "*that* way of responding to that situation didn't work, perhaps I should try *this*" – presupposes that the ways of acting here are conceptually available, and that their conceptual availability is essential.

I want to consider one final objection. It may seem as though ascribing an agent the conceptual knowledge that *"that* is a way of acting" only comes into play when one needs to step back and reason about one's actions, as in my example of Federer. There might be a concern that the ascription of such knowledge does not make any difference to the execution of the bodily skills themselves. That is, the knowledge is in some sense explanatorily idle in an account of unreflective action. Now, McDowell tentatively endorses Dreyfus's claim that 'the body knows what movements to make' (McDowell, 2007b: 368).

He states that such a claim is acceptable as long as it only means that the agent 'does not need to determine the specific character of the limb movements involved in exercising a skill' and that 'she can leave that determination to her ingrained bodily habits' (McDowell, 2007b: 368). I agree; we of course cannot downgrade the importance of bodily skill in accomplishing any sort of practical activity. The importance of possessing conceptual knowledge-how does not, however, carry the implication that such knowledge *governs* the bodily activity. Nevertheless, I do think McDowell's account here is incomplete, and we can stretch his conceptualism further.

I want to highlight that knowing how to engage in a way of acting belongs to a conceptual framework presupposed by one's acting intentionally in the first place. In acting intentionally, one "realises" a concept of a thing to do, as well as a conceptual understanding of the rules and norms of the activity one is engaging in. That is to say, the way of acting bears a normative relation to the overall action itself. I want to make the related point that one manifests knowledge of the *reliability* of the bodily skill involved in carrying out an intention. In leaving the determination of 'the specific character of the limb movements involved in exercising a skill' to one's 'ingrained bodily habits' (McDowell, 2007b: 368), one manifests knowledge that those bodily habits have some degree of reliability. One also manifests knowledge that the particular *way* of utilising one's bodily skills has a degree of appropriateness. My point here is that the conceptual knowledge that "*that* is the way to respond to *this* situation" is in the first instance integrated into a framework of concepts that is presupposed in acting intentionally. In acting intentionally, whether unreflectively otherwise, one manifests a conceptual grasp of one's embodied skills and their role in the

relevant practical activity. McDowell claims that 'when a rational agent catches a frisbee, she does not do that […] by realizing concepts of contributory things to do(McDowell, 2007b: 369). My point is that the concept "*this* is a way of catching a Frisbee" must be part of the conceptual framework that the overall intentional action manifests, because the agent must have a conceptual understanding of the skills that contribute to their intentional action.

At this point, we should recall Dreyfus's claim that 'embodied skills, when we are absorbed in enacting them, have a kind of content which is nonconceptual, non-propositional, non-rational (even if rational means situation-specific), and non-linguistic (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). I have taken an epistemic approach here to show that our embodied skills, our ways of unreflectively responding to practical situations, can be brought within the realm of conceptual though - on a clarified view of what it means for something to be conceptual. Indeed, I have endeavoured to show that our embodied skills entail conceptual knowledge that is utilised in reasoning, and is integrated in a conceptual framework that is manifested in our intentional practical activity. Of course, for both McDowell and for Dreyfus, the embodied, skilful way in which we respond to practical situations is dependent upon our perceptual experience of those situations. In providing a conceptualist account of the knowledge-how entailed by embodied skills, I hope to have prepared the ground for assessing Dreyfus's notion of the motor intentional content of perceptual experience.

Affective Content and Reasons for Acting

We have seen that McDowell wants to characterise unreflective action in terms of "responsiveness to reasons" – that is, that our actions are responsive to

perceived states of affairs that therefore represent reasons for our actions. McDowell insists on this characterisation in order to preserve the normative, agential component of unreflective action. Dreyfus, however, argues that unreflective, practically engaged experience is constituted by "motor intentional content" which cannot be construed as representing reasons for one's unreflective responses (see 2007a: 361). Dreyfus states that 'the world we are drawn into when we are absorbed in coping does not stand over against us a set of facts that can be captured in propositions but rather is *directly lived* by the absorbed coper as a shifting field of attractions and repulsions' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Crucially, this shifting field of attractions and repulsions do not figure in unreflective activity as *reasons* for an agent's unreflective responses. The "attractions and repulsions" here are figuring for the agent below the level of conscious awareness. Dreyfus utilises distinctive phenomenological descriptions of this "affective" sort of perceptual experience. Dreyfus's phenomenology depicts the chess master playing lightning chess as being 'directly drawn by the forces on the board to make a masterful move' (Dreyfus, 2013: 35). Similarly, he cites Merleau-Ponty's description of the football player: 'for the player in action the soccer field is not an "object". It is pervaded by lines of force […] and is articulated into sectors (for example, the "openings" between the adversaries), which *call for a certain mode of action*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 168). Dreyfus generalises these sorts of phenomenological descriptions as depicting the agent being "drawn" on a bodily level to respond in a certain way, or feeling a "tension" which is resolved by responding in a certain ways (see Dreyfus, 2007c: 107, cited below).

We can then identify three familiar claims that Dreyfus derives from these phenomenological descriptions. First, the claim that 'no "aspect" of motor intentional content is "present" in a "form" which is "suitable to constitute the contents of conceptual capacities' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). Secondly, the claim that bringing conceptual thought to bear on motor intentional or affective content *transforms* the content, 'thereby making it available for rational analysis but no longer capable of directly motivating action' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). This claim should be explicitly related to Dreyfus's further claim that affective content cannot be construed in terms of *reasons* that the agent is responding to:

> Tensions cannot be *described* but only *felt* as directly drawing the master to respond. They are what Merleau-Ponty calls *motivations*, which are neither reasons nor causes. Such motivations are not available as reasons when the master reflects but are only embodied in the action itself' (Dreyfus, 2007c: 107)

Attempting to conceptualise something like the "lines of force" that the master experiences on a chess board neutralises their motivating force for the agent. Here we should note Dreyfus's specification that although the "tensions" are not reasons, neither are they *causes*. Dreyfus attempts to highlight a normativity in his account of motor intentional content that may not be immediately apparent. I have repeatedly noted that McDowell is concerned to avoid picturing unreflective action as what Rietveld calls a 'brute causal event' (Rietveld, 2010: 186), or what I have called "flatly causal". In a causal picture of unreflective action, one's natural bodily dispositions are simply caused to respond in particular ways, and any sense of human agency is lost. The kind of perceptual content involved in Dreyfus's account seems to represent a non-conceptual "given" that causes an intentional response. In **3.3** I showed how

Sellars' critique of the given exposes the philosophical incoherence of such an account, and in **4.3** I showed how that critique bears out in terms of intentional responses in the shape of unreflective actions. Dreyfus acknowledges that a non-conceptualist account of the relationship between perception and action is indeed vulnerable to a concern about "disenchantment", as McDowell puts it (1994: 88).

Dreyfus remarks that 'it seems that either one is pushed around like a thing by meaningless physical and psychological forces, or else one's reasons, explicit or implicit, motivate one's actions' (Dreyfus, 2005: 56). Dreyfus takes there to be a third explanatory option here, an option between the "space of reasons", and the "realm of law". Explaining an intentional action in terms of a causal relationship between a perceptual stimulus and bodily response – "pushed around like a thing" – places it squarely within the realm of law. Of course, McDowell's account places intentional action in the space of reasons. Dreyfus argues that unreflective action belongs to the "space of motivations" (Dreyfus, 2005: 56), echoed by O'Connaill (2014). Dreyfus attempts to demonstrate how his account avoids positing a flatly causal relationship between unreflective perceptual experience and our practical responses. That is, Dreyfus has his own method for avoiding the "myth of the given" that does not involve affording a crucial role to the operation of conceptual capacities: 'We must accept the possibility that our ground-level coping opens up the world by opening us to a meaningful Given – a Given that is *nonconceptual* but not *bare*' (Dreyfus, 2005: 55). Dreyfus therefore owes us a coherent account of how affective content can be both non-conceptual and meaningful, and how the relevant aspects of a practical situation can be perceptually "given" without standing in a flatly causal relation to our actions. The issue here is how a non-conceptual perceptual

experience can stand in a genuinely normative relation to a skilful bodily response. In Bengon's terminology, the question becomes how a non-conceptual perception can "produce" a genuinely intentional, agential action.

I will first consider Dreyfus's attempt to secure a normative component to his picture of the interrelation between affective content and the skilful bodily response. This component arises again at the level of bodily feeling. Now, it essential to an agent engaged in a skilful activity – whether this be a matter of expert performance or everyday "coping" – that they can and do recognise mistakes or shortcomings in their actions. Rouse points out the importance of recognizing mistakes, citing the errors that a grandmaster absorbed in the flow of a chess game might make, in relation to Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account of unreflective action: 'Dreyfus's account of skilled coping as ground-floor nonconceptual intentionality cannot recognize them as errors, but only as responses that are abnormal for grandmasters' (Rouse, 2013: 254). An error in Dreyfus's non-conceptualist account would be more like a glitch in the grand-master's programming, or 'design limitations in their trained cognitive orientation' (Rouse, 2013: 254). A grandmaster's error would not be an normatively evaluable failure to appreciate one course of action over another, or to recognise that that they failed to consider certain reasons to adopt another strategic route. On Dreyfus's account, it comes to seem as though the grandmaster could not have acted any differently.

Dreyfus attempts to offset this possible reading of his phenomenology. Dreyfus argues that the agent's understanding of the appropriateness of their actions – whether they *ought* to be acting in this way, or not – is an understanding operating on the level of affective content. Dreyfus argues that 'the experience of

coping going well or badly is a kind of normativity that does not require an ego's representation of conditions of satisfaction' (Dreyfus, 2013: 31). Dreyfus often refers to this kind of normativity as the unreflectively acting agent 'sensing a tension' that draws them back to an optimal way of engaging in the overall intentional action (Dreyfus, 2013: 31). However, when the performance is sub-optimal, or 'when coping runs into some sort of resistance or breakdown that blocks it […] the absence of tension […] gives way to an overall background sense that things are not going well' (Dreyfus, 2013: 31). Dreyfus's account of normativity amounts to a kind of bodily intuition that our engaged activity is going either optimally or sub-optimally, and that our actions are an immediate response to this intuition. For Dreyfus, then, any normative component to the experience should be construed in terms of affective content, which phenomenology can only inadequately describe in terms of feeling "tensions" that draw the body to correct its course of skilful engagement, or to maintain it.

However, this way of securing normativity is clearly flawed. It is still bodily ability that "decides" when a performance is not going well, and it is bodily ability that therefore triggers the involvement of the conceptual capacities of the agent. The agential component to the action can only arise when the body, so to speak, has done all it can. On Dreyfus's account, the agent themselves does not decide when to assume responsibility of their non-conceptual activity. The unreflective action can still be understood in distinctly causal terms – one's non-conceptual, affective perception that an action is proceeding sub-optimally stands in a causal relation to the body's correction of the action. Nothing about the account provided here makes it clear how an unreflectively acting agent is not just being 'pushed around like a thing' (Dreyfus, 2005: 56). Dreyfus seems to

misunderstand what an ascription of normativity entails. The idea that the body "knows" whether an action is optimal or suboptimal can only be a limited metaphor, as McDowell notes (McDowell, 2007b: 368). Our bodily skills do not themselves have the kind of agency which implies the possibility of normative assessment. On an account in which conceptual capacities are not operative, the affective "sense that things are not going well" and the resulting bodily response could only entail a causal relation. As I will demonstrate below, the only way to make sense of this in a *normative* sense is to admit the involvement of conceptual capacities.

We should recall Dreyfus's references the explanatory role of science, early in the debate; Dreyfus argues that unreflective action can be explained with an accurate model of the brain. If the kind of "affective" content and its relation to bodily responses is, in the end, explicable by the relevant account of neurophysiology, then Dreyfus's attempt to show how it does not belong to the realm of law is in any case fruitless. As such, it is not possible to ascribe a normatively assessable "understanding" of the perceived situation to our bodily skills. Dreyfus's account of motor intentional content in general does not make clear how we can characterise the resulting actions as genuinely intentional, in the sense of *agential* or *justifiable*. The role that affective content plays is simply to trigger an ingrained bodily response. We can imagine an animal experiencing precisely the same kind of affective content – "feeling drawn" toward food. As Bengson notes, Dreyfus's account of solicitations straightforwardly implies that any resulting action would be 'a reflexive, conditioned, or non-voluntary response to perceptual stimuli' (Bengson, 2016: 35). Therefore, Dreyfus's picture

of perception does not explain 'how subsequent action could be *Intelligent*, nor how *perception* could lead directly to it' (Bengson, 2016: 37).

Further, we should assess Dreyfus' notion that motor intentional content represents a *meaningful* given. It is edifying to recall Gibson's theory of affordances, on this basis. For Gibson, a practically engaged agent perceives environmental opportunities for action (Gibson, 1986). Importantly, Gibson takes such perception to be of something meaningful, or perhaps "value-laden". His conception of affordances derives from gestalt psychologists such as Koffka (1935) and Lewin (1929), who 'recognized that the meaning or the value of a thing seems to perceived just as immediately as its colour' (Gibson, 1986: 138). Koffka describes the meaningfulness of perception in terms of its having a "demand" or "invitation" character. For example, 'the postbox "invites" the mailing of a letter, the handle "wants to be grasped" and things "tell us what to do with them"' (Koffka, 1935: 353). The immediacy of this kind of meaningful perception might fit Dreyfus's conception of the meaningful "given" that produces intentional action. However, we should pay attention to Gibson's specification that the meaningfulness of these perceptual affordances is not intelligible as 'an unconscious set of response tendencies' (Gibson, 1986: 138). Dreyfus departs from Gibson's picture of meaningfulness because he effectively *does* take the meaningfulness of perception to be a matter of an "unconscious set of response tendencies". Dreyfus is clear that we 'need not even be aware of the solicitations […] *as* solicitations' (2013: 18). Gibson's focus on the meaningfulness of perceptual affordances seems to be lost.

My view is that Dreyfus's account of perceptual content doesn't represent a *meaningful* given, even in a phenomenological sense. We can acknowledge that

something like "affective content" avoids picturing perception as bare, unstructured, sensory impingements. By itself, however, this is simply a phenomenological platitude. In Dreyfus's picture, affective content doesn't *necessarily* depend on our finding it intelligible, or meaningful, or even being aware of *what it is* that is affecting us. Dreyfus seems to address this point here: 'clearly, what is given to the chess master in his experience of the board isn't a *bare* Given […] In being solicited to respond to a chess-position, the chess master has a take on "the layout of reality". It follows that he can be mistaken' (Dreyfus, 2005: 55). I think the sentiment Dreyfus's expresses here is right – but it is hard to see how it could be construed in his non-conceptualist terms. Siegel remarks that the affective content in Dreyfus's account 'does not account for the experience of solicitation per se […] nothing in the ebb and flow of tension and relief reflects the experience of [objects and situations] soliciting one to perform an action that will relieve the tension one feels in that situation' (Siegel, 2014: 24). In other words, the affective content doesn't bear any necessary relation to a state of affairs. In principle, one could experience precisely the same affective content in two very different practical situations. Crucially, this point means that we can describe such content as "intentional" only in a weak sense. We should recall that Dreyfus thinks affective content enables a "contact theory", where the human being has direct access to their environment without conceptual mediation. However, this "direct access" or "contact" is underwhelming if it only guarantees contact with *something*. We should conclude that Dreyfus's account does not provide us with a substantively *meaningful* given, nor does it preserve the normativity and agency of intentional action. Dreyfus's account

entails a causal, non-normative relation between perceptual stimulus and bodily response.

Now, this does not mean that we have to deny the existence of something like affective content. There is no doubt that the perceptual experience of practically engaged agents can feasibly described in terms of being "solicited" or "drawn" to respond in a particular way. Such content surely does play a crucial role in the way in which human beings relate to their environment. I want to draw on a suggestion made by Susanna Siegel, which she does not herself develop. To make sense of Dreyfus's phenomenology, Siegel suggests, we might hold that affective content entails 'psychologically more complex responses to the situation that involves some type of understanding of what the situation demands' (Siegel, 2014: 24). In line with what I have said so far in this chapter, I think that such understanding would consist in possessing the relevant concepts and conceptual knowledge. Siegel argues that ascribing such a role to an additional form of understanding scuppers Dreyfus's account, because 'that understanding, whatever form it takes, has just as much claim to guiding the action as the dynamic of tension and relief has' (2014: 24). The account I will provide, however, accommodates the substantive role of motor intentional content

In conceiving of motor intentional content in this way, I dispute certain of Dreyfus's claims about the non-conceptual nature of practically engaged perceptual experience. Specifically, I dispute Dreyfus's claims that motor intentional content is not conceptual content (2007a: 360), that motor intentional content accordingly does not represent *reasons* for acting (2007a: 361), and that bringing conceptual capacities to bear on motor intentional content

renders it incapable of 'directly motivating action' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). In terms of this latter claim, I argue that motor intentional content is only capable of directly motivating action if it is situated within an operative framework of conceptual capacities. As I will show, that such content *is* situated in such a framework means that it is genuinely conceptual content.

It is useful to begin by focusing on the claim that motor intentional content does not represent reasons for acting. Relevant here is O'Connaill's discussion of the "space of motivations". O'Connaill distinguishes this explanatory space from the space of reasons in order to account for actions which he argues are 'not performed for a reason' (2014: 443). O'Connaill uses a definition of what it means to act for a reason from Alvarez (2009), who argues that to act for a reason requires that one takes the action to be good or valuable, either instrumentally or in itself' (O'Connaill, 2014: 443; see Alvarez 2009: 305). O'Connaill takes two examples where a practical agent is likely to explain their engaging in a particular action in an Anscombean sense, by saying something along the lines of "I felt like it". Two notable examples are performing a cartwheel, and catching a frisbee (the latter is an example McDowell uses). O'Connaill concludes that neither of these examples involve the agent acting for a reason, because "feeling like it" is simply an expression of desiring to do something, and 'if one performs an action merely because one desires to do it, one does not perform it because it seems good or worthwhile' (2014: 443). Surely, however, this is an unrealistic and unnecessarily restrictive definition of acting for reasons, and O'Connaill doesn't justify his use of it. What I want to suggest, along McDowellian lines, is that "feeling like it" *is* a reason because it is normatively evaluable. Perhaps someone may feel like doing a cartwheel in a

deeply inappropriate situation – their protesting that they did it "because they felt like it" is evaluable as a *bad* reason.

Now, "feeling like" doing something can be associated with the motor intentional, affective kind of perceptual content that Dreyfus emphasises. Certainly, the perceptual experience that Dreyfus draws attention to is often characterised by feeling drawn toward a particular feature of the environment. In terms of the chess player, Dreyfus argues that their fine-grained discriminations of positions on the board is what "draws" them to act (2013: 35) Of course, their recognition of this position is not intelligible in terms of possessing a concept of it – the position might be one that they have never come across before: 'A chess master does not see the board as a propositional structure no matter how specific and contextual. When involved in the game, and only while involved, he sees "lines of force" (Dreyfus, 2007c: 106). As I highlighted above, we can go along with Dreyfus's account of such perceptual content up to a point. We can affirm here that what the agent sees can be construed in the metaphorical language of Dreyfus's phenomenological descriptions, and explained with reference to the physiological or neurophysiological development of perceptual capacities. The chess player, having played 'hundreds of thousands of actions' has developed 'a sensitivity to subtler and subtler *similarities and differences of perceptual patterns*' (Dreyfus, 2013: 35). On Dreyfus's account, their actions are therefore directly responsive to this perceptual sensitivity – in a way that means that we can't characterise such sensitivity as representing reasons for the agent responding in the way that they do.

In one of the first poker strategy books, Doyle Brunson (1978) marvels at the way in which he is often able to correctly judge the exact hole cards of an

opponent. Brunson finds this so peculiar that he invokes the idea of "extrasensory perception" and the "electrical impulses" that the brain emanates: 'Is it really too unreasonable to suspect that a highly sophisticated electrical device as the human brain, during the intensity of concentration in a big pot, could broadcast a simple message like "a pair of Jacks" a mere eight feet?' (Brunson, 1978: 23). Of course, we might suspect that an intuition like a "a pair of Jacks" is a product of vast experience and practice at a poker table; perceiving actions – whether physical tells or strategic actions – that have been unconsciously associated with an opponent having a pair of Jacks. However, we should note the role that Brunson's strong intuition is playing here. We can take seriously the idea that Brunson cannot specify *why* he has such a strong intuition, and may attribute it to the same highly developed neurophysiology of the chess player above. Something similar might be said of the chess player who has developed a perceptual sensitivity to the "lines of force" on the board. A lightning chess player might simply "feel" that a move is right, or that some sector of the board "looks" weak, and reacts accordingly. Indeed, perhaps a better chess player would have a slightly different intuition – perhaps that segment of the board is deceptively strong, and so they do not respond with the suboptimal attacking move of the weaker player.

The idea that these are counter-examples to McDowell's conception of acting for reasons is misguided. Take Brunson's intuition that his opponent has a pair of Jacks, and suppose that he folds his own hand – perhaps he does so unreflectively. The first thing to say is that for the intuition "a pair of Jacks" to have any bearing on Brunson's action, Brunson must possess *knowledge* that his intuition has a level of reliability, just as an intentional action entails that the

agent has some knowledge of their embodied skills involved in that action. Brunson acts on the knowledge that his intuitions are generally reliable in these cases. The intuition is in the first instance drawn into a conceptual framework in which it assumes a normative character. This is essentially a Sellarsian point about the nature of intentional responses. In order for us to form the perceptually based knowledge that there is a green object in front of us, we must know, amongst other things, that our perceptual experience in the relevant visual conditions is generally reliable. In order for Brunson to fold his worse hand – in such a way that makes his action agential, intentional and "intelligent" in a Rylean sense – he must have some knowledge of how his intuition "a pair of Jacks" fits into the arc of his intentional action. In much broader terms, his intuition that his opponent had a pair of Jacks represented a reason for the action he took. I will return to the point of the intuition being "integrated" into a conceptual framework below.

McDowell notices that Dreyfus makes much of the idea that an unreflectively acting agent could not give particularly substantive answers to those Anscombean questions about why they did what they did:

> Dreyfus says, "the [chess] master could only respond to the demand for a reason by saying 'I made the move because I was drawn to make it'". And he suggests that in saying this, the chess master would be confessing an inability to give a rational explanation of his move, and that this shows that rationality is not pervasive (McDowell, 2013: 47).

In giving an explanation of their action, the chess master only refers to that perceptual content that Dreyfus has previously described as 'nonconceptual, nonpropositional, nonrational, and nonlinguistic' (2007b: 352). However, McDowell holds that the perceptual content itself represents a reason for the

chess master to act as they did; 'if he explains his move as a response to the forces on the board, as Dreyfus of course accepts he can, he is giving a rational explanation of it' (2013: 47). We can certainly talk in naturalistic terms about how the chess-master's discrimination of the board is so highly developed that they simply respond to patterns on the board. However, their discriminatory ability gives rise to perceptual content that the chess player, as a rational agent, *'acts in the light of'* (McDowell, 2013: 47; my emphasis). McDowell notes that a master chess player would have the capacity to be more specific in their explanation, and to express more detailed knowledge of what they were doing, knowledge that they were acting on the basis of: 'We can expect him to be able to say such things as this: "It's a good move, because it threatens my opponent's queen"' (McDowell, 2013: 47). As above, I want to point out that this is not necessary to secure an account of "responsiveness to reasons". Although it is more often that not the case that an agent can give detailed reasons for why they responded the way they did, the fact they can simply refer to some affective "feeling" is enough.

Earlier in the debate, McDowell distinguishes the kind of affective content that a human might experience from that an animal might experience – he returns to the terminology of "affordances". McDowell highlights that in the case of human beings, affordances 'are no longer just inputs to a natural motivational makeup; they are available to the subject's rationality' (2007a: 346). He also states that affordances are 'data for [the subject's] rationality' (McDowell, 2007a: 344). The human being's development of conceptual capacities, the development of their "second nature", decisively transforms the way in which the world figures in our intentional states. The kind of perceptual content that Dreyfus

identifies does not somehow resist being the kind of thing that one can think about it. McDowell notes that the chess master can 'consider how cogent a justification the forces on the board provide for his move' (McDowell, 2013: 48). In order for this to be possible, those forces on the board need to be conceptually available. The point of demonstrative, *de re* conceptual content therefore becomes apparent. The ability to identify that one was drawn to act by "*that* kind of board position" is crucial.

Dreyfus does, briefly, respond to this appeal to demonstrative content in a paper separate from the main *Inquiry* debate. Using the example of the chess master, Dreyfus asks; 'couldn't the master say while pointing: "Because I was in *this* specific position I made *this* specific move?' (Dreyfus, 2007c: 105). Dreyfus argues that 'as soon as the coper steps back and tries to name what he has just been experiencing even as "that tension", the tension is transformed into an object and it's motivational character is lost [...] When Merleau-Ponty tries to describe specific motivations he can speak only in metaphors' (Dreyfus, 2007c: 107). In the case of the chess player, Dreyfus argues that 'pointing to the specific squares on the board as *that* position doesn't capture what it is about that position that draws the Grandmaster to make that move' (Dreyfus, 2007c: 105). Dreyfus argues that a demonstrative would not capture the specific *context* of the player's motor intentional understanding of the position, and further highlights that 'a neutral observer could know all those demonstrative facts about the position and its context and still have no idea what move to make. What more is needed?' (Dreyfus, 2007b: 105 – 106). That is, the chess player's demonstrative reference to "*that* kind of board position" fails to capture the important elements of what led the chess player to act.

However, this objection is based in a misunderstanding of the nature of *de re* conceptual content. McDowell says that 'if we want to identify the conceptual realm with the realm of thought, the right gloss on "conceptual" is not "predicative" but "belonging to the realm of Fregean sense"' (McDowell, 1994: 107). In parentheses, he adds 'The stupid idea that those come to the same thing is unfortunately still widespread' (McDowell, 1994: 107). Opposing the "stupid idea" that *conceptual* must mean *predicative* comes to be crucial to resolving the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. A demonstrative proposition like "*that* feeling that led me to act in *this* way" does not somehow codify the personal feeling under a generic linguistic description that becomes independent of the context in which it had meaning. McDowell makes this point about Dreyfus's understanding of what language, and the conceptual domain, entails:

> A requirement of situation-independence would exclude what might be meant by an utterance of, say, "This one is beautiful" from the domain of the linguistically expressible and so of the conceptual, since there is no telling what thought such an utterance expresses in abstraction from the situation in which the thought is expressed. (McDowell, 2007a: 342)

What the demonstrative does is to preserve the "perceptible presence" of the affective content. The demonstrative is not meaningful or truth-apt in the absence of the affective content that it refers to. We might follow Stanley & Williamson in holding that the demonstrative content proper to affective content is only fully graspable by the practitioner, rather than the observer. Indeed, when a player explains to an observer that their actions were in response to "*this* or *that* particular pattern on the board", the observer generally understands that the precise nature of the experienced pattern is only fully available to the player who

responded to it. In this way, the demonstrative can bring any such affective content into the space of reasons.

If this were not possible – if the content were not of a form appropriate to being associated with a conceptual capacity – the affective dimension of our lives would never be able to figure in our reasoning in any substantive sense. Take a simple case of something that would surely count as affective content – an emotion. There is no doubt that emotions are not propositionally structured, nor is our natural ability to feel them based on our possession of concepts. However, in human life, even very particular kinds of emotions are often referred to in language, serve as premises in our inferential reasoning, and count as reasons for acting in particular ways. They are, in that sense, conceptual. For some content to occupy a node in inferential reasoning, it has to count as conceptual (I will say more about this directly below). Two linguistically identical propositions "I was drawn by *those* forces on the board" can refer, indexically, to very different things. As in the example of embodied skills, the player might utilise such demonstratives in order to reason about their performance – for example, where they were misled by their perceptual intuitions into making a suboptimal move. The idea of *de re* conceptual content allow us to affirm that conceptual expression does not *distort* the content, but preserves the contextual, embodied, *practical* or *personal* aspects of that content.

I want to consolidate my discussion by considering a further natural objection here. A concern might be that while motor intentional content might be conceptually *available*, its conceptual availability makes no difference to how the practically engaged agent responds to it in the course of their unreflective action. There may therefore be something to Dreyfus's claim that bringing conceptual

capacities to bear on motor intentional content renders it incapable of 'directly motivating action' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360). As McDowell acknowledges, if this claim means that an agent tries to express what is they are responding to as they are responding to it, may indeed scupper the immediacy and flow of the intentional responses' (McDowell, 2013: 48). This objection runs parallel to the one I identified in the case of the demonstrative identification of a way of acting. My response proceeds along the same lines. Above, I suggested that Brunson's intuition that his opponent has a pair of Jacks must in the first instance be integrated into a conceptual framework. For example, Brunson must have some conceptual understanding of the reliability of his intuition, and must understand how his intuition feeds into the overall arc of his intentional action. The possibility of responding unreflectively to motor intentional content is based in the way in which that content figures in the conceptual framework that I established is manifested in any intentional action. In order for it to figure in such a framework – in order for it to play that normative role – it must do so in a conceptual form. Otherwise, we have a non-conceptual "given" that determines our intentional responses. In this way, we can make further sense of the idea that perceptual "affordances" represent 'data for [a subject's] rationality' (McDowell, 2007a: 344).

Dreyfus's claim that bringing conceptual capacities to bear on motor intentional content renders it incapable of 'directly motivating action' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 360) can therefore be disputed. On my account, motor intentional content can only motivate action by being integrated into a relevant conceptual framework, and can be integrated in this way only in a conceptual form. Accordingly, the claim that motor intentional content does not represent reasons

for acting (Dreyfus, 2007a: 361) also fails, because it based on the assumption that motor intentional content is non-conceptual. In the same way that the involvement of kinaesthetic bodily skill does not clash with the idea that concept-possession informs the action, neither does the involvement of perceptual capacities clash with the idea that the resulting content is not a "given" that stands only in causal relations to the resultant actions, but is normatively functional in virtue of concepts that we already possess.

There seems to be a phenomenological temptation to assume that the conceptualist wants to downplay the affective dimension of human life; that emphasising the role of conceptual capacities saddles us with an account of the human being where all affective content is replaced by some generic propositional descriptions of what we perceive, and how we ought to act. However, we can preserve the phenomenological reality of that distinctive content that Dreyfus refers to as "motor intentional", and still point out that we have to make sense of its normative role with reference to its integration into a conceptual framework. Gascoigne & Thornton provide a neat summary of this general line of thought:

> It becomes "second nature" to respond as one ought, not because the associated habits "blindly" track the institutional facts but because *what it is* to have those habits is to have had one's "eyes opened" to the correct view of things. Since we are "animals whose natural being is permeated with rationality", what it is to be skilled, to cope in a masterful way, to know *how* to go on, to be, in short, a *phronimos* – is a matter of having had one's animal potentialities "shaped" in the way that constitutes understanding of the relevant concepts (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013: 164)

Attempting to conceive of practically engaged experience as isolable from our nature as concept possessors and users is a mistake. In this chapter, I have tried to provide a detailed account of *why* this is a mistake, and an account of *how* the distinctive content of practically engaged experience, including those embodied practical and perceptual skills we rely on, are integrated into our conceptual understanding.

4.5   Conclusion

Here I have demonstrated how we can ascribe the involvement of conceptual capacities to distinctly *unreflective* action. Accordingly, I have demonstrated how we can affirm the phenomenological reality of motor intentional content, while showing how it must be integrated into a conceptual framework in order to have the appropriate normative character. I started with two claims that McDowell makes. First, that unreflective action entailed the realisation of practical concepts, or concepts of things to do. Second, that unreflective action was a matter of responsiveness to reasons. Both of these claims are directed at avoiding a flatly causal conception of human activity, which Dreyfus's notion of motor intentionality is in danger of being committed to. I argued that Dreyfus's phenomenological methodology – ignoring as it does the transcendental possibilities of phenomenology – leads him to ignore the way in which concepts can be operative without appearing in a phenomenological description. In the first instance, we can hold that concepts we possess are realised – in the sense of "manifested" – in our intentional actions. Further, our actions are only possible in the light of a background grasp of conceptual

standards or rules. This allows us to provide an adequately normative account of intentional human action.

I then went on to appraise Dreyfus's positive conception of motor intentional content. I argued that Dreyfus's attempt to develop a kind of "normativity" into his account of motor intentionality was flawed. I emphasised that we should attempt to preserve the phenomenological reality of motor intentional content, but that we must do so through a conceptualist lens. Accordingly, I showed that affective content could be construed as providing *reasons* for acting, and as such is situated in a framework of conceptual understanding. We must avoid the temptation to conceive of our intentionality as dualistic – as involving something ineffable and bodily on the one hand, and situation independent conceptual content on the other. That conception remains Cartesian in a way that Dreyfus does not always appreciate. Conceiving of our embodied skills and developed perceptual capacities as bound up with those conceptual abilities that distinguish us as humans surely does justice to Dreyfus's phenomenology while forgoing the need for such a dualism of intentionality. Presenting this line of thought represents a resolution to the principle and pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

5   Heidegger and Practical Significance

5.1   Introduction

My previous chapter aimed to consolidate the idea that even unreflective forms of perceptual experience and intentional action entail conceptual involvement. I demonstrated that we could do justice to Dreyfus's phenomenological insights into "motor intentional content", while holding that this content can only play a normative role in virtue of its integration into a framework of operative conceptual capacities. Pursuing this argument, I noted, represents something of a resolution to the principle disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate.

However, my view is that a satisfying resolution to the debate has to go further. Dreyfus's non-conceptualism is motivated in part by a concern that conceptualism is geared toward 'getting it right about an independent reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 22). That is, conceptualism's epistemological purport is not designed to capture the familiar, practically meaningful world that human beings inhabit. McDowell recognises this concern, and accordingly denies that 'the world as a subject's experience discloses it to her is devoid of intrinsic practical significance' (McDowell, 2013: 52). In this chapter, I demonstrate how we might "secure" the kind of practical significance that existential phenomenology attempts to highlight in a conceptualist framework. I do this through a conceptualist reading of Heidegger's notion of the "ready-to-hand".

I argue that a distinctive kind of conceptual framework which Heidegger calls the "existential-hermeneutic *as*-structure" is operative in the kind of

practically engaged perceptual experience that pertains to the "ready-to-hand" environment (see Heidegger, 1962: 200). This framework, I argue, determines perceived objects "as" practically significant through the "involvement" relations that instantiate between the relevant concepts. My interpretation here has the advantage of preserving Heidegger's clear focus on the practically engaged dimension of human experience. Through this reading, I argue, we can offer something of a "practical topography" of the space of reasons. We can also make further sense of the way in which perceptual content can be said to "produce" intentional action. This final chapter therefore demonstrates how conceptualism can further accommodate the practically engaged dimension of human intentionality, and accordingly consolidate a picture of the mind as integrated into practically engaged experience.

In **5.2**, I discuss McDowell's brief comments on "intrinsic practical significance" in relation to certain suggestions that the phenomenon of unreflective action requires a "tailored" account of conceptual involvement. I specifically focus on Rietveld's suggestion that we reconstrue the idea of "responsiveness to reasons" in terms of "responsiveness to normative significance" (Rietveld, 2010: 199). I therefore return to the to the question of how perceptual content can be said to "produce" intentional action. I conclude that we need to specify in more detail how conceptualism can account for the specifically practical significance of the content of perceptual experience. In **5.3** I propose that we can develop such a tailored account of this practical significance with reference to Heidegger's early phenomenology. I go on to secure the idea that Heidegger is a conceptualist about perceptual experience, referencing recent appraisals of his work that take this approach. In **5.4** I move on to examine how

this conceptualism makes sense of the distinction that Heidegger draws between the "ready-to-hand" and the "present-at-hand", noting that the ready-to-hand signals the practical significance or relevance of the environment. I argue that perceiving something as ready-to-hand depends on an operative conceptual framework characterised by "involvement relations". I draw critically on Golob's recent re-evaluation of Heidegger in order to provide a complex, coherent account of this framework. I draw a comparison to Wittgenstein's notion of "aspect-perception" in order to make further sense of construing the ready-to-hand in *perceptual* terms. This allows us a plausible way to acknowledge how perceptual content can "produce" intentional action. I provide some extended concluding remarks in **5.5** that focus on Dreyfus's uses and misuses of existential phenomenology, particularly in the debate.

5.2   Conceptualism and Practical Significance

Dreyfus's notion of motor intentional content is partly mobilised to make sense of the way in which our perception 'directly motivates us to act', which he claims that conceptual content cannot do (Dreyfus, 2007a: 357 – 358). It therefore offers a particular answer to the question of how perception can be said to "produce" intentional action. The primary form of perception, the perception that pertains to unreflective action is, for Dreyfus, a 'totality of interconnected solicitations that attract and repulse us' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 357). The involvement of conceptual capacities only works to 'decouple us from the world of normative forces' (Dreyfus, 2013: 23). I have challenged the account Dreyfus provides here in two broad ways – first, demonstrating that the involvement of conceptual capacities does not imply reflection or conscious thought, and so does not in

principle imply some Cartesian form of detachment that would "decouple" us from these normative forces. Second, in showing how these perceived solicitations represent situation-specific *reasons* for actions, and further must be integrated into a conceptual framework for them to be genuinely normative, I have provided an account of conceptualism that nevertheless accommodates the form of perception Dreyfus highlights. However, I think that there is a more basic concern in play here. Dreyfus opposes a conception of perception wherein it has principally epistemic purport; where our perceptual experience's crucial role is to 'get it right about an external reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 22).

At one stage, Dreyfus expresses the concern that McDowell's conceptualism 'boils down to the assumption that what is always already given are determinate, nameable, and thinkable facts structured through and through so as to be directly graspable by minds' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 359). He further notes that Merleau-Ponty refers to this assumption as "*the prejudice in favour of the objective world*" (Dreyfus, 2013: 359; Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 58). Conceptual capacities can only be operative, for Dreyfus, as 'propositional structures in the mind' that 'correspond to the propositionally structured facts in the world' (Dreyfus, 2013: 17). In this way, Dreyfus pays close attention to McDowell's description of perceptual experience as taking in '*that things are thus and so*' (McDowell, 1994: 26). Even if conceptualism can accommodate those perceptual instincts that Dreyfus construes in motor intentional terms, the conceptual content of our perceptual experience entails information about an empirical world whose features are independent of our practical interests – propositional structures in the mind that correspond to propositionally structured facts. For Dreyfus, McDowell's 'world of facts, features, and data'

entails the idea that we 'experience context-free, self-sufficient substances with detachable properties' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 364).

As we have seen, McDowell takes perceptual experience to play a crucial role in unreflective action. Our perception of relevant aspects of practical situations provides us with *reasons* for our unreflectively acting in the way that we do. McDowell also puts this in terms of responding to facts about the world. Now, McDowell does not want to restrict the kind of facts that one is able to perceive and respond to – he denies that his conception of the factual 'involves a separation from anything with practical significance' (McDowell, 2007b: 369). McDowell states that one might perceive that a hole in a wall is of a certain size, and if the perceiving agent is trying to get to the other side of the wall, the *fact* that the hole is of a certain size is practically significant to the agent, and may even be described as a solicitation (McDowell, 2007b: 369). We therefore have an empirical concept or set of empirical concepts that are operative in our perceptual experience of states of affairs in the world, and these states of affairs have relevance to one's practical interests[51]. The general picture here is of practical agents who are responsive to perceived facts about their environment which entail reasons to act. I want to tentatively highlight a possible concern about a *remainder* of Cartesianism in McDowell's picture, where we have a subject with particular practical interests perceiving a world that is in the first instance separable from those interests.

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[51] In Chapter Four, I argued that Bengson's own account of the relationship between perception and action could be viewed as an elaboration of McDowell's position. One's conceptually organised perceptual experience bears normative relations to certain "actionable concepts" that entail one being "poised" to perform a particular intentional action (Bengson, 2016: 39).

We can put the line of critique I have in mind in the following way. McDowell's account of the way in which empirical concepts are operative in perceptual experience is designed to capture the epistemological significance of the environment. In her analysis of perceptual "affordances", Siegel notes that perception does 'feel quite different depending on whether it is dominantly structured by our roles as agents or not' (Siegel, 2014: 25). My concern is that McDowell's conceptualism is not well suited to distinguish the perceptual experience of a practically engaged agent from an epistemically oriented agent, one seeking to 'get it right about an external reality' (Dreyfus, 2013: 22). Both are simply described in terms of "responsiveness to reasons". Another way of putting this is that there is no way of distinguishing the empirical concepts that are operative in our practically engaged experience of our environment, from those empirical concepts that are at work in our epistemically oriented experience.

Rietveld's critique of McDowell's conceptualist account of unreflective runs parallel to the above concern. Rietveld draws upon Charles Taylor's own critique of McDowell, which came before McDowell's debate with Dreyfus. Taylor describes unreflective action as involving "pre-understanding", which corresponds to motor intentionality. Taylor recognises that the point of McDowell's attempt to bring unreflective action into the space of reasons is to avoid construing it as a causal event in nature. However, Taylor argues that we should distinguish two senses of rationality: 'the strong Kantian sense, turning crucially on conceptual, reflective thought; and the weaker sense, which turns on participating in the space of reasons' (Taylor, 2002: 114). In his response to Taylor, McDowell argues that we need a "middle ground" between reflective

thought and causal relations. He acknowledges that 'we need this middle ground for thinking about […] what is supposed to be occupied by pre-understanding (McDowell, 2002: 283). However, McDowell doesn't take a concern about pre-understanding to be relevant to his overall project, and does not develop such a middle ground (McDowell, 2002: 283).

Rietveld agrees with Taylor that McDowell is "not wrong" to place unreflective action and perception in the space of reasons (2010: 199). However, he agrees with Taylor that McDowell is stretching the explanatory capabilities of his conceptualism in the case of unreflective action. Rietveld claims that we get a better grip on the phenomenology of unreflective action by developing a "tailored account" which admits of an additional explanatory space (Rietveld, 2010: 200). Rietveld argues that we should place unreflective action in the explanatory "sphere of normative significance". He goes on to refine McDowell's conception of "responsiveness to reasons" into "responsiveness to normative significance" (Rietveld, 2010: 200). Rietveld's point, I think, is that we can indeed appreciate McDowell's view that intentional actions are performed for reasons which our perception of a situation presents us with. However, these reasons are not always going to be characterized by the strong, justificatory relations that arise from "reflective, conceptual thought" on facts about our environment. These kinds of reasons that we are responding to in unreflective action, for Rietveld, have motivating force 'thanks to our past experience and training as well as our current engagement in socio-cultural practices and appreciation of the situation' (Rietveld, 2010: 202). Although Rietveld doesn't explicitly say as much, the sphere of normative significance is internal to the space of reasons, and "responding to normative significance" is a

clarified type of responding to reasons. For Rietveld, this clarified terminology better describes the phenomenon of unreflective action. Further, it may further clarify how perceptual experience can be said to "produce" intentional action. This chapter then tries to secure a picture where an unreflectively acting agent is responsiveness to normative significance, or "practical significance", as I will call it.

It is important to note that McDowell's wider philosophical project has resources pertinent to this concern. In the final exchange of the debate, McDowell emphasises that his work on virtue is specifically designed to 'attack a conception according to which the world in which one acts is normatively inert' (McDowell, 2013: 52). This is where he expresses the idea of "intrinsic practical significance". This is construed in ethical terms, however. McDowell states that actions that 'manifest virtue are responses to *requirements* to act that agents confront in the situations they act in' (McDowell, 2013: 52). Of course, this account of virtuous action follows his conception of intentional actions entailing "responsiveness to reasons". However, McDowell's description of a virtuous action entailing not only a response to a reason, but a response to a *requirement* is what may complicate matters, for a plausible account of practically engaged experience. McDowell states that 'if one fails to act as virtue requires, without being prevented, that reveals at least partial blindness to facts about the world' (McDowell, 2013: 52). What we would need to do here is demonstrate how this kind of moral realism – that our moral claims are made true by facts about the world – has a general application to intentional action and the perceptual content involved. This would indeed be an edifying direction to take. However, taking this direction quickly gets us into the field of meta-ethics, an appraisal of

which would be too ambitious a task at this stage. Moreover, I want to take a direction that is in keeping with the concerns of this thesis as a whole.

What I want to do is return to the existential phenomenology that Dreyfus draws on; specifically, the early philosophy of Heidegger. In Chapter Two, I called Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger on conceptual content into question I want to resolve the debate in a way that highlights the continuing relevance of existential phenomenology *beyond* its apparent commitment to non-conceptualism. In Heidegger, we can find a conception of practical significance which suits the purpose of this chapter. So far, we have principally seen Heidegger utilised in the debate as a philosopher who attempts to preserve the practically oriented dimension of human experience by recommending a non-conceptualist account of intentional content. Doyon articulates the view of perceptual content that might reasonably be drawn from Heidegger, on a common interpretation:

> Contrary to the empiricist picture, seeing something does not amount to seeing its physical or material qualities; it is rather to see it in its referential structure where it appears as that which it is for. The now classic example here is that of the hammer, which, as Heidegger explains, manifests itself *as* practically available *for something'* (Doyon, 2015: 119).

As I highlighted in Chapter Two, Heidegger's conception of the ready-to-hand is supposed to capture the way in which objects are perceived in terms of their practical roles, or "referential structure". Doyon's description here echoes the concern I expressed above; that "seeing" features of our environment might be described in quite different terms in the context of practically engaged perceptual experience. However, this kind of description, that Doyon himself utilises, of "seeing" an object as "*for something*" tends not to be treated carefully

enough. There are surely difficulties and ambiguities in the idea that we *perceive* ready-to-hand objects. While we might offer different descriptions of a ready-to-hand object than we would a present-at-hand object, what this amounts to in perceptual terms is decidedly unclear. We have seen that Dreyfus identifies the ready-to-hand with motor intentional content. Perceiving something as ready-to-hand, for Dreyfus, simply entails being "drawn" toward an object that one needn't perceptually take account of. Turning to Heidegger must involve contesting Dreyfus's non-conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger where relevant. In what follows, I explore Heidegger's philosophical understanding of perceptual experience. I argue that we can provide a conceptualist interpretation of this account which can make sense of the difficult idea that we can *perceive* things as ready-to-hand, or practically significant, and respond to them as such.

5.3   Heidegger on Perception

Dreyfus draws attention to Heidegger's focus on the "practically significant" content of perceptual experience in the debate with McDowell. Dreyfus cites the following passage from Heidegger on perception:

> 'What is first of all "given" […] is the "for-writing,"
> the "for-entering-and-exiting," the "for-illuminating,"
> the "for-sitting." That is, writing, entering-existing,
> sitting, and the like are what we are *a priori* involved
> with. What we know and learn when we "know our
> way around" are these uses-for-which we understand
> it' (Heidegger, 2010: 121; also cited in Dreyfus, 2013:
> 17, with his own translation).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the term "ready-to-hand" to describe the way in which objects are "perceived" or "seen" in this instrumental sense (see 1962: 189). As I noted above, how to understand the idea that objects are

perceived "as" ready-to-hand is unclear. Dreyfus associates Heidegger's description here with Merleau-Ponty's "motor intentional" conception of perceptual experience. On Dreyfus's interpretation, Heidegger is providing a phenomenology of something like a "field of forces" that we are bodily responsive to. For Dreyfus, the sort of content that Heidegger describes here cannot be 'captured in propositions but rather is *directly lived* by the absorbed coper as a shifting field of attractions and repulsions' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). As I argued in Chapter Four, that perceptual content is capturable in propositions does not preclude it from being "directly lived"[52]. It is important, for present purposes, to remember that Dreyfus rejects a conceptualist account of perception because he takes it to imply some form of Cartesian detachment between the human being and the world (see Dreyfus, 2013: 31, for example). Dreyfus offers a non-conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger partly on the basis of Heidegger's express concern to overcome a Cartesian picture and all its trappings. Heidegger wants to reject 'the idea of a subject which has intentional experiences merely inside its own sphere' (1982: 63 – 64). Conversely, however, Heidegger is certainly not a proponent of the kind of perceptual "given" critiqued by McDowell and Sellars.

In an early appraisal of Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger argues against what he calls a "scientific" account of perception which he claims is assumed in the epistemology and psychology of his day (Heidegger, 1985: 39). Such an account might run as follows: 'in the first instance and in actuality, with my eyes I merely see something coloured, in the first instance I merely have

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[52] I think this is a particularly ineffective construal of the contrast between conceptual and purportedly non-conceptual experience. Dreyfus emphasises "directly lived" in italics as though it is doing decisive philosophical work, but it is not at all clear what exactly this specification amounts to, and why it prohibits propositional expression.

sensations of yellow, to which I then add other such elements' (Heidegger, 1985: 39). However, Heidegger does not critique this account because of its epistemological incoherence – as Sellars does – but because he finds it to be philosophically inaccurate. We find the same sentiment in *Being and Time* with regard to the modality of hearing: 'What we "first" hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motor-cycle […] it requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to "hear" a "pure noise" (Heidegger, 1962: 207). In earlier lecture courses, Heidegger often uses the term "natural" or "everyday" perception, noting that this should *not* be understood 'in the narrow sense of optical sensing' (Heidegger, 1985: 39). Rather, "everyday" perception should be understood as 'simple cognizance of what is found' (Heidegger, 1985: 39).

Now, in introducing a term like "cognizance" into an account of everyday perceptual experience, Heidegger could commit himself to the kind of Cartesian model that Dreyfus takes him to be radically opposed to. "Cognizance" might signal deliberative mental activity, so that perception becomes a matter of forming judgements about what states of affairs are perceptually present. However, Heidegger describes cognizance in terms of perceiving 'the immediately given just as it shows itself' (Heidegger, 1985: 39). Cognizance, for Heidegger, does not imply any of the intrusive mental capacities or inferential work that Dreyfus would object to. Heidegger's use of the term "cognizance" may signal that he recognises some form of mental understanding must be implicated in perceptual experience. We should not assume that Heidegger's attempt to overcome the Cartesian tradition would lead him to dismiss any role for the mind, and specifically for conceptual capacities. We know that "the

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immediately given" cannot correspond to something like sensory information, given Heidegger's scepticism toward that "scientific" account of perception he refers to above.

In fact, Heidegger provides us with a straightforward account of the content of perception in another early lecture course: 'The most immediate state of affairs is, in fact, that we simply see and take things as they are: board, bench, house, policeman. Yes, *of course*' (Heidegger, 2010: 122; my emphasis). Preliminarily, we might associate Heidegger's account of perception with McDowell's conceptualism. In perception, states of affairs are "immediately given" to us in virtue of our possessing the relevant empirical concepts. To "take things as they are" presupposes that we have a grasp of concepts like "house", "policeman", "bench". In Chapter Two, I referred to Heidegger's conception of "interpretation". It is uncontroversial to take interpretation as a conceptual form of intentionality that can arise in the course of engaged activity. The content of interpretation has what Heidegger refers to as an "as-structure", or 'the structure of *something as something*':

> The "as" makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. […] In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting circumspectively, we "see" it *as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge' (Heidegger, 1962: 189).

Where necessary, I will construe "something *as* something" in terms of the variables "*a* as *b*" for clarity, following Golob (2014). So, Heidegger's account of "interpretive" perception in *Being and Time* remains much the same as in his early lecture courses. Again, a comparison to the kind of conceptualism that McDowell endorses seems apt. In order to see some object "*as* a table" must entail that we possess that empirical concept, and that empirical concept is

operative in our perception. That such an account of perceptual experience depends on attributing conceptual activity on the part of the agent does not entail a lapse into the Cartesianism that Heidegger is trying to overcome. Presumably Heidegger would accept that one would have to *know* what a "policeman" or a "house" were in order to have the relevant state of affairs "given" perceptually in such a way that entails '[taking] things as they are' (2010: 122)[53]. Heidegger's account here may be intelligible in terms of the Fregean account of conceptualism that McDowell adheres to, where to possess a concept is to be in an intentional state – such as perceiving – which has that concept as a constituent. I will say much more about this "Fregean" characterisation below, as it becomes relevant to the account of "practically significant" content that I am trying to secure in this chapter.

The first problem with this conceptualist account of Heidegger, loosely sketched, is that even if Dreyfus would endorse it, he would hold that it only applies at the level of "interpretive" perceptual experience (see Dreyfus, 2007b: 371). As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, he argues that interpretation is a mode of intentionality that can only arise in the interruption of our primary unreflective practical engagement with the environment[54]. For Dreyfus, the "as-structure" is operative in "interpretive" perceptual experience, but not in that fundamental mode of intentionality that Heidegger calls "understanding". Dreyfus makes much of the fact that Heidegger distinguishes "interpretation" from "understanding", and that he makes clear that the latter is a necessary condition

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[53] Specifying that *states of affairs* are perceptually given rather than *objects* implies that "interpretive" perception, at least, has a *propositional* structure. We will see below that Golob denies that Heidegger would accept this propositionalist view.
[54] I argued against this view in Chapter Two, accordingly concluding that conceptual involvement does not imply a detached, subject-object model of experience.

of the former. Heidegger repeatedly describes the world as being first of all 'disclosed' through the understanding (see 1962: 184), and states that 'all sight is grounded primarily in understanding' (Heidegger, 1962: 187). The understanding informs our primary, practically engaged unreflective experience. Dreyfus argues that the understanding consists in a totality of ingrained, non-conceptual bodily skills which are reliably keyed on to perceptual stimuli. For example, Dreyfus gives us this familiar picture: 'In general, the absorbed coper is directly drawn by each solicitation in an appropriate way: the chairs draw him to sit on them, the floorboards to walk on them' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). For Dreyfus, the Heideggerian understanding should be closely associated with Merleau-Ponty's conception of motor intentionality; both attempt to articulate the non-conceptual "know-how" that characterises the interrelated nature of the perceptual experience and intentional action that pertains to the human being's unreflective engagement with the world.

There is some limited textual evidence for Dreyfus's reading, however. As I noted in Chapter Two, we might reasonably equate Heidegger's use of the term "non-thematic" with "non-conceptual". For example, when Heidegger states that ready-to-hand objects are not 'thematically apprehended for deliberate thinking about things' (Heidegger, 1962: 172), it is plausible that his equation of "thematic" and "deliberate thinking" entails those things not being *conceptually* apprehended. Significantly, Heidegger seems to think that the perception appropriate to ready-to-hand objects is non-propositional; for example, he discusses the 'pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). Similarly, Heidegger states that 'in dealing with something, I make no thematic, predicative statements about the thing' (Heidegger, 2010: 122). Heidegger also

comments on the "as-structure", specifying that the 'as-character does not become explicit at all' in our everyday, practical, perceptual engagement with the world (2010: 122). Dreyfus therefore seems to have some textual justification for how he describes the mode of intentionality pertaining to our primary unreflective experience: 'From the perspective of the skilled coper absorbed in the solicitation of a familiar affordance, the affording object, as Heidegger puts it, "withdraws". We need not even be aware of the solicitations to go out *as* solicitations' (Dreyfus, 2013: 18). Indeed, I have already noted that Dreyfus' non-conceptualist reading here is "dominant" in Anglo-American appropriations of Heidegger (I have cited Golob, 2014: 26 and Crowell, 2015: 73 to this effect). In assessing Dreyfus's non-conceptualist reading of Heidegger on the "understanding", Golob highlights the fact that Heidegger never makes any of the requisite arguments for something like motor intentionality:

> 'It seems to me simply incredible that if [Heidegger's] account of intentionality genuinely rested on motor intentionality he would not have explicitly stated or explained or argued for that view in any of those tens of thousands of pages' … 'Ultimately, an appeal to motor intentionality risks turning […] Heidegger's key arguments […] into a promissory note to be cashed by the *Phenomenology of Perception*' (Golob, 2014: 46).

Dennis offers a similar assessment: 'in over one hundred volumes of philosophical writing, Heidegger hardly mentions the body' (Dennis, 2012: 110). Indeed, in section 31 of *Being and Time* where Heidegger introduces the notion of the "understanding", Heidegger does not refer to the body. There is no doubt that Dreyfus comes to associate Heidegger's anti-Cartesianism with an antipathy to any philosophical appeal to capacities belonging to the mind. Accordingly, Dreyfus assumes that Heidegger must be appealing to the same sort of bodily and

perceptual capacities as Merleau-Ponty. However, Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger wilfully ignores certain important claims that Heidegger makes.

In particular, Dreyfus's reading cannot make sense of Heidegger's claim that 'in interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself' (Heidegger, 1962: 188). If the Heideggerian understanding simply indicated a set of non-conceptual "coping" skills, and that there really was a qualitative transition between non-conceptual perceptual experience, to the conceptual perceptual experience of "interpretation", such a remark from Heidegger would be incoherent. Heidegger is clear that interpretive perceptual experience has an "expressible" structure. There seems to be a disjunction between the claim that the understanding "becomes itself" in interpretation and the claim that our primary perceptual experience is "pre-predicative", or "non-thematic". In fact, Heidegger is clear that he does not take "pre-predicative" to mean "non-conceptual". In speaking of the "pre-predicative seeing" of the ready-to-hand, Heidegger only means that a perceiving agent is not actively formulating propositions about the content of their perceptual experience. Dennis notes a positive comparison between Heidegger and McDowell, who 'both seem to be suggesting that experiential content is already structured by the 'as', only it is not necessarily isolated and focused on as such' (2012: 116). That is, when one "thematises" or "makes explicit" the content of one's experience, one is simply articulating content that was there anyway. This is a reasonable reading of what Heidegger means when he says that the understanding "becomes itself" when its content becomes articulated in a judgement. In *History of the Concept of Time* (1925), Heidegger makes this very point:

> We shall see that our comportments, *lived experiences taken in the broadest sense*, are through and through *expressed experiences*; even if they are not uttered in words, they are nonetheless expressed in a definite articulation by an understanding that I have of them as I simply live in them *without regarding them thematically*.
> (Heidegger, 1985: 48; my emphasis)

As we can see, Heidegger is not excluding *any* experiences from his claim that experience has an expressible structure ('*lived experiences taken in the broadest sense*'). He even specifies that this claim applies to experiences that are *unthematic* in character. He goes on to cement his conception of the interrelation between language and perception: 'It is not so much that we see objects and things but rather than we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter' (Heidegger, 1985: 56). Our grasp of language, our conceptual repertoire, determines what it is that one "sees" in perceptual experience.

The subject of the ready-to-hand should be kept in mind here. Heidegger is clear that our most primary, practically engaged perceptual experience pertains to ready-to-hand objects. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger associates the ready-to-hand with interpretation *and* the understanding: 'Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). In this way, Heidegger makes clear that perceiving something *as* something – perceiving something *as* a table, for example – characterizes even our pre-predicative experience of ready-to-hand objects. Dreyfus's construal of the ready-to-hand in motor intentional terms – identifying the ready-to-hand with non-conceptual "attractions and repulsions" – is at odds with Heidegger's comments here. I will return to this particular point about the ready-to-hand below. Heidegger is even more explicit

that the understanding is characterised by the as-structure. He is unambiguous on this point: 'if the "as" is ontically unexpressed, this must not seduce us into overlooking it as a constitutive state for understanding' (Heidegger, 1962: 190). He goes even further, stating that perceiving something 'free of the "as" entails 'a *failure to understand it anymore*' (Heidegger, 1962: 190). Where Dreyfus maintains that the "as-structure" must only belong to interpretive intentionality, which is derivative of the primary, non-conceptual form of intentionality which Heidegger describes as "understanding", Heidegger is clear that the understanding itself is characterised by an as-structure, and that perceiving something *without* such a structure is in fact highly unusual[55].

Dennis therefore claims that Heidegger can be brought into line with McDowell's view here: 'if an experience is world-disclosing, which implies that it is categorially unified, all its content is present in a *form* in which […] is suitable to constitute contents of conceptual capacities' (McDowell, 2007a: 347 – 348). Doyon favours this reading, arguing that 'not only does Heidegger recognize that the phenomenological "as-structure" is pervasive in experience […] the point of this analysis is precisely to argue that we need not wait until that judgement kicks in to appreciate its crucial contribution' (Doyon, 2015: 125). The Heideggerian understanding is characterised by the "as-structure", the structure of "something *as* something". Dreyfus's non-conceptualist reading of Heidegger seems to actually miss the point of Heidegger's phenomenology, at least in the first Division of *Being and Time* – which is to articulate the structure of intentional experience. As I noted in **4.2**, Dreyfus is content to appeal to a

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[55] In fact, it is unclear *how* one could perceive something without *any* as-structure; the present-at-hand, as we will see, still has an as-structure. As far as I know, Heidegger does not clarify this point.

"background" of bodily skills and perceptual capacities as a necessary condition of intentional experience, but unjustifiably refuses to countenance that *conceptual* skills and capacities also form a part of that background. In *Being and Time*, then, Heidegger appears to remain committed to his earlier account of the most basic, and primary perceptual experience: 'the most immediate state of affairs is, in fact, that we simply see and take things as they are: board, bench, house, policeman. Yes, of course' (Heidegger, 2010: 122). Dreyfus is wrong to attribute a non-conceptualist account of perceptual experience to Heidegger. Both interpretation *and* the understanding are characterised by the as-structure.

Before I conclude this initial characterisation of Heidegger's account of perception. it is necessary to engage in some detail with Golob's recent interpretation of Heidegger (2014). Golob offers a significant re-evaluation of Heidegger's conception of intentionality. I am not deviating unnecessarily into Heideggerian scholarship here; Golob's account is directly relevant to my concerns in this chapter as a whole. Golob argues that Heidegger's account of the as-structure entails that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual, but rejects a Fregean or McDowellian account of Heidegger's conceptualism. Golob intends to offer an account of the "as-structure" where the content of perceptual experience is *conceptual* but not *propositional*. He therefore disputes Cristina Lafont's view that Heidegger ascribes propositional content to perceptual experience (see Lafont, 2000: 181)[56]. Golob similarly expresses scepticism at Dennis's comparison between McDowell and Heidegger: 'if [Heidegger's] position is really so close to McDowell's, then why is the whole baroque apparatus of texts like [*Being and Time*] necessary?' (Golob, 2014: 73n5).

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[56] Lafont's *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure* (2000) builds from a conceptualist account of Heidegger to argue that he is committed to a linguistic idealism.

Golob argues plausibly that the philosophical function of the as-structure is not to explain how intentionality secures reference to particular objects through empirical concepts or senses:

> '[The] *b* variable's function is not to explain why my experience is about this table as opposed to that one, or as opposed to the television: it thus does not determine reference in anything like the way in which representational mediators such as senses or noemata do' (Golob, 2014: 93)[57].

Golob claims that Heidegger's account therefore 'structurally occludes the question that drives the Frege-Russell-Kripke tradition' (2014: 145). I agree with Golob that a Fregean account of conceptualism does not *exhaust* the purpose of Heidegger's conception of the as-structure. Below, I argue that this reading does not capture important aspects of Heidegger's philosophy – in particular, the distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at hand. However, if it were not *part* of the story, Heidegger's description of our perception of ordinary empirical objects would not make sense: 'we simply see and take things as they are: board, bench, house, policeman' (2010: 122). Remember, too, that Heidegger *does* fill the *b* variable with an ordinary empirical concept; we see an object '*as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge' (1962: 189). Further, Heidegger does in fact have a story about singular reference that we find in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929).

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[57] One of the reasons why Golob rejects a Fregean account of Heidegger's conceptualism is that Heidegger appears to be opposed to any form of "mediational representationalism", which Golob takes Fregeanism to entail. I don't take an explanatory position on Heidegger's comments on representation here. However, I would point out that Golob notes that 'one might supplement mediational representationalism with an object-dependent account of the representational content: for example, by focusing on demonstrative representations' (Golob, 2014: 94). Oddly, Golob simply goes on to say that 'Heidegger's objections to mediational representationalism are not solely directed at its object-independent variants' (Golob, 2014: 94) without explaining why. He sums up by saying that Heidegger 'rejects the foundational appeal to "ideal content", be it object-dependent or not' (Golob, 2014: 95), but of course *de re* content is precisely *not* "ideal content", which Golob identifies with a 'packet of descriptive information' (Golob, 2014: 145).

I want to be cautious about how I utilise this material; that it is an interpretation of Kant means that we cannot always assume Heidegger is endorsing the claims he makes. My view, however, is that Heidegger regards the claims I evaluate below as compatible with his own philosophical project, and further that these claims make some sense of his description of the "as-structure" in *Being and Time*[58]. Firstly, Heidegger describes perceptual experience as 'thinking intuiting', its content as such being 'necessarily conceptual' (Heidegger, 1990: 71). Heidegger appears to offer an account of how such empirical concepts are generated from "empirical intuiting" (Heidegger, 1990: 71). Intriguingly, Heidegger does not take such intuiting to be non-conceptual, or non-propositional. He in fact appeals to the idea that the content of our perceptual experience is always articulable in a demonstrative proposition. He specifies that empirical intuition 'always has the character of the immediately seen particular ("this-here")' (Heidegger, 1990: 65). Further, Heidegger clarifies that 'this does not exclude the possibility that a multitude of such particulars might be intuited, namely, as a richer "this-here"; for example, this particular totality of this landscape' (Heidegger, 1990: 65). Heidegger does not focus on the philosophical role that demonstratives like "this-here" can play in the same way as philosophers like McDowell and Evans. However, he highlights how an empirical intuition which is expressible in those demonstrative terms allows us to form an "image" which essentially functions as a concept.

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[58] Roughly speaking, I take this view because Heidegger's interpretation is notable for the way in which he filters Kant through his own philosophical sensibilities – he often makes Kant say what he wants him to say – and his interpretation is regarded in this way as a "violent" one (see Heidegger, 1990: xx). Further, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* also entails a critique, and Heidegger is often clear where he regards Kant to have fallen short.

Heidegger goes onto state that in our perception of a house, we are not "preoccupied" with its "determinate look" – the particularity of the house – but with how its appearance corresponds to a pre-conceived image (Heidegger, 1990: 67). We can fill in some gaps quite plausibly here; a perceptual experience can present us with an "immediately seen" particular or set of particulars which we can codify in the *de re* demonstrative content "this-here", and this content is then brought to bear on further perceptual experiences which have the relevant features. Golob refers to this as a "prototype" theory of concepts. Golob in fact notices that Heidegger has a "prototype" theory of empirical concepts here: 'as Heidegger puts it, the prototype "regulates", i.e. it allows us to order the manifold, by "setting a standard", i.e. by exemplifying certain properties against which other entities can be measured' (Golob, 2014: 148). Margolis & Laurence describe a prototype theory to take 'categorization to be a feature-matching process where an exemplar or individual is compared to a target category for how similar they are' (2003: 196)[59]. As we will see, Golob makes much of this "prototype" account of conceptuality at the primary level of Heidegger's conception of intentionality. With this rudimentary theory of concept-formation, Heidegger seems to have much the same view that DeGaynesford attributes to McDowell here:

> It is from precisely those simple experiences expressed by perceptual demonstrative thoughts that concepts derive. These experiences provide identifying reference to the basic items about which we think and talk and whose totality makes up the world' (DeGaynesford, 2004: 142).

I therefore think Golob is mistaken in denying that we cannot characterise Heidegger's conceptualism in Fregean terms. We will see below that

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[59] Margolis & Laurence identify a prototype theory of concepts with the idea that concepts are mental representations, and not abstract entities like Fregean senses.

Golob specifies that Heidegger's "prototype" account of intentional content is conceptualist without indicating propositionally structured content. Indeed, Heidegger speaks of a prototype concept as an "image", rather than linguistically codified content – but I have established that Fregean senses need not entail such content. Furthermore, I only mean to demonstrate here that Heidegger does have some theory of singular reference, which I make use of in **5.4**; I am of course not claiming that Heidegger has a fully worked out model of empirical concepts that bears close comparison to the technical moves made in analytic philosophy of language.

5.4   Practical Significance and the As-Structure

As I highlighted above, it may be possible to construe the "as-structure" in Fregean terms to describe the way in which empirical concepts like "house" or "policeman" must be operative in our intentional perceptual experience. At this point, however, it seems as though the notion of "practical significance" is receding into the background. One way to combine Heidegger's conceptualism – articulated in the "as-structure" of the understanding – with his focus on practical significance, is to highlight his remarks on "circumspection", which is his specific term for practically oriented perceptual experience.

Prior to *Being and Time*, Heidegger holds that "natural" or "everyday" perception 'is not a detached observation and scrutiny of things, but is rather absorbed in dealing with the matters at hand concretely and practically' (Heidegger, 1985: 37). The first thing to say here is that this specification is clearly meant to offset any sense in which perception belongs to a detached,

disinterested subject, whose purpose is to acquire information about features of the environment. Heidegger further avoids any "Cartesian" connotations by emphasising that perception is not 'self-contained': 'I do not perceive in order to perceive but in order to orient myself, to pave the way in dealing with something' (Heidegger, 1985: 37). Similarly, he follows up on his description of perception as "seeing and taking things as they are," adding the caveat; 'but this taking is always a taking in a dealing-with, and [is] so originally a taking-as that its as-character does not become explicit at all' (Heidegger, 2010: 122). For Heidegger, then, our perception is principally in service our practical interests. Circumspection describes the 'skilled possibility of concerned discovering, of concerned seeing' (Heidegger, 1985: 274). It is the mode of perception appropriate to ready-to-hand objects[60].

We may therefore offer a fairly "weak" interpretation of how Heidegger's conceptualism, understood in the above terms, sits alongside this focus on practical orientation. A.A. Schiller (2012) offers a well worked out account of perception that makes sense of Heidegger's remarks on circumspection, while remaining conceptualist. Schiller is mainly concerned to develop an account in which it is facts, rather than objects or properties, which feature in our perceptual content, allying himself as such with McDowell. Schiller adds the specification that our practical interests determine *which* facts feature in our perceptual content. He draws this lesson in part from the psychological "gorilla experiment". Test subjects watch a video of a basketball being passed around by a group of players and, significantly, are told to count the number of passes.

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[60] "Enactive" accounts of perception are in some sense "circumspective" accounts. See Noë (2004), who argues that perception is not a matter of passive observation but of active discovery, and that this helps us makes sense of its epistemological purpose.

Many of the test subjects fail to recognise the arrival of a person in a gorilla suit who stops in the middle of the court, beats their chest, and walks back off. The upshot of this experiment is clear: the practical interests of the test subjects determined what they visually experienced. Their practical interest lay in counting the passes, and accordingly other features or facts about the scene – even someone in a gorilla suit – receded into the background. Schiller refers to Heidegger's phenomenology in order to argue for the practically oriented character of perceptual experience:

> According to Heidegger, perception as a part of everyday coping always takes place within the context of our interest and goals. As I'd like to put the point, perception is *structured* by contexts that we, by way of our interests, determine. If we're in the midst of playing softball, the things that matter to us (where the runner is, which way the pop fly is drifting, etc.) come into focus and those things that don't (that there's a jet flying overhead, that there's a fight in the stands) fall away. (Schiller, 2012: 589)

This seems to be a largely unobjectionable thesis – it rests on an empirical point that perceiving agents focus on certain areas of their visual field, and that this may be determined by what objects they have a reason to focus on. Heidegger would no doubt agree with this point, and it is likely that he *partly* has something like this in mind with his notion of circumspective perception. However, we should recall that initial description of perceptual experience that Dreyfus cites from Heidegger in the debate:

> 'What is first of all "given" […] is the "for-writing," the "for-entering-and-exiting," the "for-illuminating," the "for-sitting." That is, writing, entering-existing, sitting, and the like are what we are *a priori* involved with. What we know and learn when we "know our way around" are these uses-for-which we understand it' (Heidegger, 2010: 121; also cited in Dreyfus, 2013: 17, with his own translation).

Heidegger clearly regards perceptual experience as first and foremost capturing the practical significance of the environment. Prior to *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the fundamental mode of intentionality as 'a primary making-sense-of-things in terms of what they're for' (Heidegger, 1985: 120). A "circumspective" account of Heidegger's understanding of practically oriented perception doesn't get a handle on Heidegger's concerns here.

One way of putting this is that a reading of Heidegger's account of perceptual experience that simply relies on some comments about "circumspection" doesn't make sense of the distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. Accordingly, it doesn't explain how "ready-to-hand" objects are perceived, and so does not provide the kind of "intrinsically" practically significant content that this chapter is focused on securing. As we have seen, Heidegger seems to hold that empirical concepts of ordinary objects are operative in our perceptual experience. However, these concepts would surely be operative when attempting to "get it right about a distanced reality", as Dreyfus would put it. That is, those empirical concepts are operative when we are perceiving or thinking about an object in that theoretical sense which Heidegger describes in terms of "presence-at-hand". And as we have seen, our possession of a concept like "table" is also operative in our unreflective perceiving and acting, which Heidegger construes in terms of "readiness-to-hand": 'In dealing what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we "see" it *as* a table' (Heidegger, 1962: 189). The key move here is to demonstrate how Heidegger distinguishes between an empirical concept being operative in what we might call our "ready-to-hand" experience, and being operative in our "present-at-hand" experience. If we are to make this

distinction coherently, we are able to secure a Heideggerian account of the practically significant content of perceptual experience, which nevertheless retains the epistemic and normative advantages of conceptualism.

My view is that Heidegger's account of "ready-to-hand" perceptual experience entails an operative conceptual framework that is distinguished by the kind of relations instantiated between the concepts. Heidegger calls these distinctive kinds of relations "involvement" relations. In Chapter Two, we saw that Heidegger describes ready-to-hand objects as belonging to a "totality of involvements"; a hammer might be ready-to-hand in virtue of its relations to other ready-to-hand objects like nails and wood, its relation to tasks, like building a book-case, and how those tasks relate to a wider set of human activities, goals, and even existential concerns (see Heidegger, 1962: 98). Heidegger uses terms like "in-order-to", "towards-which" and "for-the-sake-of-which" to describe the kinds of relations instantiated in a conceptual framework that pertains to human practical interests.

In the lecture course where Heidegger claims that the fundamental mode of intentionality is 'a primary making-sense-of-things in terms of what they're for' (Heidegger, 1985: 120), he later makes clear that what we perceptually experience is primarily *meaning*, and describes meaning as 'grounded in references and referential connections' (1985: 211). It makes sense to describe our primary perceptual experience in terms of those "affordances" like "for-writing," and "for-entering-and-exiting," only because the "meaning" of the relevant objects or environmental features is predicated upon their connection to other things. Of course, in talking about the "meanings" of the relevant environmental features, we must admit a role for conceptual understanding. We

can therefore translate these descriptions of the "practical meanings" of environmental features into the terms of the operation of conceptual capacities. A concept of an environmental feature is operative in practically engaged perceptual experience insofar as that empirical concept bears an involvement relation to concepts relevant to one's practical interests.

Now, involvement relations can still be understood as inferential relations, and as such belong to the space of reasons. Specifying that these relations are a distinctly *practical* kind of inferential relation is what allows us to identify that subset of the space of reasons that Rietveld calls "the sphere of normative significance". This is how we can make sense of Doyon's description of perception as seeing an object 'in its referential structure where it appears as that which it is for [...] the hammer [...] manifests itself *as* practically available *for something* (Doyon, 2015: 119). Dreyfus is right to insist that practically engaged perceptual experience should not be construed as 'getting it right about a distanced reality' (2013: 22). As I have demonstrated, the non-conceptualist account of perceptual experience that Dreyfus develops in order to offset this understanding of perception has clear problems. However, we still need to explain what Heidegger then means by the "present-at-hand", which does describe this epistemologically motivated form of perceptual experience. Again, the shift from "ready-to-hand" intentional content, to "present-at-hand" intentional content should not be understood in terms of a transition between non-conceptual content and conceptual content. We can get clear about what such a transition entails by referring back to Heidegger's notion of an "as-structure".

This is where the "as-structure" becomes relevant again. The kind of perceptual experience appropriate to practically engaged activity - and the ready-to-hand - is underpinned by the "existential-hermeneutic" as-structure. This is Heidegger's name for a structure of involvement relations like "in-order-to" and "for-the-sake-of-which". However, when we adopt an epistemically oriented perspective, there is a changeover in the kind of as-structure that informs the operation of our conceptual capacities. Heidegger calls the as-structure pertaining to the present-at-hand the "apophantical" as-structure (Heidegger, 1962: 201). Heidegger refers to the transition between practically engaged, ready-to-hand experience and epistemically oriented present-at-hand experience as a modification of the as-structure (Heidegger, 1962: 200)[61]. Heidegger states that the perceived object's as-structure 'no longer reaches out into a totality of involvements […] it has been cut off from that significance which, as such, constitutes environmentality' (Heidegger, 1962: 200).

That is, the kind of normative or practical significance that we would respond to in intentional action is lost, and 'only now are we given any access to *properties* or the like' (Heidegger, 1962: 200). If a conceptual judgement like "the hammer is too heavy" becomes evaluable not in relation to our skilful engagement, but in how it corresponds to some objective state of affairs, then there is a handover in the kind of conceptual framework that we situate a concept like "hammer" in. For Heidegger, the conceptual framework of the present-at-hand is defined by logical or causal relations which don't refer to anything of practical relevance, but rather to material properties: 'the unexplained

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[61] We should recall that Heidegger thinks that such a transition can happen in "breakdown" cases, where our practically engaged experience runs up against some sort of problem that scuppers the activity.

presupposition is that the "meaning" of this sentence is to be taken as: "This Thing – a hammer – has the property of heaviness' (Heidegger, 1962: 200). The concept of "hammer" is defined entirely differently – its conceptual framework is wholly geared toward an objective description of the environment. In Dreyfus's terms, the perception suddenly manifests a conceptual framework which allows us to "get it right about a distanced reality" (2013: 22).

I want to get clearer on how all of this bears out in strictly *perceptual* terms. We can achieve a more distinct idea of what the difference between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand entails with reference to Wittgenstein's conception of "seeing-aspects". Mulhall (1990) first draws attention to the possible comparison between Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception with Heidegger's phenomenology. Take what Wittgenstein says about perception in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (1980): 'It is as if one had brought a concept to what one sees, and now one sees the concept along with the thing. It is in itself hardly visible, and yet it spreads an ordering veil over the objects' (1980: §961). In his famous example of the duck-rabbit figure, Wittgenstein draws attention to the way in which the figure can be seen differently - which *aspect* of the figure is perceived - depending on which concept is brought to it:
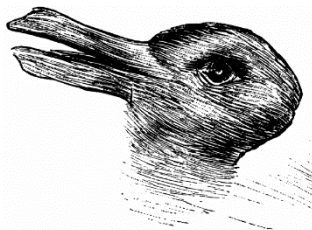
Wittgenstein's discussion of perception at least partly turns on the role that concepts play in determining perceptual content. There is certainly disagreement amongst commentators on what the overarching point of

Wittgenstein's discussion is. Avner Baz (2000) for example, argues that Wittgenstein is simply interested in the phenomenon of "aspect-dawning", where one notices a new way in which something can be seen. For Baz, aspect-perception affords us the realisation that certain things in the world require 'an expression other than the obvious and the common' (2000: 121) Mulhall, on the other hand, thinks that Wittgenstein's discussion highlights *continuous* aspect perception; Wittgenstein is concerned to articulate 'the basic or fundamental ways in which human beings relate to the world through their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour' (Mulhall, 1990: 150). A figure like the duck-rabbit then represents a clear but ultimately trivial example – a stepping stone to a characterisation of perceptual experience in general. Mulhall distinguishes "aspect" concepts from "material property concepts". The former 'involve human projections of significance on the world' (Mulhall, 1990: 129). The latter involve 'properties which entities possess in their own right' (Mulhall, 1990: 129). As with the distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, however, empirical concepts like "table" or "hammer" could intelligibly count as both aspect *and* material property concepts.

The difference, I have suggested, rests in the framework that the concept is situated in. In fact, Wittgenstein gestures toward something like this idea when he describes the "dawning" of an aspect as consisting in perceiving 'not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 212a). There is therefore something right about Baz's interpretation of Wittgenstein; different experiences of the same "state of affairs" may require different forms of expression. Siegel argues that Dreyfus's account of motor intentional content 'is inadequate to account for experiences of being

solicited by things in the environment' (Siegel, 2014: 76). As I have noted, however, she does take the idea that the perceptual content that pertains to engaged activity requires a distinctive description seriously, remarking that perception does 'feel quite different depending on whether it is dominantly structured by our roles as agents or not' (Siegel, 2014: 76). Accordingly, Siegel attempts to codify the propositional structure of this normative perceptual content – one of her proposals is the form '"X is to-be-phi'd", where phi represents an action involving X, a perceived object' (Siegel, 2014: 72). Such a way of formulating perceptual content would be contrary to an epistemologically oriented account, where it is simply states of affairs that are perceived. This is where we would require Heidegger's distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. What Heidegger calls the "existential-hermeneutical" framework may indeed underpin the form of perceptual content that Siegel proposes, which represents the kind of normative significance that can be responded to in our intentional action.

Finally, I want to provide some further depth to this account by referring to Golob's recent conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger's account of intentionality. We saw that Golob argues that the point of the as-structure is not to secure singular reference to particular states of affairs. For Golob, the b variable should not identified with a Fregean sense. Golob provides an alternative account of how we should understand the as-structure and its variables. His argument here accords with my focus on Heidegger's description of the practically significant structure of human intentionality, for example, that 'primary making-sense-of-things in terms of what they're for' (Heidegger, 1985:

120). Golob similarly identifies Heidegger's concern with specifying a meaningful context that entities are integrated into:

> '[The] explanatorily basic form of Dasein's intentionality consists in the capacity to locate an entity or entities, the *a* variable, within a meaningful, relational context, the *b* variable. The explanatorily primary form which the *b* variable takes is the web of relations which Heidegger calls "world"' (Golob, 2014: 83)

Above, I have offered an account of such a "meaningful, relational context", specifying that the relations that pertain to the context are "involvement" relations, in the case of practically engaged perceptual experience. Golob argues that the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is attempting to explain the human being's intentional grasp of such relations. For Golob, Heidegger is a conceptualist because he explains this intentional grasp of involvement relations by appealing to a 'familiarity with a relevant prototype' (Golob, 2014: 148). We saw the "prototype" model of concepts above, where an entity falls under a concept if it bears some measure of favourable comparison to an "exemplar" – Heidegger seems to understand this exemplar in terms of a visual image. The 'capacity to locate an entity or entities [...] within a meaningful, relational context' involves possessing a familiarity with generic types of relations (Golob, 2014: 83; 148). I have argued that a ready-to-hand entity is perceived as such because the relevant empirical concept is situated within a framework of involvement relations. On Golob's account, we can further explain the relations pertaining to the ready-to-hand in terms of a grasp of generic types of inferential relations that the empirical concept fits into: 'entities understood as ready-to-hand are made sense of in terms of multiple generics: Heidegger lists "serviceability, conduciveness, usability and manipulability' (Golob, 2014: 148;

Heidegger, 1962: 68). I think it is likely, on this reading, that involvement relations like "in-order-to" and "for-the-sake-of-which" also count as those generic types of relations.

Golob's reading allows us to further vindicate Heidegger's description of the primary form of intentionality as 'making-sense-of-things in terms of what they're for' (Heidegger, 1985: 120). Heidegger takes the achievement of human intentional activity to be based in a fundamental conceptual grasp of types of distinctly *practical* relations. Of course, I have argued that these relations instantiate between the relevant empirical concepts of entities. As I pointed out, Heidegger does fill the *b* variable with ordinary empirical concepts. I would suggest that an important advantage to my Fregean reading is that it secures singular reference between conceptual frameworks. When the empirical concept is "cut off" from the involvement relations that characterise the existential-hermeneutic as-structure, and refers to something present-at-hand, a concern may arise that these two "conceptions" of the object – the ready-to-hand, and the present-at-hand – are irreconcilable. We can offset this concern by noting that the same empirical concept is operative. Indeed, I think the way to take a conceptualist reading of Heidegger forward would be to further clarify, along these lines, how the conceptual frameworks pertaining to epistemically and practically oriented experience are not mutually exclusive in a way that returns us to a familiar dualism: this time, of the practical and the epistemic.

We have seen that McDowell takes perceptual experience to "produce" intentional action in the sense that we perceive states of affairs which give us reasons to act. On my reading, Heidegger's phenomenology can clarify how the states of affairs that we perceive are in the first instance practically significant;

that the empirical concepts that are operative in the perceptual experience are situated within a conceptual framework composed of "involvement" relations. We can therefore provide what we might call a "practical topography" of the space of reasons[62]. We can do this by specifying the *practical* relations that instantiate between the concepts of those features of the environment that we unreflectively respond to in our practically engaged experience. Unreflective action, on this picture, can intelligibly be said to entail "responsiveness to *practical* significance".

5.5   Concluding Remarks on Existential Phenomenology

The purpose of this chapter was to secure a stronger notion of "intrinsically practically significant" perceptual content than McDowell's particular brand of conceptualism is able to account for. I took a cue from Rietveld's assessment of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, where he concludes that we ought to develop a "tailored" account of conceptualism, where we can picture unreflective action in the explanatory language of "responsiveness to normative significance", rather than "responsiveness to reasons". I argued that we could develop the right "tailored" account of conceptualism with reference to Heidegger's conception of the "ready-to-hand". I noted that by taking this route, we could highlight how the resources of existential phenomenology might be utilised beyond the way they are in the debate.

I then moved on to argue that we can read conceptualism into Heidegger's account of perceptual experience, and further that we could make

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[62] I owe the term "topography" to Kukla & Lance (2008), who provide a "pragmatic topography" of the space of reasons that focuses on pragmatic speech acts that are not declarative assertions. My notion of a "practical" topography is distinct from their pragmatic one.

sense of this in Fregean terms. In order to secure the idea of "practically significant" content, I moved on to show how Heidegger posits two distinct kinds of conceptual framework; one that is operative in practically engaged perceptual experience, and one operative in epistemically oriented experience. The kind of conceptual framework that pertains to practically engaged experience is composed of "involvement" relations between operative empirical concepts. We can secure the idea that perceptual content can be intrinsically practically significant by emphasising that the operative empirical concepts bear involvement relations to concepts pertaining to our practical interests. Our unreflective actions are responsive to perceptual conceptual content that in the first instance belongs to an operative conceptual framework composed of specifically practical relations.

Before I end, I want to draw attention to the way in which I have utilised the existential phenomenology of Heidegger here. My usage stands in contrast to the "dominant" approach to Heidegger, which has largely been formed by Dreyfus's interpretation. The point I am concerned to make is that an existential phenomenological account of perceptual experience has, of course, distinctive contributions to make to our understanding of perception, action, intentionality, and the human relationship to the world more broadly. Its contribution to the analytic sphere of philosophy has traditionally been to emphasise the purportedly non-conceptual, embodied character of our perceptual experience of the world. However, this emphasis runs close – as it does in the debate - to being cashed out in flatly causal, "baldly naturalistic" terms. A non-conceptualist account of phenomenology, however, does not seem to capture someone like Heidegger's clear focus on the human being's practical engagement with a

meaningful world. Accommodating an explanatory role for conceptual capacities directly corresponds to the early Heidegger's project of understanding the nature of our experiential encounter with a meaningful world. Dreyfus's attempt to interpret Heidegger as a proponent of motor intentional content not only contradicts this stated interest of Heidegger's, but, as Golob nicely puts it, 'risks turning […] Heidegger's key arguments […] into a promissory note to be cashed by the *Phenomenology of Perception*' (Golob, 2014: 46).

Here, I have shown how Heidegger's phenomenology provides us with an account of practically or normatively significant perceptual content. In order to do this, however, we do have to emphasise the role of the conceptual capacities of the human being. Doing so, of course, does not take us back into a Cartesian dualism of a subject that stands over a world of material objects. It is true that an existential phenomenologist like Heidegger is sceptical that a pervasively epistemological focus will provide us with a philosophically satisfactory picture of "being-in-the-world". However, there is no evidence that Heidegger wants to relocate the locus of intentionality from the mind to the body. Olafson plausibly suggests that Heidegger may want to 'tie our mental states [...] to the world more securely than is possible' than through a reliance on epistemology (1986: 13). Indeed, I think Heidegger's early project, at least, is only intelligible if he is committed to some form of conceptualism.

In overcoming Cartesian strains in philosophical thought, I agree with McDowell that we should clarify, rather than deny, the distinctively conceptual nature of human intentionality. If existential phenomenology is going to play a continuing philosophical role, we must go about demonstrating how it assists us in this clarificatory project. In doing so, we can present a unified account of the

human being's relationship to the world that takes into account its epistemic *and* its practical characteristics. Simply relocating the locus of intentionality from the mind to the body, as Dreyfus urges we should, represents a reactionary anti-Kantianism that captures neither the spirit nor the philosophical point of a phenomenology like Heidegger's.

Conclusion

Structure

In this conclusion, I will first provide an overview of what my thesis has accomplished, and the significance of its conclusions. I will then provide a chapter summary which demonstrates how my argument has unfolded, and summarise my argument and conclusions. I then situate my conclusions within the relevant philosophical literature, and demonstrating the significance of my thesis to the relevant areas of philosophical research. I will then move on to assess where my conclusions represent opportunities for further research. I will end with some final remarks on the significance of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, and my response to it.

Overview

My purpose in this thesis has been to offer a synoptic resolution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate that emphasises the role of conceptual capacities, while preserving crucial insights from existential phenomenology about the practically engaged nature of human experience. This thesis offers the only unified and extended response to the McDowell-Dreyfus among the literature it has generated. I have provided my own account of how to make sense of what Dreyfus calls "motor intentional content" in conceptualist terms, arguing that "motor intentional content" does play an important role in practically engaged experience, but that it can play this role only in virtue of being integrated into a conceptual framework that is presupposed by our acting intentionally. Furthermore, I have provided a distinctive conceptualist interpretation of

Heideggerian phenomenology to secure the idea that the conceptual nature of perceptual experience does not preclude its content from being "practically significant".

The principal disagreement of the debate is over the operation of conceptual capacities in "unreflective action" and the perceptual experience that pertains to it. This disagreement, and my response to it, should be contextualised in terms of broader philosophical difficulties in articulating a post-Cartesian position in the philosophy of mind. The approach I have taken plays close attention to both McDowell and Dreyfus's concerns about avoiding or overcoming a "Cartesian" picture of the relationship between the human being and the world. Where McDowell argues that a proper understanding of the conceptual domain is essential to overcoming such a picture, Dreyfus has a deeply held suspicion that any philosophical talk about the fundamental role of "conceptual capacities" is an expression of the same Cartesian assumptions. Dreyfus's suspicion here informs his position in the debate, and he accordingly argues that it is only with reference to the role of non-conceptual bodily capacities, rather than mental ones, that we will avoid a Cartesian picture. However, this strategy seems to engender a dualism where a bodily form of intentionality can be isolated from a minded, conceptual form of intentionality. Instead, we should make sense of the role that those distinctly "bodily" capacities are playing from a conceptualist perspective. As above, my thesis provides a full and unified account of how to do this, and taking this approach allows us to articulate a post-Cartesian position that preserves the practically engaged dimension of the human being.

By focusing on the positive role of the mind, in the specific terms of the operation of conceptual capacities, we secure the required normativity and epistemic significance that ought to be ascribed to human perceptual experience and action. Crucially, in demonstrating how these capacities are operative in our skilful and unreflective practical engagement with the world, we are able to clarify the "post-Cartesian" credentials of conceptualism in a way that accommodates the insights and broader philosophical concerns of the kind of existential phenomenology that Dreyfus draws from. A conceptualist resolution to the principle disagreement of the debate allows us to demonstrate how the mind is integrated into practically engaged experience.

Chapter Summary

In **Chapter One**, I introduced and defined the phenomenon of "unreflective action" that Dreyfus appeals to; as intentional, or "intelligent", skilful, engaged and embodied action that is unreflectively performed, and is a pervasive and fundamental component of human experience. I went on to demonstrate the philosophical implications that Dreyfus draws from this phenomenon. I first adopted an epistemological approach in providing a Rylean argument that "knowing how" to do something is not a matter of knowing some rule or set of rules that can be construed conceptually. This led into Dreyfus's view that capacities belonging to the mind – such as conceptual capacities – needn't be invoked to explain the intelligent way in which human beings perform certain actions.

I moved on to put this in terms of the kind of intentionality that pertains to unreflective action, providing Dreyfus's conception of "motor intentional content". It was at this point that I highlighted the question, posed clearly by Bengson, of how perceptual experience can intelligibly be said to "produce" intentional action, particular those unreflective actions that Dreyfus appeals to. I accordingly presented Dreyfus's argument that unreflective intentional action arises from an interrelation between bodily skills and refined perceptual capacities, an interrelation which must be described in "motor intentional" terms. I further outlined Dreyfus's argument that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content, and that bringing concepts to bear on motor intentional content distorts its distinctive character, and accordingly neutralises the role that motor intentional content plays in motivating unreflective action. This chapter therefore presented Dreyfus's phenomenological non-conceptualism as it relates to the phenomenon of unreflective action. This allowed me to go on to assess the limitations of Dreyfus's account, and begin building an account of how conceptual capacities can be operative in unreflective action.

In **Chapter Two**, I challenged Dreyfus's association of conceptual involvement with a residual form of Cartesianism, which relates to his phenomenological account of how conceptual involvement interrupts, scuppers, or detaches an agent from their skilful engagement with the world. I emphasised accordingly that Dreyfus's "Cartesian" understanding of conceptual involvement is a central part of his case against McDowell. I first showed how Dreyfus derives the relevant arguments here from his interpretation of Heidegger's early phenomenology, particularly his notions of the ready-to-hand,

the present-at-hand, and the "understanding". I then went on to dispute both Dreyfus's phenomenology *and* his interpretation of Heidegger. I took my cue from Montero (2013) in arguing that conceptual involvement is not incompatible with skilful engagement, but often plays a necessary role there.

I then showed that Heidegger's conception of "interpretation" allows us to attribute to him much the same view, contrary to Dreyfus's reading. I concluded by noting that the necessary involvement of conceptual content in unreflective action weakens Dreyfus's claim that motor intentional content is a necessary condition of conceptual content. This chapter was aimed at undermining Dreyfus's connection between conceptual content and a "detached", Cartesian picture of the relationship between the human being and the world, therefore clearing the path for me to demonstrate how we can provide a positive conceptualist account of unreflective action.

In **Chapter Three**, I detailed McDowell's conceptualism as it pertains to perceptual experience, with a focus on McDowell's philosophical motivations here. I first demonstrated that McDowell's motivations are close to Dreyfus's; both are concerned to overcome a Cartesian conception of the relationship between the human being and the world. While Dreyfus thinks that a conceptualist account must necessarily remain beholden to this Cartesian picture, McDowell argues that we must affirm the role of conceptual capacities in order to avoid the "myth of the given". I therefore outlined McDowell's debt to Sellars, who demonstrates the incoherence of any account which purports to derive conceptual judgements from non-conceptual sensory data. I emphasised how this point is relevant to intentionally shaped responses in general, such as those unreflectively practical responses that Dreyfus emphasises. The principle point

here was to show why we ought to avoid positing a flatly causal account of intentional responses, and accordingly why McDowell tries to secure the requisite normativity of intentional responses through conceptualism.

I went on to demonstrate how McDowell's conceptualist account of perception is both compatible with unreflective action *and* avoids Cartesianism. I first emphasised McDowell's description of the passive way in which concepts are drawn on in our perceptual experience, which accommodates the phenomenon of unreflective action. This involved introducing McDowell's Aristotelian conception of "second nature". I went on to provide an account of the "object-dependence" of the conceptual framework that McDowell argues is operative in our perceptual experience. The "*de re*" conceptual content of singular thought, expressed in demonstrative propositions, is meant to avoid an account of conceptual content that remains tied to Cartesian assumptions about the mind. Further, I emphasised that demonstrative propositions would form an important strand of my argument in the following chapter. The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the philosophical importance of an appeal to conceptual capacities, why we ought to avoid a flatly causal account of intentional responses, to show how a conceptualist account of perceptual experience is not incompatible with the phenomenon of unreflective action, and finally to further undermine the idea that conceptual content is necessarily Cartesian.

In **Chapter Four**, I set out to consolidate a conceptualist account of unreflective action and the perceptual experience involved. I began by clarifying McDowell's motivations, revisiting the idea that we require a normative characterisation of our intentional responses, rather than a flatly causal one. This

provided the necessary background for McDowell's claims that unreflective action entails "responsiveness to reasons", and "realising practical concepts", or "concepts of things to do". In order to make sense of these claims, I utilised Rouse's distinction between "descriptive" and "normative" accounts of conceptual involvement, preliminarily associating McDowell with a "normative" account. I linked this distinction to Gottlieb's identification of a "phenomenological fallacy" in Dreyfus's argument which turns upon a "descriptive" understanding of conceptual involvement. I went on to argue accordingly that Dreyfus unjustifiably excludes concept-possession from the "background" that determines our intentional content, which he appeals to only selectively. I argued that unreflective *intentional* action is only explanatorily intelligible if we ascribe possession of the relevant concepts to the unreflectively acting agent.

In the latter, decisive part of my fourth chapter, I first explored how McDowell's use of demonstrative, *de re,* propositions has been utilised to argue for a conceptualist, "intellectualist" account of "knowledge-how"; focusing on the distinctive way in which our bodily skills carry out an overall intentional action. I emphasised that this clarified sense of how content can count as "conceptual" allows us to similarly make sense of the motor intentional content, or "affective" content, that Dreyfus highlights in his phenomenology of unreflective action. I agreed with Dreyfus that any genuinely synoptic conception of intentionality has to account for this kind of distinctive content because of its central importance in our primary engagement with the world. However, I argued that motor intentional content can only play a role in unreflective action in virtue of being integrated into the conceptual framework

that is presupposed by our acting intentionally in the first place. It is in this way, I argued, that we can make sense of McDowell's claim that unreflective action nevertheless entails responsiveness to reasons, and that the status of motor intentional content as providing reasons for acting means that we can intelligibly count it as *conceptual* content. Further, appealing to demonstrative propositions offsets the concern that motor intentional content is qualitatively distorted in some way through its conceptualisation. This chapter therefore provided a full, cohesive account of how conceptual capacities are operative in unreflective action, while preserving Dreyfus's phenomenology of motor intentional content.

In **Chapter Five**, I moved past the principle disagreement of the debate to focus in detail on the idea that the content of our perceptual experience, understood in conceptualist terms, could be "intrinsically practically significant". I contextualised this issue in terms of recent suggestions from Rietveld (2010) that unreflective action should be understood as entailing "responsiveness to normative significance", in a way that refines McDowell's characterisation of it as entailing "responsiveness to reasons". I also drew attention to other suggestions that McDowell's conceptualism should be further tailored to accommodate the practically engaged dimension of human life, such as Dingli (2002) and Arahata (2015), and Taylor (2002).

I went on to argue that we could derive a notion of "practically significant" perceptual content from Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand. In order to make sense of this, I argued for a conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger on perceptual experience, and accordingly highlighted the kind of "involvement" relations that Heidegger takes to instantiate between the elements in that framework – which he refers to as the "existential-hermeneutic as-

structure" of intentionality. Such relations specify how perceived features of the environment fit into specifically practical concerns, and are thus perceived in terms of their practical relevance. It is in this way, I argued, that we are able to make further sense of the way in which perceptual experience can be said to "produce" intentional action in virtue of this practical significance. Finally, I offered a general assessment of how Dreyfus uses existential phenomenology, such as Heidegger's, to argue for a non-conceptualist position in the post-Cartesian philosophy of mind, and contrasted it to my own usage. The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate a way in which we can understand a conceptualist account of perceptual experience as preserving the kind of practical significance that pertains to our primary engagement with the world.

In summary: What I have provided here is a synoptic resolution that brings together the principal contentions of each thinker in a way that demonstrates how the mind is integrated into practically engaged experience, thus providing a post-Cartesian conception of the role of the mind that meets the demands of Dreyfus's phenomenology of unreflective action. I have demonstrated how conceptual capacities are implicated even in the kind of distinctively bodily, affective intentional phenomena that existential phenomenology draws attention to. I have concluded that "motor intentional content" does play the important role that Dreyfus affords it, but only in virtue of its integration into a framework of conceptual capacities. Further, I have shown how we can conceive of perceptual conceptual content as practically significant, and have accordingly made sense of the way in which such content can bear a normative relation to our unreflective actions. In this way, I have

concluded that Heidegger can provide us with a conceptualist account of the practical significant content of perceptual experience.

This conceptualist account of motor intentional *and* practically significant perceptual content provides us with a decisively non-Cartesian conceptualist account of intentionality that is tailored to the phenomenological demands of unreflective action in a way that McDowell's is not. My thesis therefore provides a unified resolution to the principle disagreement of the debate, while highlighting its wider significance through a focus on the anti-Cartesian motivations of both parties, and the continuing relevance of existential phenomenology.

Contributions

I now want to outline how my thesis contributes to the relevant philosophical fields. Before moving into specifics, I want to attend to the wider philosophical context of the debate, which I touched on directly above. The debate should be understood as it relates to a wider debate in the philosophy of mind about the nature of human intentionality, or intentional content, and specifically contextualised in terms of philosophical attempts to overcome a Cartesian picture of the mind, wherein the capacities of the mind are understood in terms of internal representations that are independent of states of affairs in the world. McDowell's contribution to the philosophy of mind has been to argue that the intentional content of perceptual experience is itself irreducibly conceptual, and that this secures a non-Cartesian account of how conceptual mental activity is normatively dependent on states of affairs in the world. Importantly, it resists the explanatory reduction of such intentional responses to

states of the brain; like Brandom, McDowell takes from Sellars the lesson that intentional responses are characterised by normative relations to other conceptual elements. This is to be contrasted with the "right-wing" Sellarsians, who emphasise Sellars' commitment to the possibility of explaining intentional responses in scientifically naturalistic terms, for example Churchland (1995) and Millikan (1984; 2017).

McDowell's conceptualist approach to intentionality has long been challenged by non-conceptualists such as Peacocke (1998), Travis (2004), and Kelly (2001). The non-conceptualist challenge that Dreyfus mounts, however, has implications that go beyond forcing McDowell to countenance some form of non-conceptual content, and to account for that content epistemologically[63]. The pervasive disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is indeed about 'the extent to which content is conceptual' (Gardner, 2013: 111). However, as Schear points out, we might construe the disagreement here as over a characterisation of the human being as an "essentially rational animal" (see Schear, 2013: 285). Dreyfus's use of existential phenomenology is supposed to demonstrate that McDowell's conceptualism is unable to account for, or accommodate, the fundamental way in which human beings are practically engaged with the world. Further, it is supposed to show that McDowell is still committed to Cartesian assumptions about the mind's role in constituting our intentional relation to the world.

Existential phenomenologists like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty tend to be presented as distinctive kinds of anti-Cartesian philosophers. Indeed,

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[63] I have played down the extent to which this analytic brand of non-conceptualist challenges can threaten the coherence of McDowell's overall philosophical project. I just mean to point out that Dreyfus's own non-conceptualist challenge has a distinctive philosophical concern.

philosophers like Dreyfus and Charles Taylor take this phenomenology to represent the only genuinely post-Cartesian position in the philosophy of mind, precisely because it *downgrades* the role of mind in constituting intentionality. However, I have noted throughout that we should not assume that Heidegger does away with any conception of the mind's role in intentionality. Although I do not think we should understand the debate in terms of a confrontation between "analytic" and "continental philosophy", the debate surely does tell us much about where philosophers like Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger stand in relation to philosophical debates taking place within the analytic context of philosophy. In particular, I have highlighted how such phenomenology can contribute and be integrated into debates in the philosophy of perception and the philosophy of action – I say more about this below. However, the non-conceptualist approach that Dreyfus takes runs very close to giving up explanatory control of intentionality to neuroscience. If Dreyfus's challenge to McDowell is right, then intentional responses can indeed be understood in scientifically naturalistic terms. The trade-off for preserving the practical dimension of intentionality, on Dreyfus's account, seems to be giving up any coherent sense of normativity.

The debate between Dreyfus and McDowell is the most substantive and sustained disagreement over how we ought to conceive of our practical and rational capacities in a way that allows us to avoid a Cartesian picture of the mind. The debate and its responses represent the primary philosophical literature on how to understand the role of the mind, conceived of in non-Cartesian terms, in the light of phenomenologically based appeals to practically engaged experience. One of the stakes here is the possibility of a post-Cartesian

conception of the role and character of the mind, and whether that can be exhaustively construed in scientific terms. My resolution to the principle disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate should be understood as contributing to that specific area of the philosophy of mind.

Now, my resolution of course contributes to the literature directly responding to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, including those papers in Schear's 2013 anthology. I have worked to draw together and build upon certain responses to the debate in order to provide an account of how the operation of conceptual capacities does not conflict with the practically engaged dimension of the human being. My response to the principle disagreement of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is the only unified and extended response amongst the relevant literature. It is one that accounts for the operation of conceptual capacities in perceptual experience, intentional action, the skilful, embodied ways in which these actions are performed, *and* how these elements coherently combine together in the phenomenon of unreflective action. Further, it attends to the anti-Cartesian motivations behind the debate, and works to preserve the relevance of existential phenomenology. I describe my resolution as a synoptic one because it brings together these elements into my own distinctive and cohesive response.

In particular, I should highlight how my integrated account of "motor intentional" content builds substantially on those responses that seek to clarify McDowell's claim concerning the "realisation" of practical concepts in unreflective action – most notably Gottlieb (2011) – which do not attend to Dreyfus's more complex phenomenological insights here. Further, my resolution has highlighted and clarified McDowell's appeal to demonstrative propositions, understood as *de re* conceptual content; Carman (2013) touches inadequately on

the subject, but no other direct response in the literature takes this approach. In the philosophy of action, "intellectualist" approaches to knowing-how have made use of demonstrative propositions, as in Stanley & Williamson (2000), Bengson & Moffett (2007) and Gascoigne & Thornton (2013). My thesis has fruitfully brought this material into dialogue with the relevant phenomenological insights, contributing an account of how motor intentional content can be cohesively reconciled with an intellectualist account of knowing-how.

My account of motor intentional content should be contextualised in terms of recent debates in the philosophy of perception, specifically on the relationship between perception and action. In particular, Siegel's assessment of perceptual "affordances" (2014) and Bengson (2016), who poses the crucial question of how perception can be said to produce intentional action, a question I have referred back to consistently. As I have noted, Bengson highlights how conceptualist approaches like McDowell's 'have far broader significance than has yet been appreciated' and that a conceptualist account of the relation between perception and action may 'point the way to a satisfactory philosophical treatment of "flow" and related automatic actions' (2016: 27). The account I have contributed here is a conceptualist one, yet has the clear advantage of being able to preserve the phenomenologically distinctive content that Dreyfus rightly draws attention to. It can be read as an elaboration of Siegel's preliminary suggestion that motor intentional content has to entail 'psychologically more complex responses to the situation that involves some type of understanding of what the situation demands' (Siegel, 2014: 24). However, my final chapter focused more broadly on the idea that perceptual

content entails the kind of "intrinsic practical significance" that can produce or motivate intentional action.

I drew on Heidegger's analysis of the "ready-to-hand" to make sense of the idea that pereptual experience has practically significant content, and accordingly to provide a coherent picture of how one's actions are unreflectively responsive to practically relevant features of an environment. My approach to the "practical" role of perception differs from accounts that we find, for example, in Schiller (2012); Bengson (2016); and Noë (2006). Those approaches retain a sense in which perceived features of the environment are normatively neutral, and that practical interests only determine which of those features are perceptually focused on. I therefore showed how we can bring a phenomenological approach to perceptual experience – interpreted through a conceptualist lens – to bear on the question that Bengson poses. I showed how Heidegger conceives of the operation of empirical concepts to be dependent on a framework composed of "involvement" relations. This point leads into my interpretation of Heidegger, and my treatment of a general concern we may have about the relevance of existential phenomenology.

As I stated in my introduction, Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger can accurately be described as the "dominant" approach to framing Heidegger's thought in relation to analytic conceptions of intentionality (Golob, 2014: 26; Crowell, 2015: 73). This point should be linked to how Dreyfus uses existential phenomenology in the debate, and a concern that might arise from that. In the first paper of the debate, Dreyfus tends to contrast the insights of thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty with the approach taken by analytic philosophers like McDowell. We may then take the debate as a confrontation between

existential phenomenological and conceptualist approaches to intentionality, roughly speaking. Dreyfus presents existential phenomenology's fundamental contribution to be a non-conceptualist form of intentionality. If the conceptualist approach wins out, then, we might have a reasonable concern about the continuing relevance of the sort of existential phenomenology that Dreyfus draws from. My resolution to the debate has certainly erred toward awarding the "victory" to conceptualism. However, my resolution has consisted in demonstrating first of all how conceptualism can be refined and clarified to equal the demands of existential phenomenological insights. In this way, I have emphasised and affirmed the role that "motor intentional" content plays in human experience. However, I have also challenged Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger in order to demonstrate a relevance to Heidegger's phenomenology that is not exhausted by an appeal to some non-conceptualist form of intentionality.

There has been a relatively recent wave of scholarship that seeks to rethink how Heidegger can be brought into dialogue with analytic approaches to intentionality, such as Crowell (2013), Golob, (2014), Lafont (2000), McManus (2013), Doyon (2015), and Dennis (2012). Certain of these interpretations associate Heidegger with a form of conceptualism. My own interpretation and usage of Heidegger contributes to this literature. My conceptualist interpretation is able to preserve Heidegger's focus on the practically engaged dimension of intentionality in a way that other conceptualist interpretations have not. Further, I have noted that while the Heideggerian notion of *perceiving, disclosing, or grasping* objects *as* ready-to-hand is often appealed to, it has gone unclarified, and its usage in this way is accordingly careless. My conceptualist interpretation

accordingly corrects this failing. Importantly, respondents to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate have not engaged in any sustained treatment of how Heidegger's phenomenology stands in relation to the debate. My thesis addresses this gap in the primary literature, first in arguing that Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger's view of conceptual content is mistaken, and second in showing how we might bring Heidegger closer to McDowell's side of the argument - while crucially exploiting his focus on practical significance, as above.

Further Research

In Chapter Five, I briefly referred to McDowell's specification that the empirical world is not 'normatively inert' in a way which would exclude practically significant phenomena like "affordances" from our conception of the natural world (2013: 52). McDowell's position here involves a revised definition of "nature" – this position has been described as "liberal naturalism" (see De Caro & Macarthur, 2010), and stands in contrast to "scientific naturalism". McDowell's position here seems to run close to an existential phenomenological critique of contemporary ontology and metaphysics, insofar as they maintain some continuity with scientific naturalism. An intriguing prospect for further research would be to bring Heidegger's conception of "world" together with McDowell's understanding of "second nature". My thesis opens up the possibility of establishing a more substantive dialogue here. Establishing a dialogue between the concerns of what might be called "liberal naturalism" (see De Caro & Macarthur, 2010) and the concerns of existential phenomenology would, in my view, help us to clarify the ontological status of the kind of practically significant world that human beings are a part of.

Further, my conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger opens up potentially fruitful opportunities for rethinking other elements of Heidegger's overall philosophical project. Given that I have taken *Being and Time* to accommodate a conceptualist thesis about intentionality, and accordingly placed *language* at the centre of his thinking there, it would then be crucial to see how this thesis squares with his explicit later focus on language as 'the house of being' (2011: 143). Furthermore, this conceptualist characterisation of Heidegger's early project forces us to rethink the development of Heidegger's philosophical project in more general terms; for example, if his understanding of intentionality has implications for his work on technology, or art, for example.

Final Remarks

The McDowell-Dreyfus debate can be conceived as a problem of showing how certain, seemingly disparate aspects of the human being and their relation to the world in fact "hang together", as in Sellars' description of the purpose of philosophy (Sellars, 1963: 1). Philosophically, we must "know our way around" the explicitly *rational* or *normative* capacities of the human being, capacities for deliberating, reasoning, justifying, knowing, as well as those practical capacities that are the more obvious signifiers of our "animal" nature. Indeed, my motivations for writing a resolution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate are traceable to a friction between two philosophical impulses that will now be familiar.

I found Heidegger's phenomenology of everydayness in the first Division and *Being and Time* persuasive, largely through Dreyfus's interpretation of him. It

seemed right that we place a great deal of emphasis on the practically engaged perspective of the human being, and the way in which the world is "perceived", "understood" or "encountered" in its practical significance. It also seemed right to play down the epistemic dimension of the human being in a way that broke from the familiar strains of Cartesian and Kantian epistemology. However, I became increasingly aware that Heidegger, as I understood him through Dreyfus, didn't seem to place much importance on language and concept-acquisition in making sense of the fundamental way in which human beings engage with and find the world intelligible. Dreyfus's recoil from the role of conceptual capacities is motivated, of course, by the required move beyond Cartesianism. However, it seemed as though Dreyfus was recoiling too far, into what I have called a "reactionary anti-Kantianism", that seemed uninterested in how the primary experience of the human being should be distinguished from that of animals, or how the presence of rational capacities might qualitatively affect that primary experience. Indeed, I have accordingly noted how Dreyfus's comparisons between the experience of human beings and that of 'pre-linguistic infants and higher animals' (Dreyfus, 2005: 47) allow science to take the explanatory burden here. I found it improbable that our possession of concepts did not play a role in our everyday experience, or that the domain of language could be isolated from the domain of practical activity.

McDowell is right to accuse Dreyfus himself of a residual Cartesianism in his separation of practical capacities from epistemic ones, so that the "rational" nature of the human being is set apart from the "animal" nature (see McDowell, 2013: 55 – 56). It is philosophically unacceptable to conceive of our intentional responses to the world as non-conceptual. However, I have taken seriously

suggestions that McDowell's own emphasis on the rational nature of the human being – particularly the capacities to acquire knowledge and to engage in reasoning - distorts the practical and non-epistemic way in which human beings engage with the world. I therefore wanted to reconcile Heidegger's emphasis on practical engagement and practical relevance with an emphasis on the role of conceptual capacities.

Offering a resolution to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate has been far more complex than simply providing a conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger. Resolving the debate in a satisfactory way has required me to engage with two very different methods of avoiding Cartesianism, while making sure that the underlying technicalities of McDowell's brand of conceptualism were clarified in a way that could accommodate that distinctive form of experiential content that Dreyfus rightly draws attention to. This has been in service of a resolution that is able to provide an account of intentional, *conceptual* human experience that can preserve the essential sense of practical engagement and significance that we find in Heidegger's phenomenology, and accordingly secures a satisfactory, post-Cartesian conception of the role and character of the mind.

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