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Situating the Intellect

McDowell, Dreyfus, and Merleau-Ponty on Mindedness and Embodiment

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The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 13).

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Sammendrag på norsk

Denne avhandlingen utforsker begrepet om sinn og dets forhold til persepsjon og kropp slik dette forstås i John McDowell, Hubert Dreyfus og Maurice Merleau-Pontys filosofiske prosjekter. McDowells påstand om en gjennomsyrende rolle for begrepslige ferdigheter i menneskelig persepsjon impliserer ifølge Dreyfus en undergraving av rollen våre *sinnløse* kroppslige ferdigheter spiller som fundament for våre begrepslige aktiviteter. Merleau-Pontys fenomenologi utgjør for Dreyfus et støttepunkt i føringen av denne kritikken.

Jeg argumenterer for at Dreyfus' kritikk av McDowell støtter seg på problematiske antakelser, og videre at støtten han finner hos Merleau-Ponty kun er tilsynelatende. Heller enn at McDowell ”over-intellektualiserer” persepsjon, er det Dreyfus som forutsetter en over-intellektualisert forståelse av intellektet. Dette fører til at Dreyfus er nødt til å anta et filosofisk problematisk skille mellom to ulike nivåer av menneskelig eksistens. En sympatisk lesning av McDowell gir rom for en forståelse av rasjonalitet og begrepslighet som ikke ser ut til å være i konflikt med en anerkjennelse av den uunnværlige rollen kropp og kroppslige ferdigheter spiller i våre liv. Dette ser også ut til å samsvare med Merleau-Pontys tanker om samme tema.

Det er i Merleau-Pontys fenomenologi vi finner det mest tilfredsstillende svaret på hvordan menneskesinnet er situert i forhold til vår perseptuelle åpenhet til og kroppslige tilstedeværelse i verden. Det er hovedsakelig to grunner til dette. For det første forholder den seg til kravene fra McDowells konseptualisme ved å gi mening til hvordan den persiperte verden kan begrense våre tanker og påstander om den uten å anta en problematisk filosofisk fundamentalisme. For det andre oppnår den å definitivt situere sin løsning til disse kravene i fenomenet som er den levende menneskekroppen, og på den måten overgå McDowells prosjekt i noen viktige henseende. Det er først ved å fokusere begrepet om tenkelig og språklig mening på den kroppslige *gesten* at det blir mulig å vise kontinuiteten mellom verdenen vi erfarer, lever og handler i, og verdenen som tenkes og snakkes om.

Introduction

This thesis explores the notion of mindedness and its relation to perception and embodiment as this is conceived in the philosophical projects of John McDowell, Hubert Dreyfus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The key question to be examined is this: How should we understand the way in which our intellectual capacities are situated with regards to our perceptual openness to and embodied presence in the world?

As a part of this project is to develop an understanding of what the notion of "mind" or "intellect" amounts to, a precise definition will not be offered already at this point. A rough stipulation is nonetheless available: Mindedness refers to the capacity or set of capacities, usually considered uniquely human, associated with phenomena such as rationality, language, and conceptual thought. These phenomena have been given great attention throughout the history of philosophy, and for a good reason. They seem to constitute a faculty that elevates human life from the constraints and imperatives of nature and biology, and gives us privileged access to a realm of possibilities marked by the appearance of science, culture, morality, and not least philosophy itself. The danger of seeing the human mind too much in isolation or abstraction from our animal nature, however, is – as the history of philosophy proves – that it tends to become difficult to understand how it can relate to our bodies and the empirical world at all. At worst, this has lead to the positing of unbridgeable mind-body and mind-world dualisms, but one might also argue that an equally unsatisfactory consequence of focusing exclusively on the characteristics of mindedness is the tendency to ascribe the structures of mind to too many aspects of our lives, and thus to downplay the role *embodiment* plays in our human activities.

This latter concern is the motivation for Dreyfus's objections against McDowell's conceptualist view, the first of which initiated the exchange known as "the McDowell-Dreyfus debate." On Dreyfus's view, McDowell's insistence on a permeating role for conceptual capacities in our perceptual intake of the world amounts to an intellectualism that undermines the way in which our mindless embodied coping skills contribute to our perceptual relation to the world by constituting a nonconceptual foundation upon which our conceptual activities depend. In posing this criticism, Dreyfus exploits features of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for support.

In this thesis I try to show that Dreyfus's criticism of McDowell is badly grounded, and moreover that his reliance on Merleau-Ponty for support is unwarranted. It is not, I argue, McDowell who "over-intellectualizes" perception; on the contrary, Dreyfus's inclination to understand McDowell's project in that way has its source in an over-intellectualized conception of the intellect – an understanding of what involvement of intellectual capacities amounts to that cannot be found in McDowell's project, and which moreover seems to reveal the assumption of a problematic relation between "top" and "ground" floors of human existence in Dreyfus's own view. A sympathetic reading of McDowell gives way to a conception of rationality and conceptuality that does not seem to be in conflict with an appreciation of the crucial role embodiment plays in our human lives, and which furthermore seems to resonate with Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the same issue.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will prove to be the approach that in the most satisfactory way accounts for the relation between mindedness, perception, and embodiment. While McDowell's position might be sufficient for its epistemological purposes, and avoids being in direct conflict with a proper appreciation of the phenomenon of embodiment, it nonetheless has its point of departure in a too abstract notion of mindedness to itself reveal *how* an anchoring of its claims in a phenomenology of embodiment is possible. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, on the other hand, the notions of mind and rationality are unambiguously situated as capacities of the living human body from the very start. Although the way in which this is done yields support for McDowell in his debate with Dreyfus, it also contributes with a perspective on mindedness, as centred more on the *gesture* than on the *concept,* that does not leave the totality of McDowell's view intact.

My thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which is dedicated to different elements in the question of the intellect's role in human perception. I start with an account of McDowell's conceptualism and its background and motivation. This will enable an understanding of why it looks necessary to ascribe mindedness or conceptual capacities a role in our experiences of the world. In chapter two I take on the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, and examine their most important points of disagreement; I show how McDowell's view avoids the implications Dreyfus reads into it, and how Dreyfus himself seems to subscribe to a problematic philosophical position. By drawing attention to the issue of embodiment, Dreyfus's objections forces a refined understanding of McDowell's conceptualism to appear, and the question of how the spirit of his project can be anchored in a phenomenology of embodiment becomes pressing. In the third chapter I approach an answer to this by investigating relevant features of Merleau-Ponty's works, and thus develop an understanding of how mindedness and rationality fits into his phenomenology of embodiment.

1. Rational Animals

1.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the motivation and background for John McDowell's conceptualist project. The core claim of this project is that our conceptual capacities – the capacities that are actively exercised in speech, thoughts and judgments – are involved already in our perceptual intake of the world, or, in other words, that the world of our experiences is always already presented to us in conceptual form.[1]

On the one hand, McDowell's position belongs to the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy; that is, it purports to say something about the conditions for the acquisition of empirical knowledge to be possible. This aspect is most evident in his rejection of what he follows Wilfrid Sellars in labelling "the Myth of the Given" – an idea that will be further accounted for below. On the other hand, McDowell also subscribes to a "therapeutic" approach to philosophy inspired by the thoughts of the later Wittgenstein: He begins many of his reflections with insights from common sense, and he is not so much concerned with *solving* problems as he is with finding ways of thinking that make them seem obsolete. This is part of the reason for why he does not accept Donald Davidson's coherentist position – which has the unfortunate implication that the empirical world does not actually work as a constraint on our beliefs about it – as a satisfactory alternative to the idea that results in the Myth of the Given. In his seminal work, *Mind and World* (1994), McDowell argues for a "third way" or balancing position between coherentism and the Myth of the Given, which, as I will show, consists in acknowledging the Aristotelian idea that human beings are rational animals by establishing rationality as belonging to our "second nature" and consequently as a capacity that enables the perceptual opening onto a world that is already epistemically significant.

In the upcoming section (1.2) I give an account of key features of McDowell's view: I examine the notion of conceptuality and its relation to rationality and discursive knowledge, argue that a proper grasp of this makes it necessary to understand the idea of the Given as a myth, and show how a shift of perspective lets McDowell avoid the Myth without succumbing to the opposite extreme view – exemplified by Davidson's coherentism – that makes the idea of the Given tempting in the first place. The two sections thereafter take on potential challenges to McDowell's view. First (1.3) I consider some nonconceptualist arguments, represented mainly by the view of Christopher Peacocke. Then (1.4) I exploit Thomas Land's interpretation of Kant to demonstrate how we can keep a kind of conceptualist position while doing justice to some of the nonconceptualist insights, and show how McDowell seems to have come to a similar view in recent years. In concluding (1.5) I point to some questions that are left unanswered in this chapter, but will prove important in the chapters to come.

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[1] "I have urged that our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way out to the world's impacts on our receptive capacities. […] So another way of putting my claim is to say that our perceptual experience is permeated with rationality" (McDowell, 2007a, pp. 338-9).

1.2 Permeating Conceptuality

It is crucial to McDowell's understanding of conceptuality that it is essentially connected to capacities we think of as rational, which means that it is (at least as far as we know) a distinctively human phenomenon. Concepts are such that they in their nature display the possibility of being supported by or figure as reasons or justifications for beliefs or actions. In exploiting this system of rational relations, we are free to reflect on what beliefs we should embrace and what we should do in various situations, and act accordingly. McDowell's notion of conceptual capacities refers to the capacities we exercise in such cases; they are capacities that can be "exploited in thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials" (1994, p. 46). In other words, conceptual capacities are necessary in order to be able to reflect on and exploit reasons and justifications *as* reasons and justifications.

The system of rational relations and the capacities required for dealing with it are essential to the phenomenon of human knowledge. We can, following Wilfrid Sellars (1956), call this system, to which concepts belong and in which conceptual capacities are exercised, *the space of reasons*. "In characterizing an episode or state as that of *knowing*," Sellars says, "we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1956, §36). A state of knowledge is a state that necessarily implies the possibility of standing in rational relations to other beliefs and facts – that is, it implies the possibility of being supported by reasons and justifications.

Now, conceptual understanding is a necessary condition for knowledge in this sense. To say that a person knows something is to say that that person is able to articulate the known fact in a proposition of the form *A is B*. Propositional knowledge is conceptually constituted. For one to know a fact of the form *A is B*, it is required that one is in possession of the concepts that constitute the proposition. One cannot know that Obama is the president of the

U.S. without possessing the concepts *Obama* and *the president of the U.S.*. What does it mean to possess concepts in this way? It is not sufficient to simply have the ability to make the correct oral sounds as a reaction to the sounds that make up the question "Who is the current president of the U.S.?." Conceptual understanding entails that you know the meaning of the concepts you use, which is to say that you are familiar with their normative and inferential consequences. In short: to understand the meaning of a concept is to understand its role in the space of reasons. The proposition "Obama is the president of the U.S." implies when it is correct and when it will be incorrect to use it, and it also includes both the implication that reasons and justifications for the claim can be found, as well as the potential to be made use of as justification for further claims. To know that Obama is the president of the U.S. is to be able to reflect on (at least some of) the reasons for why you (should) believe that it is true, which also means that you know what has to be the case for it to *not* be true.

Human beings are inhabitants of the space of reasons, and with the ability to be aware of, exploit, and rely on rational relations follows an openness to critique and, consequently, a certain responsibility. Expressions in human languages are perhaps the paradigmatic example of this. In making speech-acts, speakers make themselves available to a form of critique. It is expected that the language-user is responsible for what she says, in the sense that she should be able to further justify her claims or elaborate on the meaning of what she says. On a somewhat similar note this is true not only of speech-acts, but of human actions in general. We normally know *what* we are doing and *why* we are doing it, and these facts are available to us for articulation and reflection. This means that our conceptual capacities reach out also to features of our lives other than those that are purely linguistic. McDowell gets at this point by stating, "movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency" (1994, p. 89). For actions to be expressions of human agency the agent must be able to be held responsible for what she is doing, which means that she should be able to articulate reasons for her actions. The extent to which conceptual capacities are in play in human actions will be further discussed in the next chapter.

It might not be obvious why the capacities required for inhabiting and making one's way in the space of reasons are called *conceptual* capacities. The short answer is that conceptual articulation is necessary for contemplating and expressing beliefs and their rational relations to reasons and justifications – the ability to exploit rational relations *as such* is dependent on the ability to exercise conceptual capacities. It does not make sense to say, "I have a reason for believing that Obama is the president of the U.S., but it is of such a sort that it cannot be conceptually articulated." That is, it is a necessary condition for something to be recognizable as a reason or justification that it can be articulated conceptually. McDowell puts the point like this: "We cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgment is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities" (1994, p. 7). Rational relations are relations that hold between states that, qua states in the space of reasons, bear inferential and normative implications, and these can be displayed only by conceptual articulation.

It is the ignoring or obscuring of this insight that constitutes what Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956) labelled the Myth of the Given. Roughly speaking, it is the idea that one can ascribe an epistemic function to something without allowing it to have the features necessary for serving that function. In other words, that we can make sense of there being something that works as a rational justification for our beliefs without itself displaying the kind of the nature that would enable it to be questioned for further justifications.

The Myth of the Given is arguably a tempting thought. As elements in the space of reasons, every belief is in principle such that it can be abandoned or accepted based on its relations to other elements within the same space; and those other elements, it would seem, are equally open for critique about *their* justifications. Within the space of reasons, there is apparently no end to the chains of justifications; every justification is itself an element that owes its being accepted to the place it has within a network of further rational relations. This thought, that all our knowledge is supported by justifications that in principle also can be put into question, can seem unacceptable. When thinking about our knowledge of the world, it is natural to suppose that the subject matter of that knowledge, the empirical world, must play a justifying role in our knowledge about it. Without any such constraint by the world on our thoughts about it, it will be hard to explain how our thoughts are directed towards an external reality at all. If we do not make room for a role played by the empirical world in justifying our thoughts about it, those thoughts can, as McDowell puts it, "threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game" (1994, p. 5). That is, if the only constraint on my thoughts about the world is the coherence within a system of already held beliefs, we can in principle not *know* that our empirical thoughts have any foothold in the actual empirical reality at all.

This is the fear that motivates the Myth of the Given. It emerges out of a wish to find an ultimate foundation – an unquestionable first premise – for our empirical knowledge, and assumes that this can be found in our purely sensible reception of the world. To use terms we are already familiar with, we can say that it is an attempt to conceive of the space of reasons as extending more widely than the space of concepts, by ascribing to impacts from the world – which are supposed to be external to the space of concepts – the function of exercising rational control *on* the space of concepts (1994, p. 7).

This idea is close to that of the classical sense-data theories from the first half of the last century, which argued that empirical knowledge is grounded in the presence of "internal episodes" of pure sensations.[2] The sensing of sense-data was thought to be simply an impression made by the world upon our senses – a purely causal event from the external world to internal experience, so to speak. As Sellars describes it, it was conceived as being something that can "occur to human beings (and brutes) without any prior process of learning or concept formation" (1956, §7). That is, an experiential happening the possibility of which depends only on a supposedly innate and unacquired ability to take in information from the world – in short, to *sense* – and not on the possession of any other skills or beliefs on the side of the perceiver.

I noted above that the possibility of being in possession of theoretical knowledge depends on the ability to articulate such knowledge in propositions. Now, it is arguably safe to assume that this ability is not innate, but rather acquired – presumably, it presupposes possession of a relevant background understanding that can only be accessed by way of being initiated into a language. In short: The ability to acquire beliefs of the form *A is B* is learned or acquired, and it is possible only against a background of already held beliefs and the capacity to conceptually exploit the rational relations between them. If this point is accepted and combined with the claims from sense-data theories, we get what Sellars calls an "inconsistent triad" of assumptions (1956, §6). The first assumption (A) says that the sensing of sense-data is a non-inferential knowing of that sense data; for instance, my sensing of a red sense data entails that I non-inferentially know that it is red. The second (B) says that the ability to sense sense-data is unacquired, and the third (C) is the one just considered – that the ability to know facts of the form *A is B* is acquired. Sellars nicely sums up the conflicts within this triad: "A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B" (ibid.). If the sensing of a (for instance) red sense data is going to count as an instance of knowledge at all, it must be the case that what you know is that *this is red*, which is in the form of a proposition. That is, if you want to say both that sensing sense-data is a case of non-inferential knowledge and that that ability is unacquired, you cannot also hold that the capacity to know things in the form *A is B* is acquired. Thus, if we want to hold, as we must, that the ability to know things propositionally is acquired, we must reject either that sensing of sense-data marks a primitive and innate access to the empirical world, or that it can count as a form of knowledge. The Myth of the Given is, in this case, the thought that sensing sense-data can be both an unacquired capacity and serve a justificatory function.

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[2] See e.g. Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912).

We can abstract from the case of sense-data theories by replacing “sensing sense-data” with “having a sensation or impression” or even “experience” in the triad of assumptions above. The important point at present is that it is problematic to claim both that we receive sensible input from the world that serve epistemic functions and that this input from the world is given to us prior to and independently of any learned or acquired abilities – in short, that the ability to non-inferentially know empirical facts does not presuppose any prior knowledge. Now, the thought that experiences or perceptions enable us to non-inferentially know things is in itself unproblematical. It does not seem right to say that my judging that the mug in front of me is black is the result or conclusion from an inference or deduction based on previously considered premises.[3] I do not need to rely on inferences in order to acquire empirical knowledge of my surroundings – when I acquire the belief that the mug in front of me is black it is (under normal circumstances) because I *see* that the mug is black. What is problematic is the thought that this seeing, as that which warrants my judgment, is an event external to the conceptual sphere and thus not even in principle open to rational consideration. In other words, that my seeing of the black mug is a fact simply causally forced on me by the external world.

This idea is supposed to ensure that empirical thinking has an ultimate foundation in the form of an unquestionable justification that works from outside the reach of conceptuality. What it really does, however, is to rid from the picture anything conceivable as a justification altogether. To have justifications for your judgments and beliefs is to be able to be held responsible for what you judge and believe. If that which “justifies” your belief is an impact from outside the reach of your conceptual understanding it means that you cannot really be held responsible for what you believe at all. “The idea of the Given,” McDowell says, “offers exculpations where we wanted justifications” (1994, p. 8). The picture it yields is one where we *cannot be blamed* for believing what we do, not one where our beliefs about the world are *justified*.

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[3] For instance in the style of ”that looks this or that way, thus, it must be a black mug.” Of course, this line of thought is necessary in some circumstances, typically in cases where it is not obvious to us from the start what we actually perceive. Usually, however, the act of perception itself enables us to know what we perceive, without the need for any mediating processes of inference.

Another approach to criticizing the Myth of the Given is to argue that it depends upon a mixing of two perspectives that are not really commensurable in the way it presupposes. That is, the empiricist Myth of the Given is grounded in the thought that mere physical occurrences (impacts from the world on our senses) can be ascribed an epistemic role. However, relations and occurrences within the space of reasons, *qua* rational, must be understood as distinct from the kind of relations and occurrences that are studied by the natural sciences. There is something special about the dimension of human life where reasons and justifications play a natural role that seems hard to capture within a scientific framework. We can emphasize this difference by saying that rational and scientific explanations belong to different explanatory levels, or, as McDowell says, different kinds of intelligibility (1994, p. 70). To explain occurrences and the relations between them in purely scientific terms is to place them in what McDowell calls "the realm of law" (ibid., p. 71). From this scientific perspective everything stands in purely causal relations to each other within a sphere governed by universal laws; the metal expands *because* heat is applied to it, the billiard ball moves *because* it is hit by another ball. The point is that we cannot use the same model in accounting for how we are moved to, for instance, form new beliefs. I can acquire the belief that Obama has become president of the U.S. by watching the news on television. This belief is not simply causally imprinted in me by the sounds and images from the screen, as if I had no choice in being affected by it. Rather, we might say that I acquired it because I found it *reasonable* to do so.

This does not mean that I would need to explicitly deliberate about whether or not I should take the message from the screen as a fact in order to acquire the belief. But it means that the possibility of doing so would have to be implied in my reception of the message in virtue of being something with rational and normative consequences – being, that is, an occurrence in the space of reasons. I would, for instance, not have immediately accepted the message from the television if I did not think that Obama was among the U.S. presidential candidates, or if I knew that the elections had not yet taken place. The point is that my acquisition of the belief cannot be construed simply as the necessary outcome of a causal chain of physical occurrences of which I have no control. I do not just helplessly find myself in the state of believing that Obama is the president of the U.S. after being physically affected by sounds and images from the television screen. Rather, whether or not I accept the message depends on its implications regarding its relation to a network of other beliefs I possess, and the capacities I have for understanding and exploiting relations to and within this network. In other words, the possibility of acquiring beliefs depends on my capacity for rationality and the worldview it operates within.

This is not to say that the reception of physical stimuli plays no role in enabling empirical knowledge. There is an obvious sense in which it is correct to say that our empirical knowledge depends on there being physical processes going on between the world and our sensing bodies. For instance, no one denies that first-hand knowledge of the visual world requires that light hits the eyes of the perceiver. The problem occurs when one tries to make use of aspects of the scientific description of our relation to the world in attempting to say something about our *epistemic* relation to it – we fall into the Myth if we think that physical affecting of our senses alone suffices for constituting impressions or sensations that can serve the epistemic function of foundation for our empirical knowledge. Ultimately, this mistake can be traced back to an inclination to reflect on our epistemic relation to the world from what McDowell calls a "sideways-on" perspective (1994, p. 35). If one takes a step back and attempt to consider the phenomenon from "the outside" it looks as if this relation is constituted of two separable elements – mind and world – where the system of conceptual intelligibility and meaning (the space of reasons) belongs solely to the former, and the latter, understood as defined by the natural sciences, is inherently meaningless and thus devoid of anything suitable to figure within a conceptual system.

If one accepts this line of thought, there seems to be only one alternative if one wants to avoid the Myth of the Given. This alternative – which marks the other "pitfall" McDowell wants to avoid with his position – consists in completely rejecting the empiricist idea that our experiential intake of the world can have a rational bearing on our thoughts and judgments. We are causally affected by the outside world, but this affecting is not suited to justify any of our beliefs. Our experiences of the world do not have a rational role to play in this view – they are outside of the space of reasons altogether. The primary example of this kind of view is Donald Davidson's coherentist theory, characterized in slogan-form in his much-quoted statement that "nothing can count as reason for holding a belief except another belief" (1986, p. 310). When we take something in the world to be the case, in the sense of "that is a black mug," it should, then, be understood as a judgment justified not by the experience itself, but by other beliefs already held by the perceiver. In short, it is the coherence within the network of beliefs and assumptions already possessed by the perceiver, and not the empirical world as such, that constraints and determines what we can know about the world.

Davidson's coherentist view substitutes the problematic idea that pure sensibility can serve as justification for our beliefs about the world with an image of empirical knowledge as ultimately not depending on how the world actually is at all. This is arguably an unfortunate consequence of rejecting the Myth of the Given. In completely dismissing the empiricists' intuition that the world itself can serve as justification for our knowledge about it, one seems to allow for the possibility that empirical knowledge can be out of contact with the real world – that it is in danger of being *frictionless*, as McDowell puts it (1994, p. 14). Davidson's epistemology avoids the Myth, but it does so in a way that places it at the opposite extreme end of the spectrum, which means that he embraces the exact thought that makes the idea of the Given seem tempting in the first place. He does of course have his own and separate arguments for doing so, but as a simplified diagnosis we can say that it is at least partly because he leaves unquestioned the assumption that our relation to the empirical world must be of a purely causal character. If we want to avoid the Myth without dismissing the idea that the world itself can have a rational bearing on our thoughts and beliefs, it is precisely this assumption that there can be only a mere external relation between mind and world – which is rooted in the "sideways-on" perspective mentioned above – we must reject.

This is what McDowell does in his conceptualist view. If we want to say that my experience of a part of the world can serve as justification for my judgments about it, that experience must in some sense already be a conceptual occurrence. It must be given me, in the experience itself, as something that already has the form necessary for being placed in the space of reasons. The case of acquiring the belief that Obama is the president of the U.S. from the television is an example of this. The message is given me as something that already has a rational significance, and I understand it in light of its implications for my whole background of conceptual understanding. The point at present is that this must be the case not only for explicit messages in the form of sentences in a language, but all our empirical experiences. In McDowell's words, "the impressions on our senses […] are already equipped with conceptual content" (1994, p. 34). From the sideways-on understanding of the mind-world relation this idea is impossible; impressions are impacts from the mindless external world, and can thus not come in a form associated with intellectual capacities. By rejecting the adequacy of this perspective, however, the problem disappears.[4]

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[4] This is an example of McDowell's ”therapeutic” approach to philosophy mentioned earlier. From the sideways-on perspective, there is a gap between mind and world that makes the possibility of empirical knowledge look like a mystery, and one seems to be left either with the impossible task of bridging the gap or with a concession to the sceptical view that we in fact cannot have knowledge of the external world. McDowell's Wittgensteinian spirit is even more evident in his consideration of this way of thinking in *Experiencing the World* (2009): ”'How is empirical content possible?,' uttered from the frame of mind I am describing, expresses a temptation to believe the premises of an argument whose conclusion is that empirical content is not possible. Given that empirical content is possible, there must be something wrong with the premises. And once we identify a culprit and dislodge it, we shall be freeing ourselves from the frame of mind that seemed to find

If we resist the sideways-on perspective and rather take the perspective of the experiencing subject as our point of departure, we come in position to question natural science's authority in providing an exhaustive definition of nature or the empirical world. The experienced nature is in this respect not identical to the nature described by natural science – it is not devoid of meaning, but rather always already *meaningful*. "What we experience is not external to the realm of the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning" (1994, p. 72). McDowell underpins this insight with the Aristotelian idea that human beings are *rational animals* (ibid., p. 85) – in other words, the idea that rationality is an integral part of our animal nature.

Now, the ability to recognize and exploit rational relations as such is not an ability we are born with. In virtue of being an ability that depends on capacities for conceptual articulation, it requires initiation into a language in order to be actualized. In being initiated into a language we are at the same time being initiated into the space of reasons; to inhabit the space of reasons is to inhabit a language. "A natural language," McDowell says, "serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what" (1994, p. 126). When we learn our first language we acquire the skills to make our way within a world where rational relations matter. Our character as rational animals is formed through our upbringing; the learning of a specific language and the culture it expresses induces a certain shape on our lives that enables us to cope within a human world of normativity and rationality. With this in mind we must say, as McDowell does, that rationality marks part of our *second nature* (ibid., p. 84) – it does not come about by way of natural processes alone, but depends on the existence of a cultural world of language and tradition as its condition of actualization. This, however, does not make it any less an integrated part of our nature.

Rationality, then, is not a supernatural phenomenon; it belongs to our animal nature, though its implications cannot – as we have seen – be properly accounted for within nature conceived merely as "the realm of law." In this way we become able to, as McDowell puts it, "resist the characteristically modern conception according to which something's way of being natural is its position in the realm of law" (1994, p. 74). That is, the insight that rationality is a natural trait of human beings enables us to extend our conception of nature so as to include the meaning we intuitively take to find in the experienced world. Thus, the initiation into a

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appropriate expression in the 'How possible?' question. The result will be, not an answer to the question, but a liberation from the apparent need to ask it" (p. 245). It is important to have this background to McDowell's project in mind in order to properly understand the claims of his conceptualist view.

language does not merely mark the acquisition of a new set of tools – it entails the opening onto a world the significance of which is such that it is suitable for being taken up in conceptual activities. This is the background for McDowell's claim that our conceptual capacities are "drawn on" already in our experiences of the world (ibid., p. 11); it is their being operative in our perceptual intake of our surroundings that enables our openness to a world with epistemic significances. In accounting for our empirical experiences we must deny the receptivity of the senses an autonomous role separate from our conceptual capacities. We are not first given pure sensations that we thereafter can apply our conceptual apparatus on in order to think and make judgments about the world. Conceptual capacities, on this view, are operative *in* the experience itself – our experiences of the world are, in some sense, *always already conceptual*.

We need to be clear about the way in which we should take conceptual capacities to be involved in our experiences. There is, after all, an important difference between judging, thinking and reflection – the active exercises of the relevant capacities – on the one hand, and our perceptual experiences of the world on the other. Exercises of conceptual capacities are subject to our control. In these acts we make decisions about what to believe and how we should act based on our understanding of their rational bearings. This is not the case in empirical experience. We cannot, at least not under normal circumstances, decide how the world presents itself to us. That is, we would not want to say that our empirical experiences come about by way of a rational *activity*. That would make it seem as if the world we experience were merely a product of our minds, so to speak. The proper way of thinking about the way in which rationality is involved in experience is that it enables our experiences to have content of the sort that is suitable for being exploited in judging and thinking by being *passively* drawn into play in the experiences themselves (1994, p. 12). In this way we can say that the empirical world does in fact exercise an external control on our thoughts about it. The crucial divergence from the ideas that fall victim to the Myth of the Given is that the world on this view constraints our thoughts about it from *within* the conceptual sphere – that is, from within the realm of the thinkable.

But if this is right, what does the claim that experiences have conceptual content mean? In *Mind and World* the answer seems to be that "conceptual" equals *propositional* – that is, that the content of experience should be thought of as structured in the same way as the content of a judgment or an assertion. An indicator of this view can be found in McDowell's claim that "in a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are this and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment" (1994, p. 26, emphasis in original). This view bears similarities to Sellars's own standpoint in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, where he talks about experiences as so to speak already *containing* the proposition we make use of when we judge that what we experience is *thus and so*. In an empirical experience, according to Sellars, the claim describing the object of that experience (e.g. "this is black") is so to speak "[…] evoked or wrung from the perceiver by the object perceived" (1956, §16). In other words, when I have an experience of a black mug, the content of my experience is "this (or that) is a black mug."

The thought that experiential content is propositional in structure can seem to undermine the fact that there are important differences between thought and perception. Thoughts are, after all, content that is explicitly articulated, while the content of perceptions is, in the perception itself, unarticulated. Moreover, although McDowell emphasizes that conceptual capacities are involved only passively in experience, the idea of propositional content seems to imply some sort of activity. After all, a proposition or judgment is in some sense a *categorization* and consequently a kind of *determination*; it involves subsuming some thing under some other thing, like when I point to the particular and concrete object in front of me and subsume it under the more general concepts of "black" and "mug." It is arguably difficult to understand how this kind of structure can come about passively. McDowell has, in later writings, become aware of the importance of this difference between thought and perception, and this has lead him to formulate a modified version of his conceptualism where propositional structure is reserved for content that is exploited in actual articulation. I will return to an elaboration of this later (1.4). The upcoming section will be concerned with a view that argues not only that there are structural differences between thought and experience, but that this means that we must recognize experiential content as ultimately *nonconceptual*.

1.3 Can there be nonconceptual content?

In "Kantian Conceptualism" (2011), Thomas Land offers an analysis of the contemporary debate over experiential content that is useful for understanding what I take to be a crucial difference in motivation between McDowell and nonconceptualist views. Land argues that Kant must be understood as advocating a kind of conceptualist view, but that the concern that motivated this version of conceptualism is distinct from the concern the contemporary debate is centred on. The latter, Land observes, focuses mainly on "the similarities and dissimilarities in structure between the content of conceptual thought, on the one hand, and that of perceptual experience, on the other," while Kant sought to "identify the conditions that must be satisfied for perceptual experience to have content in the first place" (2011, p. 199). That is, the former presupposes that our experiences have content but are concerned with the nature of that content, whereas Kant's motivation was to make explicit the conditions of possibility for how our experiences can be directed towards the objective world – have content – in the first place.

Although McDowell obviously is part of the contemporary debate and has been concerned with the issues that, according to Land, are characteristic of it, it is clear that the main concern of his conceptualist view in many ways is similar to the one Land ascribes to Kant.[5] There is no question for McDowell whether the content of our experiences is conceptual or not. The whole point of arguing that rationality is involved in our experiential intake of the world is to make sense of how we can be said to be in contact with the objective world through our experiences. "It is," he says, "only because experience involves capacities belonging to spontaneity [our conceptual understanding] that we can understand experience as awareness […] of aspects of the world at all" (1994, p. 47). To be aware of aspects of the world is to perceive those aspects as available for being embraced in thought or put into expression. When we reject the Myth of the Given, we reject the idea that thinkable content can be given independently of and prior to involvement of conceptual capacities. So, to say that the content of experiences is nonconceptual will for McDowell amount to saying that the experience is *blind*. There can be no awareness of the world included in it – and this would arguably be the same as saying that there is no content either.

So why would anyone argue that there is such a thing as nonconceptual content in our experiences? As said above, there seems to be another motivation involved here – a motivation more concerned with structural or qualitative differences between perception and thought than with explaining how we have access to a thinkable world in the first place. Typically, nonconceptualist views arise from a concern that our concepts are too "coarse-grained" to be able to capture all the features of our experiences. This concern seems to stem from the fact that concepts are *general*. One concept can be used to refer to a variety of particulars in different situations and to different times. For instance, "mug" is not tied to a specific instance of a particular thing, but can be used to designate a whole range of individual objects. The same holds for "black," which does not in itself designate a specific occurrence – a particular shade or nuance – of the colour. Thus, when I say that the conceptual content of my experience is "the mug is black," it seems that I am abstracting from the specific features of the world that constitutes the actual experience.

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[5] Land acknowledges this in footnote 3, p. 199 (2011).

This might lead one to conclude that concepts are unsuited to exhaust experiential content; that when I make a claim based on my empirical experience I *lose* – or fail to capture – certain aspects of what I experience. When I have an experience of a black mug, one might say, that particular mug is present to me in such a determinate and specific way that it cannot be fully expressed conceptually, which means that my experience of it must be *nonconceptual* or at least have some features that are not conceptual – in other words, some nonconceptual content.

The problem with arguments like this is that they seem to neglect the fact that there is nothing that in principle prevents concepts from being able to capture specific characteristics of the perceived environment. If I have a visual experience of a black mug, it will be correct for me to say that what I experience is exactly a *black* mug; but I can be more specific if I want – I can say that "it is a light black colour, close to dark brown," if that is the case, or I can say that "it is dark and shiny, I can almost see my reflection in it" if that is the case. In these cases I focus my expression on more specific details of my experience – details that are not articulated by the concept "black" alone, but are nonetheless part of the experience that can be conceptually expressed. But is this enough to claim that nothing in my experience of the black mug can escape conceptualization? Are not the specific descriptions above still too general to capture *exactly* the shade of black I experience the mug to have? As Gareth Evans (1982, p. 229) remarks, it seems that the amount of (shades of) colours we are able to sensibly discriminate between is much larger than the amount of colour concepts we can possibly possess. Should we then, as he does, conclude that "no account of what it is to be in a non-conceptual informational state [i.e., a perceptual experience] can be given in terms of dispositions to exercise concepts unless those concepts are assumed to be endlessly fine-grained" (ibid.)?

McDowell's solution to this apparent problem with conceptualist theories is to invoke the notions of *demonstrative concepts* and *recognitional capacities* (1994, pp. 56-7). We do not need to have actual *names* for every determinate shade of colour in order to be able to exploit those shades in our conceptual thinking. By use of demonstratives such as "this" or "that" I can exploit the presence of the aspect of the experience I am conceptually referring to. For instance, while experiencing the black mug I can think to myself "the mug is *that* shade of black." However, to ensure that that specific shade of black has become part of my conceptual repertoire, we must "insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself" (ibid.). If I say "I know what shade of black this mug is; namely, *this* shade of black" while pointing at the mug, that can hardly count as a demonstration of real knowledge of the mug's colour on my part. As McDowell remarks, such cases look like Wittgenstein's famous example of the person who says "I know how tall I am," while putting his hand on top of his head to prove it (ibid.).[6] The point is that cases like this seem to lack something; they are cases of referring to something without actually placing what is referred to within a context that makes it open to critique. For a specific shade of colour to actually be a part of one's conceptual repertoire – for it to be placed in the space of reasons – one must be able to exploit it in situations other than those where the object with the shade of colour one is referring to is present. This is what is going on when I can *recognize* the mug's colour in other objects, for instance a colour sample. I demonstrate conceptual understanding of the mug's specific shade of black if I can point to (for instance) an area of a colour chart and say, "*that* is the colour of my mug." Even though I may not have a *name* for the colour, the fact that I am able to think about it and recognize other instances of it means that it is conceptually available to me in the sense that I can make use of it in a rational discourse.

It is obviously true that experiences of specific shades of colours can enable us to recognize other instantiations of colours that are, if not always exactly identical, at least *similar* to the shade of colour initially experienced. But need this mean that *all* the content of that initial experience was conceptual? Christopher Peacocke, a well-known advocate of the nonconceptualist position, denies this. Before I remark on what he has to say about demonstrative conceptual content, I will give a brief account of what he argues is the *nonconceptual* content of experiences.

Peacocke's concern in arguing against conceptualist theories of experience confirms Land's analysis of the contemporary debate; it is to "do justice to the fine-grained phenomenology of experience," which is something that cannot be done "if we restrict ourselves to those contents which can be built up by referring to the properties and relations which the perceived objects are represented by the experience as possessing" (2001, p. 3). This point is quite similar to what I have already discussed; it seems that my experience of the black mug contains more than what can be captured by concepts. The experiential content that cannot be captured conceptually, according to Peacocke, is "the *way* in which some property or relation is given in the experience" (ibid., Peacocke's emphasis). What is Peacocke referring to when talking about "the way" in which things are given us in experience? One example he mentions is the fact that the same shape can be perceived either as a square or a regular diamond – it can be perceived in two different *ways*. The same holds for musical intervals; the same two tones played simultaneously on a musical instrument can be heard in two different ways – for instance, "either as an augmented fourth, or as a diminished fifth" (ibid.). The idea seems to be that there is a ground-level of content in our experiences that has to do with the way in which things looks, sounds, and so on, which he takes to be beyond reach for our conceptual capacities.

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[6] "Imagine someone saying, 'But I know how tall I am!' and laying his hand on top of his head to indicate it!" (Wittgenstein, 2009, §279).

The way in which something is given to us in experience is, on Peacocke's view, supposed to serve the function of *making available* perceptually based concepts to the thinker (2001, p. 4) – that is, serve the function of providing a "canonical, non-inferential basis" for the application of general concepts (ibid., p. 5). Thus, Peacocke takes the (supposed) nonconceptual ways in which things are given to us in experience to be serving a *rational* function: "Their presence can entitle a thinker to make a particular judgment, or to form a certain belief" (ibid., p. 17). In other words, the nonconceptual content of our experiences are what *make* our perceptually based judgments and beliefs rational in the sense that it is what *grounds* such judgments and beliefs. But how can something that is by definition outside the sphere of the conceptual be the ground, the non-inferential first premise, of our judgments?

In accounting for the ground for our perception-based knowledge in terms of nonconceptual content, Peacocke is falling victim to a version of the Myth of the Given. He wants something that, according to him, cannot itself be the content of judgments and beliefs to be able to serve as *justification* for judgments and beliefs. But it is hard to see exactly what justifies his insistence that "the way" must be an instance of nonconceptual content. If the expression "I believe it's square because it looks that way" is "an articulation of the subject's reasons" (2001, p. 20), why can we not simply say that "that way" captures *the way it looks* in the experience so that it can be called conceptual content after all? Peacocke even characterizes the way in which things are given us in experience as *representational* content in the sense that it "is evaluable as correct or as incorrect" (ibid., p. 2), but how can it be thus evaluated if it cannot figure in judgments?

We can certainly make sense of the observation that things are presented to us in various *ways* in experience. It is also intuitive to say that the way in which things are presented to me in experience in some sense is the ground for my judgments concerning that experience; an empirical experience is always an experience of something presented to a perceiver in a certain way, and the way in which it is presented is a crucial factor in determining what judgments the experience makes available to the perceiver. But can we make sense of Peacocke's claim that this feature of our experiences of the world constitutes a *nonconceptual* content of those experiences?

A central point in Peacocke's argumentation is that it is important to distinguish between concepts and that which they refer to. Even though "the reference itself is made *by* something conceptual," he argues, "there is no requirement that the reference *of* the demonstrative be conceptualized" (2001, p. 19). Consequently, "the conceptual character of the conceptual constituent 'that way' must be sharply distinguished from the nonconceptual character of its reference, a nonconceptual way in which something is perceived" (ibid., p. 20). Peacocke's idea is that although we can use concepts to refer to the ways in which we are presented with things in experience, that does not change the fact that "the ways" themselves are part of the experience's nonconceptual content.

This illuminates why Peacocke is not convinced by McDowell's appeal to demonstrative concepts. It seems available to a defender of McDowell's view to simply remark that the way in which something is given us in experience is available for demonstrative referring, and thus that it is part of that experience's conceptual content: When I experience something in the world as given to me in a certain way (for instance a right-angled and four-sided figure presented to me as a regular diamond), this enables me to both demonstratively refer to *that way* in thought or expression at the time of the experience, as well as recognize other instances of the same or similar things given to me in the same way as that in initial experience. From Peacocke's perspective, however, this possibility does not prove that "the way itself" as it is given in the experience is conceptual content.

However, Peacocke's insistence that we must distinguish concepts from that which they refer to is no threat to the claim that experiential content is pervasively conceptual. No one is denying that there is a difference between concepts and what they refer to. To say that the content of experiences is conceptual is not to say that the objects and features of such experiences *are* concepts. It is rather to say that, by virtue of our conceptual capacities, the world of our experiences is presented to us in a way it could not have been presented if we did not possess such capacities - namely, as something that can be expressed and thought, and thus placed in the space of reasons. What I experience when I see a black mug is *the black mug*, not the *concept* of a black mug.

When I conceptually articulate what I experience I am not transforming the experiential content to something it initially was not – I am saying (or thinking) exactly what I see. This common sense insight is nicely expressed by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical*

Investigations: ”When we say, *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, then, with what we mean, we do not stop anywhere short of the fact, but mean: *such-and-such – is – thus-and-so*” (2009, §95, Wittgenstein’s emphasis). There is, as McDowell puts it, “no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean […] and the sort of thing that can be the case” (1994, p. 27). If it is the case that the way in which an object is given me in experience enables me to recognize it as a square, then the conceptual articulation of “that way” in my expression “I believe it is a square because it looks that way” does not stop anywhere short of the fact. “That way” expresses exactly that feature of the experience that in this case enables me to recognize the object as a square. If we want to make sense of the ability to conceptually exploit this part of the experience’s content without falling victim to the Myth of the Given we must hold that it was already given us as conceptual content.

The picture advocated by Peacocke is one where sensibility alone can provide a ground for our empirical thinking. This is perhaps most explicit in his claim that “some of the nonconceptual content of our experience can be *identical* with the representational content of the experience of creatures that either possess no concepts, or possess only a set of concepts far more rudimentary than our own” (2001, p. 5, my emphasis). Now, if we consider similarities in sensory apparatus it is surely intuitive to think that our perceptual states can share some features with the perceptual states of non-rational animals. It is, however, wrong to account for such potential similarities in terms of *content*. The content of my experience is content with a rational signification, content of the sort that can be expressed or serve as justification for my judgments. The perceptual states of non-rational animals do not have any such content. My experiences are directed towards a world with a significance that goes beyond the immediate situations in which it is encountered, a world with significance for practices and projects that are distinctively *human* – or, one might say, distinctively rational. The point is that we must say that only animals with rational capacities are able to experience objective reality – a reality, that is, which can be the object of rational discourse and potential intersubjective agreement. “Creatures without conceptual capacities lack self-consciousness and – this is part of the same package – experience of objective reality” (1994, p. 114). This makes talk of “identical content” unsuitable. As “content” typically concerns the directedness or aboutness of thought or experience with regards to the objective world, one might argue that one should not talk about non-rational animals having experiential “content” at all.

Why does Peacocke feel obligated to posit nonconceptual experiential content as the ground for conceptual activities? The reason for this might be that he fails to understand that our capacity for rationality can be an integral part of our human nature, that the animal life of human beings can itself be permeated by spontaneity. That is, although we surely share common features with animals that lack the capacity for rationality, we need not assume that those features constitute a part of our nature that is "merely animal" and that rationality so to speak comes in addition to or "on top" of that nature. As McDowell says:

> We do not need to say that we have what mere animals have, non-conceptual content, and we have something else as well, since we can conceptualize that content and they cannot. Instead we can say that we have what mere animals have, perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment, but we have it in a special form. Our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is taken up into the ambit of the faculty of spontaneity, which is what distinguishes us from them. (1994, p. 64).

Peacocke argues that a way to make the transition from nonconceptual to conceptual content is "to ask questions which are in the first instance not about concepts, but about the world," for instance by asking "Would something's looking that way W give reason to think it is a square?" (2001, p. 22). This statement, I think, further proves that Peacocke takes our conceptual capacities to be so to speak "elevated" above the part of our nature that presents us with the world. It is of course right to say that the question above is "about the world" and not "about concepts," and that asking questions like this is one way to make rational use of the phenomenology of our experiences. However, this is not an argument against the idea that *the way the object looks* already can be given as part of the experience's conceptual content. It seems that Peacocke has a confused understanding of what it means to say that the content of human experiences is conceptual. That is, his view that empirical judgments must rely on content that is nonconceptual seems to have its root in the assumption that the *sensory* character of empirical experiences makes it problematical to hold that they are also *conceptual*.

This sort of assumption figures even more explicitly in Michael Ayers's objection to McDowell that "the way the world is presented in experience is not quasi-linguistic" (2004, p. 249). What is implied in this statement is that a consequence of conceptualist views is that we must understand human experiences as something other than what they seem to us to be – that is, that they are not *really* sensory, but rather more "text-like." However, the claim that the world is presented to us in a way that is permeated by our conceptual capacities does not require us to equate having empirical experiences with something like the reading of a text. McDowell's thought is neither that the phenomenology of our experiences is "text-like" or "quasi-linguistic," nor that conceptuality constitutes some kind of experiential "subtitles" that come in addition to the sensory presence of the world.

This last image seems rather to capture how Peacocke conceives of the relation between conceptuality and experience. He thinks that nonconceptual content constitutes the sensory character of perception, and that conceptual content never can fully capture this aspect of experiencing – perhaps in the way the reading, hearing or thinking of a sentence never can be the same as the *seeing* of the picture the sentence describes. What makes this a failed criticism of the conceptualist view, or at least the view McDowell advocates, is that it assumes a separation or dualism of intellect and senses – that is, it overlooks (or fails to understand) the possibility that, as he puts it, "a conceptual mode of presentation might itself be a sensory mode of presentation" (2009, p. 135). There is no need to assume that McDowell's conceptualist view implies a picture where our conceptual rationality so to speak hovers above our sensory experiences and produces intellectual ideas for the mind. Criticisms based on these kinds of assumptions demonstrates a failure to understand the full scope of McDowell's project, an important part of which is precisely to reject any radical separation of our intellectual capacities from our bodily animal nature. "Resting content with a dualism of the sensory and the intellectual," he says, "betrays a failure of the imagination about the possibilities for finding the rational intellect integrally involved in the phenomena of human life" (ibid., p. 137).

It is exactly this thought, that it is possible to understand intellectual capacities as essentially integrated in human life, which is the overarching theme of this thesis. The idea is that it is possible to think that our rational capacities – the capacities that opens us to the space of reasons – is implied in the way we perceive the world, without this amounting to holding that our bodily being-in-the-world is mediated or controlled by something like a pure intellect or mind that is separate from our bodily and sensible nature. Hitherto I have been concerned with arguing merely *why* we should hold that our rational capacities permeate our human lives. A fully satisfactory account of *how* this is possible will not emerge before we consider the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the third and final chapter. In the next section, however, I examine an aspect of McDowell's view that will make it a bit clearer what the claim that our experiences are conceptual amounts to.

1.4 Intuitions without Propositions

In Thomas Land's aforementioned paper, "Kantian Conceptualism" (2011), he argues that Kant must be understood as holding a sort of middle position between nonconceptualism and what he calls "propositionalism."[7] The idea is that Kant manages to avoid the Myth of the Given while also acknowledging the heterogeneity of thought and perception in a more satisfying way than propositionalism is able to do. This interpretation of Kant bears striking and interesting similarities to the conceptualism McDowell has been advocating recently. In the following pages I will provide an outline of Land's Kant, which will function as an entrance to the latest formulation of McDowell's conceptualism.

The motivation for rejecting propositionalism is in many ways similar to the nonconceptualists' motivation for rejecting conceptualism altogether – a wish to do justice to the differences between thought and perception. As noted earlier, we should not be afraid to recognize that there are obvious differences between *seeing* a black mug and *thinking* that the mug is black. Perception is, as Land observes, singular, fully determinate and spatio-temporally structured, whereas thought makes use of general concepts and is logically articulated (2011, p. 202). For Kant, everything with propositional form is a judgment, and a judgment is a form of *thought*.[8] In light of this, Land finds textual evidence for arguing that Kant does not think of intuitions in terms of propositional structure (ibid., p. 219).[9] Although nonconceptualism, as Land says, "keeps perception too far removed from thought," Propositionalism, on the other hand, "moves perception and thought too close together" (ibid., p. 225). To say that intuitions – our view of the world or experiential intake – has propositionally structured content is on Land's view either to fail to "account for the determinacy of perception," or, in the case of what he calls "Demonstrative Concept

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[7] It should be noted that this interpretation of Kant differs from one that will be exploited in chapter three (3.3). There, I follow Merleau-Ponty in assuming that Kant construes perception solely on the model of "act intentionality" – which is the intentionality of judgments and propositions – and contrasts it with Merleau-Ponty's division between two kinds of intentionality. As I use Kant – both at present and in chapter three – mainly in order to illuminate aspects of other views I do not take the exploitation of different interpretations to be a problem.

[8] See p. 217 in Land (2011) for an outline of how Kant's understanding of "judgment" differs from that of McDowell and other modern philosophers. In *Mind and World* McDowell reserves "judgment" for the exercise of conceptual capacities, while still holding that experience – as the passive involvement of conceptual capacities – is propositional in structure. He would of course, because of this, deny that everything with a propositional structure is a judgment and hence a kind of thought. But the point here is exactly that to say that something is propositionally structured is to conceive of it on the model of thought – and why should we think that something that is distinct form thought, as perception surely is, has a structure modelled after that of thought?

[9] For instance, Kant describes intuitions as "that representation which can be given prior to all thought" (2007, B132) and when talking about the possibilities of error he states that there can be no error in the representation of the senses (intuition) because "it contains no judgment whatever" (ibid., A294/B350).

Propositionalists" (e.g. McDowell in *Mind and World*, 1994), to undermine "the heterogeneity of understanding and sensibility" (2011, p. 222). In the former case one fails to account for the fact that mere concepts are too coarse-grained to capture the determinate phenomenology of experiences. In the latter case, which is an attempt to account for precisely this fact, one admits – exploits – that perception has a determinacy that mere concepts cannot account for, but nonetheless insists on it having the same structure as that of mere concepts in a proposition.

How does Kant manage to avoid this problem while also avoiding the Myth of the Given? A clue can be found in his statement that "the same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment likewise gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition; and this unity may in a general way be called the pure concept of the understanding" (2007, A79/B104). Kant is not saying that *the act of judgment* (which is the act that gives representations propositional form) gives unity to intuitions, but he is saying that *the same function* that gives unity in a judgment also gives unity to intuitions. This opens the possibility of thinking that there is one function that underlies the unities of both perception and judgment, but that these unities come about in different ways or by way of different acts. That is, one can think that the objective unity of intuitions depends on involvement by the understanding – and in this way avoid the Myth of the Given – without subscribing to the claim that intuitions are structured as ready-made judgments. This seems like a reasonable solution. After all, what we need in order to avoid the Myth of the Given is to conceive of experience as already having the kind of *content* that can also be thought, and this need not require that the structure in which the content is given in experience is identical to the structure in which the content is exploited in thinking and judging. By thinking that the same capacity can be involved in different ways we can do justice to the heterogeneity of perception and thought without subscribing to the idea that judgments are exercised on a nonconceptual ground – that is, we can conceive of perception as (in the first instance) non-propositional without falling prey to the mistaken idea that experiential content can be given prior to any involvement of our conceptual capacities.

What this means, effectively, is that even though experiential content is given as content of the sort that can be expressed propositionally, it is not itself given *as* propositions only waiting to be articulated. Propositional structure is a feature of content that is articulated and placed in a discourse, and although the content of intuitions is available for being so placed, it is, in the intuition itself, neither discursive nor articulated. That is, even though it is correct to say that I, in my experience of the black mug, see (for instance) *that the mug is black*, my intuition or experiential intake of the black mug does not itself involve content in this form. This does not mean that my articulation of the content stops anywhere short of the fact, but it means that the content of the intuition is not itself given in the structure of an already articulated fact.

In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” (2008), which is where McDowell first drew attention to the new formulation of his view, he says, “what we need is an idea of content that is not propositional but intuitional” (p. 4).[10] As in the case of Land’s Kant, this should not be taken to mean that intuitions are given independently of involvement of conceptual capacities. To illuminate the possibility of conceptual but non-propositional intuitional content, McDowell refers to the same passage from Kant’s first *Critique* as Land uses for the exact same purpose, where Kant asserts that the unity of judgments and the unity of intuitions are given by the same function (2007, A79/B104), and glosses it as follows: “The capacity whose exercise in judging accounts for the unity of the content of judgments – propositional unity – also accounts for a corresponding unity in the content of intuitions” (2008, p. 4). Intuitional content is still conceptual content, in the sense that the possibility of having intuitions depends on involvement by the same capacities that also enable us to judge. That is, the ability to have intuitions is not separable from the ability to make rational use of those intuitions: “we could not have intuitions, with their specific forms of unity, if we could not make judgments, with their corresponding forms of unity” (ibid., p. 7).

The unity of judgments corresponds to the unity of intuitions, but they do not come about in the same way. McDowell’s arguments in favour of this view build on observations that to a large degree resemble the remarks I made above. Judging, he says, is a case of making something explicit (to oneself), and is in that regard a discursive activity (2008, p. 6). Intuiting, on the other hand, is not discursive: “Discursive content is articulated. Intuitional content is not” (ibid.). When I pointed to this difference earlier, I did not spell out what it consists in. What is the difference between content that *is* and content that is not (but can be) articulated? When I make something explicit, for instance in a linguistic expression, I put significances together in order to make a meaningful whole. The expression “this is a black mug” is a case of creating something with a meaningful content by combining expressions that would be meaningful also in different contexts and in combination with other expressions. Thus, the unity of judgments comes about by way of an activity that puts significances together. The unity of intuitional content, on the other hand, is not a case of significances put together - it is already there as a unity in the intuition.

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[10] ”Intuition” is the word used in the English translations of Kant for the German term *Anschauen*, which – roughly speaking – refers to our experiential or perceptual intake of the empirical world.

Intuitions are conceptual in the sense that their content is already content of the sort that is available for being exploited in discursive activities. In McDowell's words: "Every aspect of the content of an intuition is present in a form in which it is already suitable to be the content associated with a discursive capacity" (2008, p. 7). The content of intuitions is given as something that is suitable for articulation, but to articulate intuitional content is not so to speak to pick up a proposition that was already there or to turn an unarticulated proposition (whatever that is supposed to be) into an articulated proposition. To make intuitional content explicit is rather to grab a bit of it and place it in a discursive setting, together with other content. To exploit content discursively is, as McDowell puts it in a, for him, unusually metaphorical language, to "*carve out* that content from the intuition's unarticulated content" (ibid., my emphasis). In other words, when I articulate intuitional content I am exploiting content that was already there in the intuition, but it was not there as already *determined* in the way it is in my articulation of if. I can exploit the content of my experience of the black mug discursively – in a propositional unity – by saying, for instance, "this mug is black." In so doing I do not create a new kind of content, but I put it together in a way it was not put together in my experience. The capacities we actively exercise in carving out content are drawn upon already in our being presented with content that can be carved out. That is, even though intuition itself is not discursive, it is due to involvement of capacities that are essentially discursive that intuitional content displays the kind of unity that make it suitable for being placed in the space of reasons.

The point in saying that the unarticulated content is not propositional is that it is not given as *already carved out*. Phenomenologically speaking this amounts to saying that we are not primarily aware of facts *as* facts in the act of perceiving itself, at least not facts as they are presented or formulated in acts of thought and linguistic expression. We are, however, aware of facts in the sense that we in perception are presented with a world that is immediately available for being embraced in thought or put into words.

1.5 Conclusion

McDowell's conceptualism emerges out of a wish to balance between two equally unsatisfactory views concerning the nature of empirical knowledge. By rejecting the adequacy of the "sideways-on" understanding of the mind-world relation and invoking the notion of second nature, he becomes able to argue that the world of our experiences is always already presented to us in conceptual form. The empirical world surely constraints our thoughts about it, but it does so from *within* – not outside of – the sphere of the thinkable.

Nonconceptualist views do not seem to have understood the therapeutic and arguably unproblematical aspect of McDowell's position. That experiential content is conceptual is really not a more controversial claim than that we always already experience features of the world as *thinkable* – it can thus be argued that it is somewhat self-contradictory to *refer* to aspects of our experiences and insist that they are *not* conceptually available.

Despite this unproblematic aspect of McDowell's conceptualism, it is important to try and understand what the claim that experiential content is conceptual really amounts to. In recent writings, he has reformulated his view so as to do more justice to the heterogeneity of thought and perception. Although these new claims from McDowell demonstrate an important departure from some of the things he advocated in *Mind and World*, the core of the position he laid out in that work has not been abandoned. The main purpose is still to explain how our thoughts and beliefs can be constrained by our empirical experiences in a way that avoids the Myth of the Given, and the solution is still to hold that our rational capacities permeate the deliverances of sensibility themselves.

However, this new formulation of McDowell's conceptualism seems to require more explanation. What is the function that underlies the unities of both our judgments and our intuitions, and in what way does it enable the world to be presented in thinkable form? This might seem like unwarranted questions from a therapeutic perspective – perhaps it should suffice to say that the "same function" must be associated with the capacities that mark our distinctively human abilities for speech, thought and rationality, and that it thus opens us onto a thinkable and linguistically expressible world. From some perspectives, however, this is not enough. There are characteristics associated with the notions of conceptuality and rationality that seems to demand a more elaborate account of how they should be understood in order to avoid implying a problematic picture of the nature of human perception. This is the concern of the next chapter, where I turn to the phenomena of embodiment and unreflective action in order to examine the way in which conceptual rationality is integrated in the human form of life.

2. A Mindless Critique?

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided arguments for why John McDowell's conceptualism should seem attractive. If we want to both avoid the Myth of the Given and be able to say that the world of our experiences can serve as an external constraint on our thoughts about it, we must hold that our conceptual capacities are operative in – permeate – all our experiences of the world. I considered a possible critique of this thought: a nonconceptualism motivated by a wish to do justice to the fine-grained phenomenology of our experiences. I argued that the positing of nonconceptual content is an unsatisfactory way of dealing with this, and demonstrated how McDowell's recent adjustment of his view manages to appreciate the differences between perception and thought while keeping the idea that our capacity for rationality is drawn into play already in the experience.

This chapter has its point of departure in a critique that strikes McDowell's view from another angle. Hubert Dreyfus has, with apparent support from existential phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, accused McDowell of over-intellectualizing human perception. The main point of the critique is that the postulation of permeating rational capacities overlooks the most fundamental way of human being-in-the-world: a primitive way of engaging with the world that does not require concepts or rationality, but rather depends solely on practical bodily coping skills. While I in the previous chapter was concerned with a somewhat formal account of the workings of conceptuality with regard to experience, Dreyfus's critique enables us to look into how we can understand conceptual capacities as integrated in the situated and embodied life of human beings.

It is certainly right that many of our dealings in the world take place without us actively exercising our rational capacities, but should we thus conclude that those dealings are nonconceptual or – in Dreyfus's terms – mindless? I will argue that we should not. There are two sides to why I think Dreyfus's critique fails. First, he seems to assume an understanding of the notions of conceptuality and rationality that McDowell does not share. Although this mistake was most evident in the paper that started the debate and has been somewhat corrected by Dreyfus later, it still seems to have a hold on his arguments. This, I believe, is related to the second point: Dreyfus assumes a distinction between our intellectual and embodied capacities that is philosophically problematical. On the one hand he seems to rely on an "over-intellectualized" conception of our intellectual capacities, and on the other he advocates a view of our practical bodily copings in the world that can hardly be defended – phenomenologically or otherwise. That is, he assumes that any involvement of rationality necessarily includes a detached and reflective attitude and, perhaps because of this, argues that most of our practical copings are completely without any such involvement. Ultimately, this entails a version of the Myth of the Given, or, as J. C. Berendzen labels it, a "phenomenological foundationalism" (2010, p. 630)[1]. In short, Dreyfus attacks a straw man, and in the process of so doing reveals problematic aspects of his own view.

The way to avoid Dreyfus's criticism of conceptualism is to reject his notion of what our intellectual capacities amounts to. McDowell has, throughout the debate, insisted that Dreyfus's objections fails to hit the target[2], and argued that he does not see his view as opposed to a proper phenomenology of embodiment[3]. By looking into what I see as the most important points of conflict in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, I want to show how the implications and consequences Dreyfus ascribes to the claim that conceptuality permeates our lives as human beings does not need to follow, and how his alternative has its own problems to deal with. The dismissal of Dreyfus's criticism will bring to light that, rather than supporting an over-intellectualized conception of perception, McDowell's project implies a de-intellectualized conception of the intellect. That is, in arguing that conceptual capacities are involved also in our embodied copings, McDowell is not providing an unsatisfactory account of that phenomena, but rather rejecting the idea – presupposed by Dreyfus – that conceptuality necessarily entails detachment and explicit thought. McDowell can thus be said to, rather than undermining or contradicting the phenomenological perspective, relying on an alternative – and arguably more satisfactory – phenomenology than Dreyfus.

In the next section (2.2) I provide a brief introduction into the thoughts Dreyfus bring to his debate with McDowell, and follow them to what seems to be some problematical consequences. Thereafter I dive more directly into the debate and consider and discuss some important points, first with regard to rationality and action (2.3) and then with regard to the role of mindedness in perception or experience (2.4). The picture of Dreyfus's view of the relation between mindedness and embodiment that emerges from these discussions will then be more critically assessed (2.5), before I conclude (2.6) with some general remarks concerning the McDowell-Dreyfus debate while at the same time setting up a challenge to McDowell that naturally points toward chapter three and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as the ultimate solution to the question of the relation between mindedness and embodiment.

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[1] In "Coping Without Foundations: On Dreyfus's Use of Merleau-Ponty" (2010) Berendzen questions the way in which Dreyfus exploits Merleau-Ponty in his debate with McDowell. His main point is that Merleau-Ponty probably saw the relation between conceptuality and embodiment as more intertwined than Dreyfus wants to admit, and consequently that he in some respects would be closer to the view advocated by McDowell. This point is the topic of my third chapter, and I will thus return to Berendzen there.

[2] "[Dreyfus's] objections are at cross-purposes to my thesis. In interpreting me, Dreyfus brings to bear a conception of mindedness that is not mine" (McDowell, 2013, p. 41).

[3] "I am all for the project of giving an insightful phenomenology of our embodied coping. But a phenomenology of embodiment should be conceived not as a corrective to the thought that our orientation towards the world is permeated with conceptual rationality, but as a supplementation, filling out the details of something that needs to be presupposed by any acceptable version of that thought" (McDowell, 2007a, p. 349).

2.2 Dreyfus and Zahavi on Mindedness and Absorbed Coping

In the paper that started the debate with McDowell, Dreyfus attacked modern cognitive science for its intellectualism and, consequently, its lack of understanding for the way perception really works – a critique he argued is supported by the stagnation in and fruitlessness of research on artificial intelligence (AI) (2006, p. 44)[4]. It has been an inclination in cognitive science to construe perception on the model of a system of symbolic, mental representations. The brain is taken to construct mental representations based on "input" from the senses, and the proper "output" (behaviour or response) is produced by logical manipulation of these representations based on algorithmic rules. The objection is that this makes perception seem like a purely intellectual act, when it really is more of a primitive, practical and dynamical relation between an embodied organism and its environment. This mistake is one form of what Dreyfus calls "the myth of the mental", and although McDowell's project lies in quite a different area, he has apparently also fallen victim to the same myth – a myth that requires "the phenomenological alternative" to be overcome (ibid.).

It is easy to see why the tendencies in cognitive science and AI mentioned above frustrate Dreyfus. As he points out, we should not try to explain how the world has meaning for us – i.e., how we have an understanding of the relevance of our surroundings and the situation we are in – by positing internal mental models as that which determines such meaningfulness.[5] In this context Dreyfus rightly invokes Merleau-Ponty for support. The theories in question seem to be based on the mistaken assumption that perceiving and acting is best understood when pictured as undertaken by an agent that always has a reflective awareness of her surroundings and, in virtue of that, explicitly deliberates about how to act. In other words, the model of perception they assume is that of a rational *spectator* deliberating about the world from a distance. This, however, is not how perception normally works. That is Merleau-Ponty's point when he argues that we must understand ourselves not as spectators of, but rather primarily as *part of* the world (2012, p. 317). We do not need to actively impose our understanding *on* the world, or explicitly represent it *as* relevant. Rather, we are, as Dreyfus nicely sums up a core point of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, "always already in a world that is laid out in terms of our bodies and interests, and thus permeated by relevance" (2006, p. 44). We are not minds keeping the world at arm's length, but *bodies* that are always already open to surroundings filled with significance. The whole of the body, its environment and the context we are in are relevant in describing and accounting for our perceptions of and actions in the world, and it is thus understandable that Dreyfus is sceptical about theories that attempt to reduce and compress such situational totalities into mental representations.

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[4] Dreyfus's disagreement with McDowell came to the surface in 2005, with his APA Pacific Division Presidential Address (Later published as "Overcoming the myth of the mental" (2006), which is the version I will be referring to). Four papers followed in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* (2007, 50:4): McDowell's "What Myth*?"* (2007a) and Dreyfus's "The Return of the Myth of the Mental" (2007a), in addition to their respective responses ("Response to McDowell" (2007b) and "Response to Dreyfus" (2007b)). The last entries of the debate so far are two essays published in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate* (ed. Schear, 2013), where they sum up their positions, arguments and disagreements.

[5] One problem with this approach to perception shows itself in what is known as "the frame problem" of AI (Dreyfus, 2006, p. 44). If a computer represents a specific situation and some feature of that situation changes, it is almost impossible for the machine to determine what part of the initial representation that need to be changed for it to continue representing the situation correctly.

Dreyfus has recognized an important aspect of the theories of the existential phenomenologists and, in an admirable philosophical effort, worked to demonstrate and illuminate its relevance with regard to contemporary issues in cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Moreover, his criticism of McDowell has sparked a fruitful and interesting debate that has engaged many of our greatest contemporary philosophers, as well as prompted McDowell to become explicit about aspects and implications of his view that have hitherto remained implicit.

Dreyfus's objections to McDowell's view draw attention to the important role of bodily skills in human engagements with the world. To be a human perceiver is not primarily to engage with the world as a reflecting and deliberating subject; rather, it is to be an embodied organism that practically cope with its surroundings and knows its way around thanks to its bodily skills and a way of perceiving that discloses a world that is always already filled with availabilities and affordances[6] for bodily actions. Thought, as a process of reasoning and contemplation, is superfluous in many of our everyday copings. We do not have to take what we perceive up in thought or rely on explicit deliberation in order to be able to skilfully deal with familiar situations. Take, for instance, a case where the sequence of events is as follows: I approach the door to my apartment, reach for the key in my pocket, and unlock the door. Being familiar with the situation, I do not need to first reflect on whether or not that specific door is the right one or thematize it as “my door” in thought before I can move on with the rest of my actions; neither do I have to actively think about reaching for the key or performing any of the other actions necessary in order to actually perform them. My understanding of the situation is such that I know how to deal with it without having to think about how to deal with it. In short, the understanding displayed in this case – of the situation I am in and the actions it requires – is not a kind of understanding that has its source in processes of thinking. Rather, my bodily coping skills acquired by way of becoming familiar with that kind of situation makes me disposed to perform the suitable actions as if they were called forth from the situation itself.

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[6] "Affordance" is a term coined by the American psychologist J. J. Gibson, known for his "ecological approach" to perception. See e.g. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1986). By introducing the notion of affordances, Gibson drew attention to how features of the perceived world have meaning in virtue of the practical value they have for the perceiver. For instance, for a human perceiver familiar with the function of chairs, a chair will be perceived as *affording* sitting on.

The phenomenon in described above is what Dreyfus calls “absorbed coping” or “acting in flow” (e.g. 2013, pp. 17-9). Being an activity that does not take place by way of rational or thought-through decisions, but rather by forces of attraction and repulsion, he argues that it is a phenomenon that is overlooked or undermined by McDowell’s view (2007b, p. 374). Acting in flow is, according to Dreyfus, “a primordial nonconceptual mode of coping *on the basis of which* the conceptual world makes sense” (2013, p. 21, my emphasis). Characteristic of Dreyfus’s understanding of absorbed coping is that it is skill-based, practical and *mindless*. That is, there is “no place for an ‘I’” when acting in flow (2013, p. 28). When we are completely absorbed in an activity, we are not aware of ourselves as subjects. Self-consciousness belongs to the detached and critical attitude, and has no place when we are merged with the world in a practical and skilful way.

Dreyfus’s claim, then, is that conceptuality is superfluous in cases of unreflective engagements. He points to both everyday behaviour such as opening doors (2013, p. 18), and more challenging activities like blitz chess and football (ibid., pp. 17-35) to exemplify cases where, on his view, there is no room for conceptual rationality. In the cases of blitz chess and football it is crucial that they can be instances of acting in flow only when performed by people who are masters or experts in the given activity. Dreyfus argues that, just like the skilfulness of the expert blitz chess player enables her to be drawn to make the next move by “the forces on the board” (ibid., p. 35), all humans are masters in their everyday activities and do thus not require involvement of conceptual rationality to skilfully get around.

Dreyfus describes the phenomenon of absorbed coping as a *merging* with the world, and contrasts it with the distanced mind-world relation McDowell supposedly takes as basic (2013, p. 17). It seems that, for Dreyfus, any involvement of the mind – our rational capacities – necessarily entails taking a step back from our engaged involvement with the world. When absorbed in coping, he says, “we are not subjects striving to get it right about an independent objective reality” (ibid., p. 21). Rather, our conceptual capacities come into play first when our mindless coping is interrupted: “In the face of a disturbance, a distance opens up between the coper and what he is acting on which is bridged by a situation-specific concept” (ibid., p. 19).

One problem with this, which I will problematize further in the following sections, is that when Dreyfus talks about mindedness and rationality, he seems to be associating it solely with what McDowell would call *exercises* of conceptual capacities. That is, active reflections on or considerations of reasons for acting or justifications for beliefs. Thus, when Dreyfus talks about a distanced mind-world relation, what he means is a critical distance where one actively represents to oneself what one is doing and experiencing, a self-reflective state that is incompatible with the phenomenon of absorbed coping. Regarding the conflict between this kind of distance and absorbed coping, Dreyfus obviously has a point. There are many everyday activities that we manage perfectly well without having to “monitor” our own behaviour and that, moreover, become almost impossible (or at least more difficult) if we start thinking about what we are doing and how it should be done. However, as I will argue below, the claim that conceptual capacities are pervasive does not imply that a detached mind or subject constantly and actively reflects on or thinks about what it is doing and experiencing.

Another problem is that when Dreyfus describes absorbed coping as mindless, he seems to mean that there is no kind of awareness involved at all. “When Dasein [Heidegger’s term for human beings] is totally merged with the world,” he says, “there is no place for *content*, neither experiential nor propositional – there is nothing that is in any sense inner” (2013, p. 29, Dreyfus’s emphasis). Moreover, he claims, “it would be a *pun* to think that realizing a practical capacity in my coping requires that I realize what I am doing” (ibid., my emphasis). These statements indicate that Dreyfus pictures the state of the absorbed coper as near – if not wholly – unconscious. When fully absorbed in her coping, the agent does not only act unreflectively and without deliberation regarding her next moves, she does not even *realize* what she is doing. In referring to a passage where Sartre talks about how he is drawn to assist his friend in need by the force of “Peter-having-to-be-helped,” Dreyfus notes that “it does not follow that in order to act kindly the kind person must be *aware* of the situation *as* a situation calling for kindness" (ibid., p. 34).[7] Sartre is, according to Dreyfus, directly drawn to act by virtue of his "unthinkable" openness to the force of "Peter-in-need," and "it is only on the basis of a *retrospective illusion created by reflection* that the situation will seem to all involved to have been one that required kindness" (ibid., my emphasis). It is only in retrospect or from a third-person perspective that it looks as if Sartre had a reason for his action in the sense that he was aware of Peter as in need for help; in the midst of the situation, it was merely his acquired disposition of kindness that made him open to be unwarily drawn by the force of his friend in need.

Dan Zahavi has drawn attention to some challenges with this way of accounting for the phenomenon of absorbed coping. Dreyfus presents the understanding of absorbed coping as a way of being in the world with no room for awareness or "realizing what one is doing" as a phenomenological insight, and he often supports the claim by referring to phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. It is, however, hard to see how the claim that no awareness is involved in absorbed coping can be phenomenologically defended. This is Zahavi's concern when he asks, "How can one meaningfully speak of a *phenomenology* of mindless coping – as Dreyfus repeatedly does – if the coping is completely unconscious?" (2013, pp. 321-2). For instance, how could Sartre give a phenomenological description of how he was drawn to help his friend in need if he was not in some sense aware of what was going on? It seems that he must have had some sort of conscious access to what he was doing in order to be able to give a description of it afterwards. The sceptical attitude towards the potential of reflection to yield a correct picture of the phenomenon of acting in flow indicated by Dreyfus is problematical for the same reason. One would think that the possibility of arguing that one way of understanding the phenomenon is incorrect presupposes reflective accessibility to how it truly is. That is, if the characteristics of unreflective acting were necessarily obscured by reflection, it seems that one would have no means for distinguishing between good and bad ways of describing them. As Zahavi puts it, "How does Dreyfus know that reflection falsifies lived experience? How does he know that it is a myth that reflection makes something implicit explicit?" (ibid., p. 333). He suggests that it is open to Dreyfus to hold that providing a true description of the phenomenon of absorbed coping is a case of “inference to best explanation of behavioral data” rather than accessing the phenomenon through reflections upon one’s own experiences (ibid., p. 334). But then again, his claim to be advocating a *phenomenological* insight would be unwarranted.

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[7] Sartre says: "I pity Peter, and I go to his assistance. For my consciousness only one thing exists at that moment: Peter-having-to-be-helped. This quality of 'having-to-be-helped' lies in Peter. It acts on me like a force" (1957, p. 56). It is interesting to note that nothing Sartre says here indicates that he is *unaware* of what he is doing or the reason for his action. It is perfectly possible to describe the phenomenon of how seeing a friend in need immediately draws you to act in this way without excluding that Sartre is aware of or sees *that Peter needs help*.

Zahavi further purports to show that the idea of a sort of “permeating mindedness” is not unheard of in the phenomenological tradition. For instance, he focuses on Sartre and Heidegger and argues that, though they would deny that all experience includes explicit references to an “I”, they seem to hold that an “I” nonetheless is somehow *implicated* in the sense that “every worldly experiencing involves a certain component of self-acquaintance and self-familiarity” (2013, p. 328). The idea is that even though we are not constantly “monitoring” – as Dreyfus puts it – our own experiences and actions, there is still a sense in which they always involve some form of self-understanding or self-consciousness.

On the face of it, both Zahavi’s own critique of Dreyfus, as well as the passages from classical phenomenologists he refers to for support, seem to fit almost perfectly on McDowell’s side of the debate. For instance, he sympathetically describes Heidegger as “basically [arguing] that there is an intimate connection between experience, expression, and understanding” (2013, p. 333), which, generally speaking, is exactly what McDowell is arguing. Moreover, just like McDowell[8], Zahavi criticizes Dreyfus for not being radical enough in his rejection of Cartesianism (ibid., p. 334). However, Zahavi further argues that Dreyfus’s refusal to ascribe mindedness a role in absorbed coping is due to him holding on to a conception of mindedness that is *too similar* to that of McDowell (ibid., p. 326). Consequently, he claims that their debate is not over the conception of mindedness as such, but rather about whether or not mindedness – the characteristics of which they supposedly agree upon – is present at the level of absorbed coping (ibid.). The right way to counter the problem, Zahavi claims, is to “[propose] an alternative and better understanding of what experience and subjectivity amount to” (ibid., p. 334).

Now, it is certainly not the case that Dreyfus and McDowell hold the *exact* same conception of mindedness. Of course, an important part of their debate concerns whether mind is involved in absorbed coping or not; but, as mentioned above, this conflict seems to have its core precisely in a disagreement about the characteristics of mindedness. Whereas Dreyfus’s criticism of McDowell is built upon the assumption that involvement of the mind necessarily entails detachment and distance, McDowell's response consists in rejecting that assumption. The conflict, then, is not about whether or not we always experience and act in the world as detached minds, but rather about whether mindedness always entails distance. It is thus possible to say that it *is* the conception of mindedness that is in question.

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[8] In response to accusations of Cartesianism from Dreyfus, McDowell states: ”What does have a Cartesian character is the assumption whose grip on Dreyfus’s thinking prevents him from hearing the pervasiveness thesis as I mean it” (2013, p. 55).

The reason why Zahavi nonetheless argues that there is a similarity between Dreyfus and McDowell's conceptions of mindedness has to do with the fact that they both endorse what he calls a "conceptualist definition of mind" (2013, p. 326). That is, they both assume a tight connection between mindedness on the one hand and conceptuality, rationality, and language on the other. When Zahavi claims that the solution to the problem of mindedness is to propose an alternative understanding of what experience and subjectivity amounts to, then, what he has in mind is a conception of mind that is independent from conceptuality altogether. He is sceptical about McDowell's claim that self-consciousness and experience of objective reality can be ascribed only to creatures that possess conceptual capacities, and argues that mindedness in the sense of the "first-person character of experience" or "self-presentational character of phenomenal consciousness" is something we can also ascribe to infants and non-human animals (ibid., p. 335).

This "solution" to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is not unproblematic. He argues against Dreyfus that absorbed coping involves a kind of awareness that enables it to be available for phenomenological reflection and description – activities that obviously involve conceptual or linguistic capacities. Then he objects to McDowell that this "awareness" is, in effect, *nonconceptual*. Zahavi thus sets up a distinction between a primordial nonconceptual mindedness and a conceptual mindedness that is – presumably – brought into play first when the "content" of the former is to be actively exploited in language or thought. Put this way, it seems that there is not really a substantial disagreement between Zahavi and Dreyfus's positions regarding this matter after all. When Dreyfus argues that absorbed coping is mindless, it is precisely the conceptualist notion of mindedness he wants to rid from the picture – not necessarily, as Zahavi assumes, *any kind* of phenomenal "first-person character" of experience. Zahavi's claim that Dreyfus is implicitly committed to some form of behaviourism rather than a proper phenomenology is obviously not one Dreyfus himself would agree with, and it probably has its source in an exaggerated interpretation of what the "mindlessness" thesis amounts to. Dreyfus does, after all, present himself as an advocate of traditional phenomenology, and in his latest contribution to the debate with McDowell he moreover acknowledges a point similar to Zahavi's by proposing Heidegger's notion of "mineness" as a "certain style" that pervades all human activities (2013, p. 30).[9] Dreyfus's "phenomenology of mindlessness" might, as Zahavi observes, seem self-refuting, but his point is not that we have no form of access to our perceptual "ground floor," but rather – as we have seen - that this ground floor is constituted by an embodied familiarity with our surroundings that is mindless in the sense of being *nonconceptual, nonrational* or *non-intellectual*.

This is not to say that Zahavi's concerns are unwarranted. The point is rather that his own proposed solution falls victim to the same assumption that makes Dreyfus's view problematic in the first place – that is, the positing of a "ground floor" of experience that stands in a mere external relation to the subject's rational capacities. Whether this ground floor is accounted for in terms of embodied familiarity or a first-person character of experience is not important in this context; the question is, how can we account for the relation between the perceptual ground floor and our conceptual exploitation of it in (for instance) phenomenological descriptions if the former is defined as beyond reach for linguistic or conceptual acts? It seems that both Dreyfus and Zahavi fall victim to a version of the Myth of the Given, albeit not in the empiricist sense considered in the previous chapter. It is surely not pure impressions or "sense-data" that is posited as an ultimate ground for our conceptual activities here, but the general idea is still the same: That our access to the empirical world is primordially marked by something that is not itself present in a form that suits conceptual exploitation.[10]

Both Dreyfus and Zahavi, then, seem to subscribe to what Berendzen – originally intended only at Dreyfus's view – calls a "phenomenological foundationalism" (2010, p. 630). That is, they both subscribe to the thought that "there is a primary layer of human existence that is free of, and supports, higher mental activities" (ibid.). The way to avoid this foundationalism is, as Zahavi correctly observes regarding Dreyfus's position, to propose an alternative understanding of what mindedness amounts to. Contrary to what Zahavi thinks, however, the way to do this is not to define mindedness as primordially nonconceptual – rather, it consists in adopting an alternative understanding of what involvement of conceptuality amounts to. In the forthcoming sections I will attempt to provide such an understanding by focusing on aspects of McDowell's view and his replies to Dreyfus's criticism.

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[9] Unlike Zahavi, Dreyfus – presumably following Heidegger – reserves this "character" or "style" only for *human* experiences or activities.

[10] Dreyfus expresses sympathy with Sellars's denunciation of the "indubitable Given" (Dreyfus, 2006, p. 43). He does, however, not recognize that his conviction that we cannot "leave the conceptual component of our lives hanging in midair," but that we need to found it upon "the nonconceptual embodied coping skills we share with animals and infants" amounts to nothing more than a relocating of the assumption Sellars wanted to denounce (ibid.). Whereas the empiricist foundationalists assumed a problematic relation between sensory input and the empirical beliefs it were to work as a ground for, Dreyfus takes the same relation to hold between our embodied understanding of the world and our "conceptual mindedness."

2.3 Mind in Action

In chapter one I described how McDowell sees our responsiveness to reasons as an ability acquired through our character being shaped in a certain way by our upbringing and initiation into a language and a tradition, which is how he can say that rationality becomes our second nature. This shaping results in "habits of thought and action" (1994, p. 84), which means that our capacity for rationality – our responsiveness to reasons as such – comes to inform all our actions as human agents. McDowell invokes the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* to account for this disposition or ability: "'practical wisdom' is the right sort of thing to serve as a model for the understanding, the faculty that enables us to recognize and create intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons" (ibid., p. 79). Human actions are placed in the space of reasons in the sense that the agent, in her actions, displays answerability to rational critique. She can be held responsible for her actions in the sense that they are open to questions about justifications, and she *is* responsible to the extent that she knows what she is doing – in other words, to the extent that she has the means to *recognize* her responsibility in the sense of being able to answer "what" and "why" questions regarding her actions.

This is the motivation behind McDowell's aforementioned claim that "movement of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency" (1994, p. 89). The involvement of conceptual rationality in action comes in the form of a kind of self-knowledge on the part of the agent that can be conceptually articulated in response to rational critique regarding her activities. McDowell stresses that the kind of self-knowledge in question must be understood as *practical*, not theoretical (2007b, p. 367). Involvement of rationality in human action is in the first instance not present in the form of a thought *about* what one is doing, like an articulated fact that accompanies or comes in addition to the action; it is, in McDowell's words, "a matter of an 'I do' rather than an 'I think,'" where the "I do" must be understood as the characteristic *form* of exercises of human agency as such (ibid.). Put differently, self-knowledge in acting is realized not by way of some "extra" mental process, but simply by performing the action *as* a human agent. To say that movement of limbs without concepts are "mere happenings," then, is simply to say that, without involvement of conceptuality, movements of the body falls outside the scope of what the agent takes herself to be doing, and thus also outside the scope of what she is able to take responsibility for.

Some of McDowell's critics seem to have misunderstood what the idea that conceptual rationality permeates our human lives amounts to by taking it to imply that rationality is explicitly involved in *all* bodily movements. One version of this misunderstanding appears in Taylor Carman's *Conceptualism and the Scholastic Fallacy* (2013, p. 173), where he argues that conceptualism would be in trouble if it turned out that we are unable to conceptually indicate the proper distance one should stand from someone in a conversation. He suggests, and seems to accept, that McDowell in this case could invoke the notion of demonstrative concepts, so that questions about how far one should stand from each other when having a conversation could be answered in terms of "about *this* far" while one places oneself at what one takes to be a suitable distance. That might be so, but it does not seem right to say that it is our ability of so doing that informs our capacity to unreflectively take up the proper distance in actual conversations – and McDowell's project does not require him to commit to that description. It is, in his words, "no problem for the pervasiveness thesis that in some movements we make (for instance, in a conversation), we are responsive – without being aware of it […] – to culturally instituted norms of distance standing" (2013, p. 51). Of course, we might become aware of it when someone stands too close to us, but such awareness need not be (arguably, *is* not) accompanied by a representation of what would be the *right* distance to stand in in that situation – what we would think or say in such cases would probably simply be something like "this is too close."

The thesis of permeating rationality in human actions is, for McDowell, meant to account for cases in which we can be said to be aware of what we are doing in the sense that we are able to take responsibility for our actions, and conversational distance standing is not necessarily such a case. I would probably take it as weird if my conversational partner in a normal conversation – where the distance between us were in accordance with social norms – suddenly asked me "why are you standing at that distance from me?," and it would arguably be even weirder if I responded "because this is approximately the right distance to stand from someone when one is having this kind of conversation," as if I actually knew what I was doing. A more natural response would rather be something like "I don't know, shouldn't I? Do you think it's too close?" The weirdness of both the question and my imagined initial response indicates that distance standing is usually not something we would regard as exercises of agency in the sense of implying a rational responsibility for what we are doing.

A similar point can be made with regards to what we can call the "mechanics" of exercises of agency: the concrete bodily movements and adjustments that constitute what we take ourselves to be doing. That is to say, the claim that rationality permeates exercises of agency does not entail that we are always aware of what is going on at the level of our bodily way of accomplishing such exercises. For instance, if I open a door and go through it, that is what I am *doing* in the sense relevant for the pervasiveness thesis; the adjusting of my grip to fit the door handle is the mechanics of that action and thus not something that, taken in isolation, necessarily is a case of my rationality in operation. Again the ability to take rational responsibility is the ultimate test. The adjusting of my grip when my hand moves toward the door knob is not obviously an action open to rational critique, it is not necessarily an action suitable for placement in the space of reasons as an exercise of agency, because it is probably outside the scope of what I am – and other people would expect me to be – able to take responsibility for.[11]

This is relevant with regard to an argument Dreyfus frequently uses in objecting to McDowell's view: That the fact that the performance of certain activities gets worse when one is focusing on (thinking about) the actual movements they consist of proves that rationality usually is not involved in those activities. One case Dreyfus appeals to in order to demonstrate this is that of Chuck Knoblauch, a successful baseball player who suddenly lost his skill of throwing efficiently to first base because he – supposedly – started to think about how he should do it (2007a, p. 354). However, the difference between Knoblauch's performance before and after this "incident" does not, as Dreyfus seems to think, exemplify the difference between mindless actions and actions in which rationality is involved. It does, however, demonstrate the difference between acting normally and acting while "monitoring" one's own behaviour, the latter of which is, as we have seen, how Dreyfus understands the implications of McDowell's view of acting in general. Before he lost his skill of throwing efficiently to first base, Knoblauch's rationality was involved in so doing in the form of practical self-knowledge of what he was doing – in throwing efficiently to first base he was, as McDowell puts it, "realizing a concept of a thing to do" (2007b, p. 367). Knoblauch was no less aware of what he was doing in this case; rather it is what he could be said to *be doing* in relevant sense of that term that differs between the two cases. That is, in skilfully accomplishing to throw the ball to first base, what he was doing, or what he *took himself to be doing* – in other words, the practical concept he was realizing – was simply *throwing to first base*. Now, in starting to think about *how* this is done, the action would suddenly have appeared as more complex. What was previously the "mechanics" of the basic action of throwing efficiently to first base now appear as *more things to be done*. It will seem that, in order to throw properly, it is also necessary to realize the practical concepts of, for instance, holding the ball a certain way and having the right swing of the arm. It goes without saying that such an attitude towards one's own actions will make most activities more difficult. But, as said, that is not what it means for conceptual rationality to permeate human actions in the relevant sense.

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[11] It is important to note that these limitations of McDowell's pervasiveness thesis are limitations on the extent in which *self-knowledge* is involved in human actions, not constraints on what is in principle *available* for being conceptually exploited. For instance, I am obviously able to direct my attention to the way in which my hand prepares to grip the door handle, or the moves I make to adjust the distance in a conversation – the point is that the claim that rationality permeates our human actions does not entail that we are *always* aware of such things.

The main point of the dispute between Dreyfus and McDowell with regards to rationality's involvement in human actions is whether or not the "I do" is operative in cases of absorbed coping. In other words, do absorbed copers have any form of awareness of what they are doing and why they are doing it? As mentioned above, Dreyfus points to both routine everyday practices and more challenging activities in order to exemplify the phenomenon of absorbed coping. With regard to the challenging activity of blitz chess, he says:

> In blitz chess, at a second a move, the absorbed master does not have time to make a move because he thinks that it is the thing to do. […] After much experience, the chess master is directly drawn by the forces on the board to make a masterful move […] The master [does not] make his move for a reason. (2013, p. 35).

It might be right to say that the skilled blitz chess master does not have time to *think* about what to do before doing it, but is it really correct to say that he does not make his move for a reason? At a second a move the level of concentration is obviously high, and so any questions posed to the players would presumably interrupt their flow and stop the game. But *if* one were to ask the chess master, in the middle of a blitz chess game, for a reason for his latest move, would we not expect him to be able to answer? Dreyfus suggests that the only thing the chess player could respond in such a case would be "I made the move because I was drawn to make it" (2013, p. 35). Although I think this is to underestimate the knowledge the chess master has of his own moves, the fact that Dreyfus thinks this kind of answer would go against the thesis of permeating rationality reveals his continuing tendency to misunderstand what that thesis amounts to. The issue is not what *kind* of reason the chess master gives in response to the question, but rather the fact he is answering it in a *way* that acknowledges the appropriateness of being held responsible for the move and, moreover, that he actually is able to give a reason. Regardless of whether he answers “I made the move because it gives me the opportunity to get my opponent’s queen next time,” or “I did it because I was drawn to make it,” he is explaining why he acted like he did. If the best explanation the chess master can give is that he merely let himself be drawn by “the forces on the board,” then that would be his reason for making the move that he made. It is only on a conception of rationality as a faculty bound to always provide clear, thought-through, and elaborate reasons that this sort of response would seem as an inability to give a rational response. That, however, is not the conception of rationality McDowell holds.[12]

The crucial point here is what we should say that the absorbed coper is doing when she responds to the “why” question by giving a reason – as we must assume most absorbed copers are able to. Is she merely appealing to a “retrospective illusion created by reflection,” in the sense that the reason she provides is not really something she was aware of and acted in response to when making the move, but rather something she projects on the situation only in retrospect? This explanation, which we saw Dreyfus suggesting in the case of Sartre helping his friend in need, is not satisfactory. There is no reason to think that Sartre even would have to appeal to reflection in order to give a rational response – for instance, “I saw that he needed help” – to why he acted like he did. Most probably he would be able to answer the question straight away, without asking himself questions like “what did I do?” and “why did I do that?” That is, he would presumably not first have to search for the answer by considering his action in retrospect before he could formulate it in speech. Should we not in this case say that the response to the “why” question, rather than being the result of a “retrospective illusion,” is an expression of knowledge he already had – something he already was aware of – when running to help his friend?

As said above, to respond to “why” questions concerning one’s actions by providing a reason for why one acted like one did is to acknowledge the question as appropriate and hence to take *responsibility* for the action in question. But why would one – and how could one – take responsibility for something one, *ex hypothesi*, was completely unaware of doing? There are, of course, cases where one truly *is* unaware of what one has been doing. But when confronted with demands for reasons in such cases, one will usually *deny* any knowledge and responsibility of what has happened. Rather than responding “I did it because…,” one will say things like “Did I do that?” or “I didn’t know I was doing that.” If the phenomenon of absorbed coping were restricted to cases where such responses were all the coper could appeal to when faced with questions about her actions, then it would surely be right to describe it as mindless. Moreover, if that were the case the phenomenon of absorbed coping would, like the case of distance standing considered above, fall outside the scope of McDowell’s pervasiveness thesis altogether, and thus not pose a threat to his view after all.

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[12] As he says, “if [the chess master] explains his move as a response to the forces on the board, […] he is giving a rational explanation of it” (McDowell, 2013, p. 47).

However, Dreyfus does not restrict his notion of absorbed coping to distance standing or other cases where one is unable to provide a suitable response to questions regarding what one has been doing.[13] Rather, he seems to hold that any expressible knowledge regarding one’s actions in flow will only emerge after the flow is broken, so that if it then appears to you that you were aware of what you were doing and that you had a reason for your action, that will only be in virtue of retrospective illusions constructed by reflection. As Zahavi points out, however, this line of thought is far from unproblematical. There is no reason not to think that one in cases of making expressions regarding what one did when acting in flow are making knowledge that was implicit at the moment of acting explicit. Rather, the opposite claim – that one in such cases necessarily is constructing an obscure or illusory picture of what was really going on – seems difficult to justify.

Dreyfus’s scepticism towards McDowell’s view seems to be based on an incorrect assumption about what rationality amounts to. What he fails to understand is that the practical self-knowledge McDowell ascribes to all exercises of human agency does not imply that one is “monitoring” one’s own behaviour or so to speak experiencing oneself as acting from a distance. When Dreyfus argues that the blitz chess master cannot be said to act for a reason because he “does not have time to make a move because he *thinks* that it is the thing to do,” he seems to be assuming that the only way in which one can be said to act for a reason is if the reason is *thought about*. The same seems to hold for his conception of awareness in general; it looks as if Dreyfus thinks that awareness of what one is doing entails that one is actively *thinking about* what one is doing.[14]

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[13] Dreyfus does, admittedly, say that absorption in flow involves being ”unable to answer what and why questions” (2013, p. 32, box 1.2). Given the examples he uses for absorbed coping, I take this to mean that one is unable to answer such questions *while* staying in the flow, which is not the same as not having the *means* to give a reason for one’s action.

[14] This is evident in the way in which Dreyfus phrases his arguments against McDowell. For instance, he remarks, ”in total absorption […] one is so fully absorbed in one’s activity that one is not even marginally thinking about what one is doing” (2013, p. 28). He then quotes a passage where Merleau-Ponty describes how an orator ”does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking,” but that it is first at the end of the speech – which will be ”the lifting of a spell” – that ”thoughts on the speech or text will be able to arise” (p. 209 in the 1962 translation of *Phenomenology of Perception*, which is the one Dreyfus refers to. The same passage,

Now, Dreyfus might have a point in arguing that there is little room for such processes of active thinking when acting in flow. It seems right to say that the blitz chess player, at a second a move, does not have time to actually think about what he is doing if what "think about" means is to make what he is doing explicit to himself, perhaps in a way similar to "I am moving the pawn to C4, because I am drawn to do so." The difficulty here might stem from the thought that one can be said to act on the basis of reasons only when one's action is the outcome of a deliberate *decision* based on contemplation of different alternatives.[15] If such cases exhaust what Dreyfus associates with acting for reasons, it is understandable that he wants to reject that rationality is operative in the actions of absorbed copers; as he says, they do not have time to *think* before acting. However, if we actually consider various cases where a rational explanation of what we have done is at our disposal, it should be clear that reasons usually are available also with regard to completely spontaneous or unreflective actions. Sartre may not have needed to contemplate reasons for helping his friend before hastening to his aid, but he would certainly have been able to say that he did what he did because he *saw* that his friend needed help – and an explanation does not need to be more advanced than that to count as rational.

As we have seen, McDowell's notion of practical self-knowledge does not imply any "monitoring" in the form of additional thoughts about what one is doing. His claim is that human agents know what they are doing, not by representing to themselves some extra fact, but simply by performing the action as a human agent, which entails the realization of a practical concept that *can* be explicitly exploited on occasions of being faced with demands for rational explanation. In Robert Pippin's words, the intention or reason for an action is usually "in" the action, "not 'before' or 'behind' it" (2013, p. 105). "In initiating and then sustaining an action," he explains, "I obviously know what I am doing and have some sense of why […]," and that can be the case without entailing that "I keep checking to see if my intention is being fulfilled, or if the action still fits the act description under which I became committed to the intention […]" (ibid.). Human agents act for reasons not in the sense that

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translated somewhat differently, can be found at p. 185 in the 2012 translation). But Merleau-Ponty's intention in this passage is to argue that thought should not be understood as operating "behind" expressions as internal conditions, but rather – as speech – as a form of expression. He says that "[the orator's] speech is his thought" and that "[his] words fully occupy [his] mind," which, of course, is not to say that the orator is *unaware* of what he is saying while speaking. The "nonthinking spell" Merleau-Ponty describes is not the mindless absorption Dreyfus wants it to be.

[15] Of course, one might want to reserve the word "reason" for these kinds of cases, and, for instance, rather say that one acts in response to "motivations" when the action is unreflective. This, however, is merely a terminological disagreement. As long as one acknowledges that we can be aware of such "motivations," and that they can be appealed to in answering questions about why one did what one did, they are reasons in the relevant sense of that term.

the reasons are always thought about as such prior to the execution of the action, but rather in the sense that we usually[16] have some sense of *why* we are acting like we do.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, McDowell uses the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* in explaining the way in which rationality is involved in our human actions. Aristotle says about *phronesis* that it “involves knowledge of the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be attained by systematic knowledge but only by perception”[17]. For Aristotle *phronesis* is mainly understood as an ethical capacity; a capacity, acquired by having one’s ethical character shaped through one’s upbringing, which enables one to understand what the right thing to do is in specific situations. It is the ability to immediately understand what specific situations require from us and act accordingly. Such situation-specific understanding does not come about by contemplation of abstract principles for action – rather, the *phronimos* (the practically wise person) can directly perceive what is needed of her in the situation itself.

“Imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect,” McDowell says, “is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics” (1994, p. 84). By way of our upbringing, where initiation into a language is the most important in this context, our character becomes shaped in such a way that we become responsive to reasons as such. Like the ethical upbringing of the *phronimos* makes her responsive to ethical demands, our initiation into a language, tradition, and – consequently – the space of reasons, makes responsiveness to reasons a pervasive trait of our actions as human agents. The point is that when the *phronimos* acts virtuously without having to appeal to reasoning, she is nonetheless displaying responsiveness to ethical demands *as such* – her practical rationality is at work in the way in which she perceives the situation as calling for a specific response. In the same way, then, our responsiveness to reasons as such is displayed in all our actions as human agents – our rationality is at work in our actions in the sense that what we act in response to is such that it is suitable for placement in the space of reasons, regardless of whether our actions are the result of reasoning or not.

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[16] There are of course some cases where we know *what* we are doing without having a *reason* for doing it. Faced with a ”why” question in such cases one would typically answer something like ”No particular reason.” It is crucial that this kind of answer – which McDowell calls the ”null response” (2013, p. 49) – is very different from rejecting the question altogether, in the sense of ”I didn’t know I was doing that.” In the null response case the agent is still acknowledging the appropriateness of being held responsible for her action. She is revealing that she was aware of doing it, which means that her rationality was in play in the action.

[17] Quote taken from Dreyfus’s ”The Myth of the Mental” (2006, p. 46). He quotes from *The Ethics of Aristotle* (Thompson, 1955, p. 182, 1142a25).

We are now in the topical territory that sparked the McDowell-Dreyfus debate in the first place. In his initial paper (2006), Dreyfus criticised McDowell's exploitation of the notion of *phronesis* on the ground that he saw it as conflicting with Heidegger's understanding of the same term. That is, he assumed that McDowell's understanding of acting in response to reasons implied acting on the basis of situation-independent rules, and thus took it to be in conflict with Heidegger's description of *phronesis* as an essentially *situation-specific* form of understanding (2006, p. 46). However, Heidegger's description of *phronesis* is perfectly compatible with how McDowell takes our capacity for rationality to be at work in our everyday life.[18] As we have already seen in the case of the blitz chess master, to act on the basis of reasons is simply to act in response to something one is able to appeal to in giving a rational explanation of why one acted like one did. Such explanations can of course be completely situation-specific, as is the case with the chess master's imagined response, "I was drawn to make it." This is not a reason specifiable in abstraction from the specific situation in which he made the move, but it is nonetheless a rational explanation of why he acted like he did.

Dreyfus's mistake was to assume that involvement of rationality necessarily entails a distanced attitude towards the situation on the part of the agent – an attitude that enables her to apply abstract rules of action to the particular case she finds herself in.[19] Now although he has admitted that he drew too quick conclusions about McDowell's project in his initial criticism,[20] Dreyfus's assumption about the situation-independence of rationality is demonstrative of a tendency to think of our intellectual capacities solely in terms of abstraction, detachment and distance that – as we have seen in the foregoing discussion – has persisted in his arguments throughout the debate. In other words, though Dreyfus has conceded that rationality does not necessarily entail situation-independence, his insistence that absorbed copers does not display responsiveness to reasons because they do not have time to *think* about what they are doing reveals that he still presupposes what we might call an "over-intellectualized" conception of rationality that does not do justice to McDowell's understanding of the same term.

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[18] It even turned out that Heidegger, via Gadamer, influenced some of McDowell's formulations of Aristotle's view (McDowell, 2007a, p. 340).

[19] The kind of action pictured here might be described as the outcome of a process similar to the following: The agent recognizes the situation as an instance of the general sort *S*, remembers that she has learned that situations of the sort *S* requires application of the general rule *R*, which in this case means acting in way *A*, and acts accordingly. Some situations will, of course, require that we take a step back and contemplate them in a way similar to this. The point at present is that most of our actions do not require this sort of process.

[20] "I did assume, accepting the traditional understanding, that McDowell understood rationality and conceptuality as general. I should have known better. I am sorry that I attributed to McDowell the view of rationality he explicitly rejects in his papers on Aristotle" (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 353).

2.4 Mind in Perception

McDowell's claims regarding conceptuality's involvement in experience is something I already considered in some detail in the first chapter. In short, his main claim is that conceptuality permeates all our empirical experiences. Now, as we saw above, this view is challenged by Dreyfus's insistence that our skilful embodied coping constitutes a nonconceptual and self-sufficient (2007a, p. 363) ground upon which conceptuality is based. The question at present is whether it really is unproblematic to posit this kind of dependence relation between a nonconceptual "ground floor" and a conceptual "upper story," or whether it is possible to, as McDowell does, recognize the importance of our embodied coping skills in disclosing a field of practical affordances without feeling the need to account for it in terms of nonconceptuality.

In his to this date latest contribution to the debate, Dreyfus exploits a passage from Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995) concerning assertions made with regard to a badly placed blackboard in a lecture room. Heidegger first draws a distinction between the assertions "the board is black," which is "ready-made for logic and the study of grammar," and "the board is badly positioned," which is "simpler in the sense of something spoken naturally and spontaneously" (1995, p. 343). He then gives a preliminary account of the latter assertion where he notes that it does not determine an inherent property of the board as an isolated object, and suggests that one could rather understand the board's bad position as a subject-relative determinacy (ibid., p. 344). This account, however, is not satisfactory for Heidegger. We must not understand the board as badly positioned merely in relation to the subjects who perceive it, but rather as badly positioned relative to the whole situation in which the assertion is made.

> [T]he board is not – as this rash interpretation concluded – badly positioned in relation to us who are factically to be found here, rather the board is badly positioned in this lecture room. […] It is out of the manifestness of the lecture room that we experience the bad position of the board in the first place. Precisely this manifestness of the lecture room within which the board is badly positioned is what does not explicitly appear at all in the assertion. We do not first attain the manifestness of the lecture room via the assertion "The board is badly positioned,"

> rather this manifestness is the *condition of the possibility* of the board in general being something we can make judgments about. (1995, pp. 344-5).

Heidegger is here drawing attention to two important features of his assertion about the blackboard. First, he is clarifying what he in fact is doing in making the assertion. In asserting that the board is badly positioned, he is not providing an objective, situation-independent description of the board. Rather, what he in effect expresses is that the board is badly positioned *in that room in that kind of situation*. Secondly, this kind of situation-specificity means that we must understand the assertion as made possible by Heidegger's familiarity with the situation as a whole. It is from the perspective of being familiar with the room as a lecture room that Heidegger experiences the board as badly positioned. Had the room had some other purpose – for instance being a dance hall, which is Heidegger's example (ibid.) – he might have said that the board's position was a good one.

Now, Dreyfus claims that Heidegger's initial interpretation of the assertion as subject-relative presumably would "fit into McDowell's world of facts and judgments about them," but argues that what Heidegger goes on to say about the assertion being made possible by his familiarity with the situation as a whole is "as if objecting to McDowell's view" (2013, p. 20). The reason for this is that, on Dreyfus's view, we need to understand the background understanding Heidegger describes as the condition of possibility for making assertions as an essentially *nonconceptual* kind of understanding. Dreyfus writes:

> The moral of the blackboard example is that McDowell begins his description of the relation of mind and world too late. That human beings are open to a world of facts presupposes a nonpropositional, nonintentional, ongoing background activity that discloses our familiar world without the mediation of conceptual content. (2013, p. 23).

What does Dreyfus mean by saying that our background familiarity is nonconceptual? It seems that what he has in mind is that it is a familiarity on a purely practical level – a fundamental bodily grip on the world where there is no room for conceptuality. He describes the manifestness of the lecture room as a "skill" and as the "know-how that orients us in the lecture room and enables us to deal with things in it" (2013, p. 20). Heidegger's disclosing of the lecture room as the background for his lecture room related activities is in other words solely a matter of a nonconceptual practical familiarity with no space for involvement of his intellectual capacities. The lecture room is not primarily disclosed as an object or a collection of objects apprehensible in thought, but rather as a holistic system of practical affordances, solicitations, and availabilities – as, in Dreyfus's words, "a field of forces drawing us to keep up our ongoing coping like a pilot staying on the beam" (ibid., p. 21). The thought is that, as parts of the holistic "field of forces," the features of the lecture room do not primarily show up for Heidegger as objects about which such-and-such assertions can be made or thoughts can be had. On the contrary, they do in some sense not "show up" at all – they remain in the background as practical solicitations determined by their roles in the lecture room as the holistic background for his lecture giving activity. For instance, if the blackboard were positioned in a way that suited its role in the lecture room well, and Heidegger were completely absorbed in his activity of giving a lecture, he would not need to apprehend it as "a blackboard" in order to deal with it skilfully. It would merely be present in the form of one of the multitude of guiding forces for Heidegger's activity – one could say that, rather than being present as a blackboard, it would be given to him merely as "for-writing-on."

For Dreyfus, conceptuality comes into play only when one is not absorbed in coping, but rather takes up a distance to one's surroundings. In the case of the blackboard in the lecture room, this happens because the board's bad position disturbs what could otherwise have been a completely mindless dealing with it on Heidegger's part. The board cannot "withdraw" as the practical solicitation of "for-writing-on" because its position does not properly suit the activity it is meant to solicit in that situation – its role in the lecture room is to be written on, but its position is such that that activity cannot be easily performed. It is this "unready-to-hand" mode of being of the blackboard – to use the terminology Dreyfus adopts from Heidegger (ibid., p. 19) – that makes conceptuality, as Dreyfus puts it, "arise" (ibid., p. 31). The unready-to-hand mode of being of the blackboard establishes a distance between it and Heidegger – it shows up as "a blackboard" about which he can assert or judge that it is "badly positioned." Conceptuality, then, emerges only in "breaks" of our absorbed coping, and it emerges *out of* our absorbed coping in the sense that absorption in a background of familiar forces is the condition of possibility for it to emerge in the first place. It is, after all, Heidegger's already being absorbed in the familiar forces of the lecture room that enables him to sense the position of the board as a disturbance.

We should not doubt the importance of our background familiarity in making possible certain experiences and assertions. Neither need we reject the thought that the background familiarity in question involves disclosing a field of practical affordances that enable us to be skilfully and unreflectively involved in our surroundings. In order to account for the phenomenon of unreflective acting, we must acknowledge that we have the ability to be responsive to practical solicitations in a way that enable us to orient ourselves in familiar circumstances without having to reflect upon how we should deal with various objects. There is, then, a sense in which it is correct to say that if the blackboard's position suited its role in the lecture room, Heidegger's responsiveness to it as "for-writing-on" would not need to go "via" a thought of it *as* a blackboard – in the sense that he would not need to derive or infer its function of "for-writing-on" from a prior recognition of it as a blackboard. Such unreflective responsiveness to affordances can be made even more evident by considering how we cope with everyday objects such as, for instance, chairs. No person that is familiar with the practical function of chairs need to reflect upon whether or not a specific normal chair is for sitting on in order to be responsive to the activity it affords. It surely seems right to account for this ability in terms of bodily skills for disclosing a background of practical affordances for our activities, rather than in terms of intellectual operations of which the relevant action is the outcome.

None of this, however, suffices to justify Dreyfus's insistence that the disclosing of a familiar background constitutes a self-sufficient nonconceptual ground upon which conceptuality is based. Why should we think that the disclosing of a background in the form of a field of practical affordances necessarily excludes any involvement of our conceptual capacities? Is it not possible to argue that in disclosing a background in this way, we are also – at the same time – disclosing a world that is embraceable in thought? There is, after all, nothing intrinsically contradictory in claiming that familiarity with affordances also includes being open to *what it is that affords*. For instance, the fact that I am immediately drawn to sit on a chair without the mediation of reflection does not in itself exclude the possibility that I am also perceptually open to the chair as something that is available for being embraced in thought. Thus, we can agree with Dreyfus that an embodied familiarity with affordances is a necessary condition for our ability to experience a world, without committing ourselves to following him in holding that such a familiarity constitutes a *nonconceptual* ground level independent from involvement of rational capacities.

We can get a better grip on this if we consider how the human way of relating to the world differs from that of other animals. The way in which Dreyfus accounts for our embodied familiarity with affordances indicates that he sees it as a mere animal trait that is untouched by our distinctively human rational capacities.[21] Now we should of course not deny that embodied familiarity with and responsiveness to affordances is something that is shared by both rational and non-rational animals. There are, as McDowell puts it, “descriptions of things we can do that apply also to things other animals can do” (2007a, p. 343). It is, for instance, possible to describe the behaviour of both humans and other animals in terms of responding to practical affordances. But accepting this fact does not commit us to assume that what our perceptual capacities do for us in our embodied copings is identical to what the perceptual capacities of non-rational animals do for them.

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[21] This is something he explicitly argues in the first papers of the debate, for instance when he describes the ”ground floor” of absorbed coping as ”the nonlinguistic, nonconceptual discriminations of everyday perceivers and copers such as infants, animals and experts" (Dreyfus, 2006, p. 48), and says things such as ”happily, we are

There is a crucial difference between the mode of life of rational and non-rational animals. What this difference consists in can be expressed by saying that, whereas non-rational animals merely inhabit an environment, human beings are open to a *world*.[22] This is what Zahavi forgets or overlooks when he, as we saw above (2.2), argues that there is no reason to think that there is a style in subjectivity and experience that is unique for mature human beings. Non-rational animals have constraints on their mode of life that are stricter than those of human beings. Their mode of life is, as McDowell says, “structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives” (1994, p. 115).[23] In perceptually disclosing their surroundings, non-human animals are disclosing a mere environment the significance of which is fully determined by the biological forces of the animal’s nature. “The milieu it lives in can,” in McDowell’s words, “be no more than a succession of problems and opportunities” (ibid.). The emergence of linguistic, and hence *rational*, capacities, on the other hand, elevates human beings from this kind of restrictive mode of life in a mere environment into a life lived in a *world*; with the ability to decide what to think and do comes a freedom that makes the way in which we relate to our surroundings distinct from that of other animals. In being initiated into a language, we come to understand our surroundings as a topic for potential intersubjective agreement, as an object for *discursive activities*. In contrast to a mere environment, the *world* is, as Gadamer has said, ”the common ground […] uniting all who talk to one another” (2004, p. 443). Our perceptual capacities, then, open us to a world that is more than just an environment consisting of “biological forces” – the world in which rational

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only part-time rational animals” (2007a, p. 354). He has, however, omitted this line of argument from his latest contribution to the debate (2013), but does not, as far as I can see, offer a satisfying account of what it is that distinguishes human coping from that of non-rational animals.

[22] This way of putting it, which is frequently used by McDowell, both in his debate with Dreyfus (e.g. 2007a, p. 346) and in his earlier works (e.g. 1994, p. 115), is directly borrowed from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (2004, e.g. pp. 442-3)

[23] To avoid misunderstandings of what this amounts to, McDowell continues: ”That is not to imply that the life is restricted to a struggle to keep the individual and the species going. There can be immediate biological imperatives that are at most indirectly connected with survival and reproduction: for instance, the impulse to play, which is found in many animals” (McDowell, 1994, p. 115).

animals live transcends its natural and biological significances and enable what McDowell follows Gadamer in calling a “free, distanced orientation,” (1994, p. 117; 2007a, p. 346)[24] elevated from the constraints of biological imperatives.

If there is something to this distinction between being open to a world and merely inhabiting an environment, it is natural to assume that there is a difference also in the disclosing enabled by the embodied coping skills of humans and non-human animals. After all, our embodied coping skills discloses a background for an openness to a *world*, whereas all the coping skills of mere animals ever can disclose is an environment permeated with biological imperatives. That is to say, while the perceptual capacities of non-rational animals in some sense can be said to disclose *only* affordances, the same cannot be said with regard to human beings. There is, as McDowell says, “more to our embodied coping than there is to the embodied coping of nonrational animals” (2007a, p. 344). What this means is that, although we can agree with Dreyfus that familiarity with affordances is crucial for our being able to experience a world at all, we must understand our relation to affordances in a different light than that of other animals – our openness to affordances is not an openness to *mere* affordances and nothing more.[25] As our capacity for rationality entails an entirely different way of relating to our surroundings, we should not think that our embodied coping skills, which are what enable our openness to the world, are, so to speak, indifferent to the kind of openness they enable. When our way of relating to our surroundings becomes characterizable as openness to the world, our embodied coping skills do not preserve their “original nature” in the form of being a self-sufficient “ground layer” that enables but is independent from our openness to the thinkable world; rather, the openness to affordances achieved by our coping skills becomes, in McDowell’s words, *part of* our openness to the world (ibid., p. 345). We must thus understand our “acquisition” of rationality not simply as an addition of a new layer on top of an otherwise unchanged animal nature, but rather as a restructuring of the *whole* of our being-in-the-world.

McDowell’s project, then, does not – as Dreyfus seems to fear – entail an undermining of the insight that we deal with the world by way of our bodily coping skills in favour of positing a picture where a self-standing rational mind does the job by itself as it were. Embodied coping skills are a necessary condition for our being able to experience the world, but in virtue of being the embodied coping skills of rational animals, what they disclose is not restricted to a field of mere solicitations to act. The openness to affordances that is achieved by way of our skilful bodies is, *qua* a rational animal's openness to affordances, informed by our capacity for rationality and thus not *just* an openness to affordances, but rather part of our openness to the world. After the transition from non-rational to rational animal, our perceptual affordances are no longer mere biologically determined forces, but take on a new kind of significance – they become, as McDowell puts it, data for our rationality (2007a, p. 344).

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[24] McDowell quotes from *Truth and Method* (2004, p. 445). It is important not to equate the “distanced orientation” mentioned here with the “detached” distance Dreyfus associates with mindedness. Whereas Dreyfus talks about a reflective distance between mind and world, McDowell and Gadamer has in mind the distance humans have from biological imperatives.

[25] “Becoming open to the world,” McDowell argues, “transforms the character of the disclosing that perception does for us, *including* the disclosing of affordances that, if we had not achieved openness to the world, would have belonged to a merely animal competence at inhabiting an environment” (ibid., McDowell’s emphasis).

Responsiveness to affordances is, as said, a trait we can be said to have in common with non-rational animals. Both a human being and a cat can be expected to respond to the affordance constituted by an opening in a wall by going through it, and their responses *qua* responses to affordances can in that sense be said to be alike. But it does not follow from this that the nature of the actual responses is of the same kind. One can still argue – as McDowell does – that the human being's response is different from that of the cat in the sense that it is her "rationality at work" (ibid., p. 343). The human perceiver will perceive the opening not *just* as affording going through, but also as part of a world that can be embraced in thought – as something suitable for being conceptually articulated (for instance in terms of "an opening in the wall").

It is Dreyfus's rejection of this thought that makes him a victim of the Myth of the Given in the version of a "phenomenological foundationalism." Although he in the end agrees that there is an important difference between the mode of life of human beings and other animals, and that this difference consists in our possession of rational capacities, he seems to think that it is displayed solely in the active *exercising* of those capacities. That is, the difference is marked by the fact that we *can*, as he puts it, "step back and reflect" (2007a, p. 354), but the possession of that capacity does not have any influence at the level of embodied coping: "Capacities are exercised on occasion […] [They] can't pervade anything" (2007b, p. 372).[26] In denying entrance of any capacities associated with conceptual rationality at the level that is supposed to be the ground and enabling condition for the exercise of such capacities, Dreyfus is positing a problematical relation between these two "levels" of human existence.

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[26] Dreyfus corrects this categorical rejection of always operative and pervasive capacities in his latest contribution to the debate, on the ground that he sees the thought of a pervasive capacity as illuminating Heidegger's notion of "mineness" (2013, p. 30). He does, however, continue to refuse that rationality is the sort of capacity that can be always operative. It could be interesting to look further into what the notion of "mineness" amounts to, and whether Dreyfus really is justified in thinking that it does not imply a concession to McDowell's project. He does, after all, note that it marks a contrast between the activity of human and non-human animals (ibid.), and his insistence that it does not entail a "pervasive ego" (ibid.) is – as we have seen – not in conflict with anything McDowell argues. Unfortunately, I will not be able to investigate this issue further at present.

We can return to the case of Heidegger's assertion about the blackboard to elaborate this point. Heidegger's embodied familiarity with the situation is the enabling condition for his assertion: It is that in virtue of which he is able to perceive the blackboard's position as deviating from what it ought to be given the function the board has in that situation. Now, another way to put this point is to say that the understanding that is the enabling condition for the assertion in some way or other amounts to an understanding of what makes it the case that the position of the board is bad. This, in turn, seems to imply that the familiarity in question involves something on the line of an understanding of *the reason for why* it is appropriate to say that the board is badly positioned. As noted earlier, if the situation had been different, or if Heidegger had misinterpreted it and believed the room was being used as a dance hall, he might not have made that assertion. Such contextual understanding – whether it is the familiarity with the room as a lecture room or the mistaken belief that it is a dance hall – will of course primarily be manifested and displayed in the way in which the situation is unreflectively dealt with. But it does not follow from this that the familiarity in question is essentially beyond the reach of conceptual exploitation, that it cannot also have a rational significance. On the contrary, it seems that it *must* be something that can be appealed to in a rational discourse about whether or not the board's position is bad – for instance by saying "it is badly placed because I need it to write on." On Dreyfus's view, however, that cannot be the case. As he conceives it, the understanding that is the assertion's "ground" cannot amount to anything that can be called Heidegger's *reason* for asserting that the board is badly positioned. After all, a reason entails availability for being conceptually exploited as such, and Dreyfus insists that Heidegger's background understanding is a mere *nonconceptual* familiarity.

Taken at face value it seems that Dreyfus's position entails that Heidegger is making his assertion that the board is badly positioned without – at least at the moment – having any conscious access to why that is so, perhaps in a way somewhat similar to how one can sometimes get a feeling that "something is wrong" without having a reason for feeling that way. But of course, Heidegger does not just suddenly and surprisingly find himself seeing the board as badly positioned, as if it were a state forced upon him by powers outside his control. If we imagine a case where a person ignorant of the fact that she is in a lecture room where a lecture is taking place asks Heidegger why he is claiming that the blackboard is badly placed, it is natural to suppose that his response would amount to something more than merely “I don’t really know” or “that is just the way it is.” Rather, we would expect him to be able to respond with something on the lines of “I am going to give a lecture, and I can’t use it to write on when it is placed like that,” and do so quite immediately, without any effort of reflection, as if what he says was already available for him to express. Dreyfus would probably not dispute this, but the fact still remains that, on his view, what Heidegger would respond on such an occasion cannot amount to an expression of anything like the understanding that enabled him to make the assertion about the board in the first place.

If we approach the blackboard example from the perspective of McDowell’s view of the workings of our perceptual capacities, we can account for Heidegger’s imagined response in terms of a making explicit of features of his implicit contextual understanding of the lecture room. That is, if we hold that Heidegger’s background disclosing not only consists in becoming familiar with a mere field of practical affordances, but also in becoming open to a world embraceable in thought, we can say that the familiarity Heidegger has, which is presupposed for him to be able to make the assertion, involves an understanding of the situation and its environmental constituents as already available for conceptual exploitation. In short, we can say that Heidegger’s skilful familiarity with the lecture room involves him understanding it *as* a lecture room in which he is to give a lecture, and his practical grasp of the blackboard in light of its situation-determined role involves him understanding it *as* a blackboard the use of which in that situation is to be written on. When he explicitly appeals to versions of these facts, then, he can be said to make explicit an implicit understanding that until then had been manifested in his ability to skilfully deal with the situation.

It must be emphasized that this way of putting it is an attempt to undermine the importance of our embodied coping skills in constituting a necessary condition for our ability to perceptually engage with the world. It is not a matter of substituting Dreyfus’s view with one where all the work is done by a self-sufficient and disembodied intellect – of, so to speak, substituting a ground of mere practical familiarity with affordances with a primacy of pure theoretical apprehension of ideas. There is no attempt here to dispute the fact that our embodied coping skills are indispensable in anchoring us to a world to which we are perceptually open. The point is, to return to the specific case in question, that we can appreciate and acknowledge the importance of Heidegger’s embodied coping skills in enabling his assertion, without feeling obligated to thus *exclude* any involvement of his conceptual capacities from the picture. As argued above, the embodied coping of rational animals is different from that of non-rational animals in the sense that the world we are perceptually open to is significant in a way – or presented to us in a form – that is exclusively tied to our unique capacity for exploiting it in discursive activities. This is not to overlook or dismiss the importance of our embodied coping skills, but to recognize that there is something *more* to the embodied coping of rational animals compared to that of non-rational animals, in the sense that the discursive capacities that distinguish us from other animals are involved *in* our embodied copings.

Now, while the contrasting of the sort of perceptual access enjoyed by humans from that of non-rational animals marks an illuminative approach to explaining the role played by conceptual capacities in perception, it should be noted that the above discussion has not provided an answer to the question that ended the previous chapter. It has become clear that McDowell's notion of conceptuality does not entail the intellectualist implications Dreyfus associates with it, but we have still not gotten a more elaborate account of what the function that is supposed to ensure the categorial unity of experience really amounts to. It might open us to a world and thus elevate us from a mere *milieu*, but *how* – in what way – does it do so? As it turns out, a proper account of the phenomena by which we become open to a world will not emerge before we examine the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty in the third and final chapter.

2.5 Dreyfus's Division of Mindedness and Embodiment

How can conceptuality "arise" from and be based upon a mindless familiarity that nonconceptually discloses a background merely as a field of interrelated practical affordances? If the embodied disclosing of a background is to do the job Dreyfus ascribes to it, as a ground and enabling condition for exercise of conceptual capacities, then the insistence that it is essentially devoid of involvement of conceptual rationality seems to leave mysterious how these two "layers" of human existence can be related. How can a purely practical (in the sense of nonconceptual) disclosing of the blackboard as soliciting being written on be the ground for Heidegger's exploitation of it *as* a blackboard embraceable in discursive activities?

In what looks like an attempt to begin to explain this, Dreyfus (2013, p. 21) quotes a passage where Heidegger states that "precisely in order to experience *what* and *how* beings in each case *are* in themselves as the beings that they *are*, we must – although not conceptually – already understand something like the what-being and that-being of beings" (1995, p. 357, emphasis in original). Dreyfus obviously takes the understanding of "something like the what-being and that-being of beings" to refer to the kind of understanding he ascribes to our nonconceptual embodied coping skills. That, however, only raises further questions. What does it mean to nonconceptually understand the what-being and that-being of beings, and what is the relation between that kind of understanding and the conceptual understanding it supposedly works as a ground for?

It might be that Dreyfus, in his exploitation of Heidegger's claim, mistakenly takes a mere terminological difference as support for his own view. That is, although Heidegger says "not conceptually," that does not necessarily mean "nonconceptual" in the sense that would be in conflict with the conceptualist picture. When McDowell claims that conceptuality is involved in our experiences, what he means is that we are already in our experiences presented with content of the sort is *available* for conceptual articulation. Now, to claim that we must already understand something like the what and that-being of beings seems to amount to a similar thought. I doubt, for instance, that Heidegger would hold that this presupposition for experiencing "*how* beings in each case *are* in themselves as the beings that they *are*" belong to a "ground floor" of our being-in-the-world that we share with non-rational animals. On the contrary, he seems to be referring to a uniquely human way of understanding things – a way of understanding things, moreover, that is a necessary condition for being able to experience them as displaying factual states of affairs.[27] If this – arguably more favourable – reading of Heidegger is correct, what is at issue is merely different ways of using the word "conceptual." The claim that we do not in the first instance understand the that-being and what-being of beings "conceptually" can for instance mean that it precedes actual *thematizing* or explicit thought, which is perfectly compatible with McDowell's conceptualism. Thus, on a charitable reading of Heidegger, we can take him to agree with McDowell that the ability to embrace the empirical world in thought presupposes that it is disclosed as already available for us in a form that is suitable for being conceptually exploited.[28]

This, however, is not how Dreyfus wants to understand it. A passage from "The Return of the Myth of the Mental" is illuminating in this regard:

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[27] This is at least how I interpret the emphasis on *how* and *are* in the sentence I refer to.

[28] In the first endnote of Dreyfus's *Response to McDowell* (2007b, p. 377) he admits that "Heidegger does say that, unlike animals, we always cope with beings as beings," which seems to support my interpretation of what already understanding "the what-being and that-being of beings" amounts to. Dreyfus, however, goes on to say that we must understand this as an *ontological* and not a *phenomenological* claim. He does, in my view, not provide satisfactory grounds for why that is the case. Moreover, is not Heidegger's ontology a *phenomenological* ontology?

> 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". […] 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 […]. (2007a, p. 360).

Focusing on something in the sense of thinking it or making it explicit, then, is to *transform* content that is in principle unthinkable into thinkable content. When I direct my attention to the kitchen chair and think about it, I do not simply focus my gaze on something that was already, in my unreflective coping with it and the kitchen as a whole, present for me in the form of something available for being embraced in thought. Rather, by directing my attention to it in that way I am transforming what was until then only a mindless disclosing of the chair in the form of a guiding force for my unreflective coping into an understanding of the chair *as* a chair. Given how Dreyfus thinks about this, "transform" is surely the right word for this process. He is not talking about something like a process of translation, where the result preserves roughly the same significance as the starting point, but a radical alteration from one kind of significance (purely bodily and mindless) to a completely different one (minded, conceptual), where – it seems – no sort of similarity can be found between the two. Given this radical distinction between the "ground floor of embodied coping" and mindedness, it is difficult to see how the latter can be based or grounded on the former at all.

One would expect Dreyfus to have an account ready of how this scenario is possible, but that is not the case. On the contrary, he confesses that the bridging of nonconceptual absorption and conceptual mindedness is still a problem to be solved. He admits that "[the phenomenologist] owes an account of how our absorbed, situated experience comes to be transformed so that we experience context-free, self-sufficient substances with detachable properties" (2007a, p. 364), and defines it as an urgent and challenging task of both analytic and continental philosophy to "[show] how our conceptual capacities grow out of our nonconceptual ones – how the ground floor of pure perception and receptive coping supports the conceptual upper stories of the edifice of knowledge" (2006, pp. 48-9). The relation between embodied coping and mindedness, then, is – at least for Dreyfus – truly mysterious.

Though I agree with Dreyfus that there still are philosophically interesting things left to be said about the relation between conceptuality and embodiment, I am sceptical as to whether the problem he sets up is the best starting point for such an endeavour. If one wants to get a better understanding of how two notions are connected, it is seldom advantageous to start out by defining them in a way that in effect renders them incommensurable. This was Descartes's vice when he formed his notions of subject and object, and thus discovered a dualism that still haunts some areas of philosophy. By asserting that "the ground floor level of everyday coping is self-sufficient" in the sense that "we [in principle] could go on coping in flow" without ever needing involvement of the mind (2007a, p. 363) and, moreover, declaring that "mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping" (ibid., p. 353), Dreyfus is arguably dangerously close to creating a dualism of his own. The distinction he sets up between embodiment and mindedness entails that there can only be an external relation between the two, and it thus looks as if there is a "gap" that needs to be bridged by a process that remains to be found.

The assumption that leads Dreyfus to this problematical result is the thought that mindedness necessarily involves distance and reflection. By thinking that the mind is something that appears only on occasion and then in the form of a subject at a "distance" from the world that actively reflects and deliberates about what to do, or contemplates about what it perceives, Dreyfus is accepting what McDowell calls "the Myth of the Mind as Detached" (2013, p. 41). Starting from this assumption, Dreyfus sees it as necessary to rid mindedness from the picture of embodied coping altogether, which results in a problematical phenomenological foundationalism. By rejecting the "over-intellectualized" conception of mindedness presupposed in Dreyfus's view, it becomes possible to – as McDowell does – hold that the connection between embodiment and mindedness is not one of disjunction and an external relation, but rather one of *continuity* and an *internal* relation.

2.6 Conclusion and a Challenge to McDowell

I have argued that Dreyfus presupposes an unjustified opposition between our conceptual and embodied capacities. This is to a large degree due to his conviction that our conceptual capacities are in principle entailing *detachment*, understood as a contemplative attitude towards one's surroundings and exercises of agency. I have tried to show that this is an assumption McDowell does not share, and thus that most of Dreyfus's objections seems to be directed at a straw man version of the conceptualist view.

The way to reject this assumption about what conceptuality amounts to, and the problematic division between "top" and "ground" layers that results from it, is to fully recognize the meaning of the thought that human beings are rational animals – that conceptual rationality is our second nature and hence an *integrated* part of our animal lives. Thanks to the involvement of the capacities that are actualized by being initiated into a language and a tradition, we become open to a *world* in the sense that what we do and experience in our lives have the kind of significance that is suitable for exploitation in thought and speech. We do not first become open to the world embraceable in thought when we start to actively exercise our capacities for articulating it conceptually. For human beings, *qua* rational animals, the thinkable and expressible world is the world in which we always already live. Just as conceptual rationality with regards to action marks the distinctive *form* of exercises of human agency as such, conceptuality's involvement in human perception marks the distinctive form in which human beings perceptually relate to the world. Our intellectual capacities are involved *in* our embodied copings, not "before" them like a determining force that "produces" perceptions and actions by way of reasoning, which is the intellectualism Dreyfus fears, or "after" them as a tool applied on material already provided by way of some other process, which is the view he thinks is the only other alternative.

Having thus concluded that McDowell's project does not entail an undermining of the role of our embodied coping skills in action and perception in the way Dreyfus claims it does, and moreover that it is rather the latter's view that contains assumptions that are philosophically problematic, I want to end this chapter by acknowledging that there still remains a potential challenge to McDowell's conceptualism concerning its relation to a proper phenomenology of embodiment.

McDowell has – contrary to Dreyfus's accusations – been aware of and defended the importance of embodiment long before the present debate.[29] Moreover, in his first reply to Dreyfus he states that a phenomenology of embodiment is suited to fill out the details of what is presupposed by his conceptualist project (2007a, p. 349). He has, however, never made any direct effort to link his project to a theory of embodiment. This is probably because he does not see such an effort as required by or directly relevant for his project, which is arguably understandable. From a purely epistemological perspective, McDowell's conceptualism makes for a satisfactory and sufficient position. It accomplishes its purpose of providing an account of how our experiences can serve as rational constraints on our thoughts and beliefs without falling victim to the Myth of the Given. Given the nature of this approach, it is arguably fairly unproblematical that McDowell keeps his claims at the abstract level of the conditions of possibility for empirical knowledge and responsibility in human agency. But a

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[29] See for instance his critique of Kant's notion of self as not explicitly enough situated as "a bodily presence in the world" (McDowell, 1994, p. 104).

"filling out" by a phenomenology of embodiment of what is presupposed by McDowell's claims will have to show how notions such as "mindedness," "rationality," and "conceptuality" are grounded in the phenomenon of the human body, and from the perspective of that kind of project McDowell's conceptualism does not offer the best starting point.

Although, as I have been arguing, McDowell's conceptualism does not entail an *undermining* of the phenomenon of embodiment in the sense of being in direct conflict with it, there is arguably something to the claim that it *overlooks* it, as the consequences of a phenomenology of embodiment are not taken explicitly into account. McDowell grounds his understanding of conceptual rationality in the phenomena of thought and language, and the main goal of his project is to offer an account of how those notions relate to our experiences. Though this might not be a problem from a purely epistemological perspective, it is a too abstract and narrow starting point if the goal is to provide a broader account of rationality and embodiment.

This leads me to a partial acknowledgment of the spirit behind Dreyfus's criticism of McDowell. From the perspective of a phenomenology of embodiment, a satisfactory account of how human beings relate to the world will have to start with the body as the place where all human capacities come together in a single unified phenomenon. The fact that McDowell's project is centred solely on the phenomena of rationality and discursive knowledge without any elaborate account of how they fit into a holistic picture of humans as embodied beings, is apt to give the impression that rationality and thought is assumed to belong to a self-standing sphere of human life elevated from our bodily facticity. What it is to be a rational animal cannot be fully understood by starting from an abstract idea of the nature of rationality; embodiment is not merely an additional detail that can be filled in after the fact, but will have to serve as the starting point where rationality first reveals its true nature.[30]

What the defence of McDowell's conceptualism against Dreyfus's criticism still lacks is an account that manages to ground an appreciation of the importance of rationality in human life in a proper phenomenology of embodiment. As it stands, we have, on the one hand, a phenomenology of embodiment that, according to its advocate, does not support any form of conceptualism, and, on the other, a theory of rationality's role in experience the advocate of which claims is compatible with a phenomenology of embodiment, though he does not himself seem interested in providing the link. In the next chapter I will argue that the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a solid solution to this tension.

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[30] That being said, this remark does not serve to give any substantial credit to Dreyfus's actual objections. Whereas McDowell merely refrains from establishing an explicit link between rationality and embodiment, Dreyfus assumes a seemingly unbridgeable division between the two notions.

3. Singing the World

3.1 Introduction

Is a proper appreciation of the phenomenon of embodiment compatible with the idea of mindedness as a capacity that permeates our human lives? According to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the answer seems to be positive. On his view, humans, unlike other animals, are perceptually open to a kind of "sense" or meaning that is essentially connected to intersubjectivity and, consequently, the capacity for speech. These distinctively human features do not constitute an additional ingredient upon our animal nature; they mark a restructuring of our whole bodily being so as to enable a new mode of life. In other words, they do not belong to a faculty elevated from our animal nature, but are manifested in bodily capacities for coping within a human world.

In this way Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology offers the most satisfactory solution to the question of the role of mindedness in perception. On the one hand, his notion of perceptual sense involves more than Hubert Dreyfus's "nonconceptual solicitations" and thus represents a view closer to that of John McDowell. There is, as we shall see, no room in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for a perceptual "ground floor." On the other hand, the understanding of the relation between rationality and perception that emerges from Merleau-Ponty's works marks an advantage over McDowell's view in that it fully accomplishes what the latter manages only half-heartedly – namely, to establish a proper de-intellectualized conception of the intellect. This is done by centring the notion of meaning not so much on the concept as on the *gesture*, and by showing how a certain bodily and existential attitude – "the categorial attitude" – underlies the possibility of finding and exploiting this kind of sense.

In the forthcoming section (3.2), after a brief introduction to crucial elements of his phenomenology, I will draw attention to what we might see as an anthropological point of convergence between Merleau-Ponty and McDowell. Thereafter (3.3) I confront Merleau-Ponty's division between two kinds of intentionality and argue – against Dreyfus and others – that this does not necessarily entail a nonconceptualist understanding of perception. The two sections following this is aimed at disclosing a positive account of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological solution to the issue in question: First (3.4) I examine the notion of gestural or expressive meaning, and how it relates to both speech and perception, then (3.5) I place this in the context of the notion of the categorial attitude, which will prove to be the "function" underlying both the unity of the perceived world and the possibility of linguistic expression.

3.2 Rational Animals?

Merleau-Ponty is known for placing perception and embodiment at the centre of his philosophical project. "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (1964b, p. 13). It is by perception we relate to and engage with the world, and the living, active human body is what we must start with and continue to return to in order to understand our perceptual connection to the world. Drawing inspiration from Gestalt psychology, a central element in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the dynamic relation between figure and background in perception. We always perceive features of the world against a *background* that enables and informs the way in which the perceptual "foreground" appears – this figure-background dynamic thus constitutes a holistic structure that defines the nature of perception. "The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of some other thing, it always belongs to a 'field'" (2012, p. 4). An aspect of the role of the perceptual background must, as Sean Kelly observes in his paper[1] on this topic, be understood as an implicit contribution of *perspectives* from the surroundings upon the focal object that let its hidden sides have a positive – yet indeterminate – presence in the form of a *norm* that leads us toward the optimal bodily grip upon the object as a whole.[2]

This introduction seems to lend support to Dreyfus's view. From the perspective of Kelly's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, it is the body's practical grasp upon the world – and not anything recognizable as intellectual capacities – that constitutes the primordial perceptual relation to the world. Moreover, if we take Merleau-Ponty's explicit anti-intellectualism into consideration, the possibility of finding a role for rationality or mindedness at the ground level of perception appears even less likely.[3]

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[1] "Seeing Things in Merleau-Ponty" (2005), from *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (ed. Carman, T. & Hansen, M. B. N.)

[2] Kelly arrives at this understanding of the role of the perceptual background by finding a convincing connection between Merleau-Ponty's remarks about "seeing things" and his account of how the lighting of a room play a crucial background role in enabling colour constancy (the phenomenon that, for instance, lets the same thing appear to have the same colour even though shadows or a change of light entails that it would produce differing sensations. "Lighting and reflection," Merleau-Ponty states, "only play their role if they fade into the background as discreet intermediaries, and if they *direct* our gaze rather than arresting it" (2012, p. 323). The thought here is that the dynamic between the "real" colour of the thing and the background of lightning enables the perceived colour to appear as *constant* by establishing it as a norm that leads my gaze toward where I can best grasp it. Merleau-Ponty likely takes something similar to be the case with the role of "seeing things:" "I can see one object insofar as […] each of them arranges the others around itself like spectators of its hidden aspects and the guarantee of their permanence" (ibid., p. 71). Thus, the background constitutes a "view from everywhere" upon the thing, which, as Kelly notes, "is the optimum perspective from which to view the thing, the perspective from which one grips it maximally" (2005, p. 91).

There are, however, reasons to believe that this anti-intellectualism does not amount to an overall dismissal of a role for rationality at the ground level of perception. As Étienne Bimbenet notes in addressing what he sees as a metaphysical or speculative similarity between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty, they have a philosophical style in common marked by their endeavour to establish a third alternative between and beyond what they recognize as two equally unsatisfying positions (2009, p. 72). As in McDowell's "balancing position" between coherentism and the empiricist Myth of the Given, Merleau-Ponty's alternative to empiricism and intellectualism is not so much a complete refusal of everything that can be briefly associated with these views as it is an acknowledgement and reconciliation of important observations from both sides made possible by a new way of understanding them. Thus, it seems likely that Merleau-Ponty's anti-intellectualism is not a rejection of a role for the intellect in perception, but rather a new way of understanding *the way in which* the intellect is involved. In fact Merleau-Ponty notes, concerning a particular aspect of intellectualism, that "the intellectualist analysis, here as everywhere, is less false than it is abstract" (2012, p. 126), which hints toward his project as more of an existential *situating* of intellectualist theses rather than a downright dismissal of them.

We find the first clue regarding Merleau-Ponty's understanding of rationality's relation to human life in *The Structure of Behavior* (1963). With regard to the existential structure of human life, he puts forward claims that seem to directly support McDowell's insistence that we must understand rationality as an *integral* aspect of our animal nature. This is evident in a statement that, by itself, seems to explicitly oppose McDowell's view: "Man is not a rational animal" (1963, p. 181). The line of thought this statement actually is directed at, however, is arguably more like that of Dreyfus. This becomes clear in the continuation of the cited passage: "The appearance of reason and mind does not leave intact a sphere of self-enclosed instincts in man" (ibid.). Human beings are not "mere" animals with rationality added "on top"; being human, which involves being minded and rational, entails an entirely different structure than that of non-rational animals. This obviously has consequences for our understanding of human perception. Addressing this issue, Merleau-Ponty sympathetically cites Herder's remark that "if man had the senses of an animal, he would not have reason"

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[3] E.g his remarks that "perception is not an act of the understanding" (2012, p. 47) and "to perceive in the full sense of the word […] is not to judge, but rather to grasp, prior to all judgment, a sense immanent in the sensible" (ibid., p. 36).

(ibid.). The implications of this with regard to understanding Merleau-Ponty's works are significant. We should, as Bimbenet notes, constantly have this quote in mind when reading the *Phenomenology of Perception* (2009, p. 65). The phenomenological descriptions of perception do not attempt to establish a perceptual common ground between humans and other animals, but are always intended as descriptions of precisely *human* perception – perception, that is, which is far from indifferent to the "appearance of reason and mind" in the human organism.

What, then, contrasts the human way of perceiving from that of the mere animal? Another passage from *The Structure of Behavior* is illuminating in this respect, and, as it is directly linked to the notion of the categorial attitude, it can serve as a precursor for the forthcoming discussions. What defines human perception and is absent from how mere animals are able to relate to their surroundings is a certain kind of *flexibility* that lets perceived objects display an indefinite number of possibilities while remaining *the same unified thing*. In other words, this "symbolic function" of human perception enables the thing to present itself as something *more* than – or something *beyond* – a particular and immediate relevance. When a monkey has discovered that a tree branch can be used as a stick to reach high hanging fruit, Merleau-Ponty notes, "the tree branch as such is eliminated" (1963, p. 175). It is no longer *the same thing* for the monkey as it was prior to the discovery, but appear anew as defined by its new use value. Consequently we must say that the monkey does not perceive "things" at all; it perceives, as Bimbenet puts it, "what is needed under a given practical determined perspective" (2009, p. 66). This, of course, in contrast to humans, for which – in Merleau-Ponty's words – "the tree branch which has become a stick will remain precisely a tree-branch-which-has-become-a-stick, the same *thing* in two different functions and visible [for us] under a plurality of aspects" (1963, p. 175).

How can Dreyfus incorporate these observations into his view? He will surely not deny that humans, in contrast to other animals, are *able* to perceive "things," but it seems that this cannot be a capacity that is operative at what he takes to be the "ground level" of perception, where all that is disclosed is solicitations for action. However, it is pretty clear from Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the difference between human and animal perception that the former always already involves the perception of something *more* than mere practical functional values. This will be made even more evident in the forthcoming sections.

These considerations regarding the distinctively human capacity of "thing-consciousness" provides an important pointer towards Merleau-Ponty's notion of perceptual sense, which is the topic of a later discussion (3.4-5). That is, the reference to the ability to perceive things as such is one way of accounting for the opening onto a meaningful core of perceptual presence that, on Merleau-Ponty's view, defines human perception. Moreover, we here catch a glimpse of a new way of understanding – or at least a new aspect of – the role of "seeing things" as a perceptual background. Ultimately, the capacity to be perceptually open to things as such is a marker of a fundamentally *intersubjectively informed* attitude towards the perceived world. The role of the "perspectives" provided by the features of our perceptual background is not merely to be dumb indicators of the perceived object's hidden physical aspects, but represents potential gazes of other human subjects that liberates the perceptual sense from the object's immediate and concrete givenness and lets it express an intersubjective significance. It is precisely this implicit understanding of the perceived object as something equally and simultaneously available to *others* that marks the flexibility of human perception and thus enables things to be visible for us "under a plurality of aspects." In short, we must recognize intersubjectivity as an essential enabling condition for the sort of meaning that defines the way in which the world is present to human perceivers. This does not render Kelly's interpretation of "seeing things" false, but it adds a new dimension to it. We must now understand the contribution of the background's multiplicity of perspectives not *just* as establishing a norm directing us toward the optimal bodily grip upon the object, but also as enabling a sort of perceptual sense that is exclusively human.

That human beings perceive intersubjectively available significances as opposed to mere monotonous use values seems to align with the idea explored in the previous chapter, that whereas non-human animals inhabit mere environments or *milieus*, humans are open to a *world*. A further clue for this can be found in what might be seen as an extension of the thought that "the appearance of reason and mind does not leave intact a sphere of self-enclosed instincts in man" (1963, p 181) – namely, that the appearance of culture does not leave intact a sphere of pure nature in the human world. "It is," Merleau-Ponty argues, "impossible to superimpose upon man both a primary layer of behaviours that could be called 'natural' and a constructed cultural or spiritual world" (2012, p. 195). That is, none of the meaning we find in our human world, whether it concerns the behaviour of others or aspects of the world in general, is *untouched* by the culture in which it expresses itself. Nature and biology does not constitute autonomous contributions of meaning independent from the space of meaning enabled by culture. The emergence of culture or of the human world, then, marks a certain "transformation" of nature; it enables the natural to express itself in a new way, only graspable from the perspective of a *cultural* animal. Already the emergence of mere animal life represents a kind of "transformation" in this sense; it "makes 'food' appear over here and a 'hiding place' over there, and gives to 'stimuli' a sense that they did not have" (ibid.). This, however, is "even more the case" with the presence of humans in the world (ibid.).

What is the relevance of this with regard to the issue in question? What we can learn from the above remarks is that, for Merleau-Ponty, human perception is not indifferent to the fact that the perceiver inhabits a certain culture. Once again, this seems to constitute a problem unanswered by Dreyfus's view. As Berendzen points out, "the human world is not just the world of pragmatic coping. It is the world of culture, wherein things can be elegant or dreary" (2010, p. 642). There is a *meaning* in the perceived world that is *more* than merely solicitations for coping. This, in fact, resembles an argument Merleau-Ponty directs against empiricism:

> They [empiricists] conceal from us the 'cultural world' or the 'human world' in which almost our entire life nonetheless happens. […] There is nothing [for them] in the sensible appearance of a landscape, an object, or a body that predestines it to have the air of being 'gay' or 'sad,' 'lively' or 'gloomy,' 'elegant' or 'crude.' [For empiricism,] there can no longer be an *objective spirit*: mental life withdraws into consciousnesses that are isolated and given over solely to introspection, rather than taking place, as appears to be the case, in the human space made up of those with whom I discuss or of those with whom I live, the place where I work or the place of my happiness. (2012, p. 25).

What these terms refer to – whether it is the "cultural" or "human world," or the Hegelian "objective spirit" – are our *intersubjective institutions*, our "social, cultural, and political formations" (Berendzen, 2010, p. 643). Merleau-Ponty's point, then, is that these institutions inform our perceptual engagements with the world – our familiarity with them enables significations relevant to them to present themselves to us in our experiences. Empiricism cannot accommodate this fact because it assumes that what we are given in perception is a purely natural contribution of mere sensations. Though this is far from Dreyfus's view, it seems equally difficult to make room for an "objective spirit" in his picture of a nonconceptual field of practical solicitations.

Our cultural institutions are, as Berendzen notes, constituted by way of *intersubjective interaction* (ibid.), and this inevitably points toward language as an essential component. Is there a culturally instituted meaning that is *not* also linguistically expressible? Arguably, it seems to be a necessary link between the two. We find evidence of the same thought in Merleau-Ponty. "What is simply true," he says, "is that, of all the expressive operations, speech alone is capable of sedimenting and of constituting an intersubjective acquisition" (2012, p. 196). The meanings of our human world are preserved or *sedimented* in language; as previously used expressions, they constitute "a fortune" of available expressions referred to by Merleau-Ponty as "spoken speech" (ibid., pp. 202-3). Thus, if we are to understand perceptual meaning as culturally informed, it seems that we must also conceive of it as linguistically expressible and, consequently, conceptually available.

Dreyfus's view undermines this insight regarding the essential role of the cultural world in human perception by not making room for linguistic capacities in perception. What he seems to forget is that, being the kind of animal that we are, we do not merely cope with a world of purely practical problems. The cultural or human world encloses us at every instance, it is the world in which we are born and the world we inhabit. Human children must, from the moment they are born, learn to cope with a world that is, in Berendzen's words, "already saturated with language" (2010, p. 640). Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the same thought when he, in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, cites Delacroix in stating that "the child bathes in language" (1973, p. 12), and perhaps even more when he in *The Structure of Behavior* – as if directed at Dreyfus – reminds us that we should not "forget the role which language plays in the constitution of the perceived world" (1963, p. 167).

The aspects of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology considered in this section seem to almost perfectly converge with McDowell's thoughts regarding the same issues. Mindedness or rationality is not an extra feature in addition to our animal nature, but concerns the whole existential structure of human life – it is, as McDowell would say, our *second nature*. This is inextricably linked to the way in which we are perceptually open to the world. The world is something *more* for us than it is for non-human animals; it signifies something beyond what is immediately and practically relevant to us in concrete situations. This potential is realized in what we have called the "human" or "cultural" world. From what we have seen, it seems that Merleau-Ponty would agree with McDowell in that it is the initiation into a language that enables this kind of openness. The cultural world is constituted by or built upon intersubjective interactions. Hence, what we in effect are open to in being open to such a world are *intersubjective* significations, which, as we have seen, are preserved in our linguistic repertoire of available expressions.

Dreyfus does not take anything of this into consideration in his criticism of McDowell's conceptualism. Can we conclude from this that his exploitation of Merleau-Ponty in that context is unwarranted? It is at least clear that the picture is more complex than it appears in the way Dreyfus renders it in support for his own view. He might, however, contend that none of the above considerations are in conflict with the position he advocates. The point, we can imagine him arguing, is not that linguistic meaning is *irrelevant* to human perception, but that it does not extend all the way down to our primordial perceptual engagements. In the next section I will examine the feature of Merleau-Ponty that Dreyfus draws upon in establishing motor intentional content as a nonconceptual ground floor of perception.

3.3 Two Kinds of Intentionality

Merleau-Ponty's anti-intellectualism is perhaps most explicitly stated in his claims that "perception is not an act of the understanding" (2012, p. 47) and that "to perceive in the full sense of the word […] is not to judge, but rather to grasp, prior to all judgment, a sense immanent in the sensible" (ibid., p. 36). These claims refer to his understanding of how our primordial perceptual intentionality is brought about – that it, in short, is not unified by way of an intellectual act but on the contrary *precedes* the possibility of intellectual apprehension in a judgment. This is, understandably, a feature of Merleau-Ponty that is frequently exploited by phenomenological nonconceptualists. The thought seems to be that this primordial perceptual intentionality concerns mere *motor* significances. In the previous chapter we saw Dreyfus describing absorbed coping as involving only "motor intentional content" and further arguing against McDowell that "no 'aspect' of motor intentional content is 'present' in a 'form' which is 'suitable to constitute the contents of conceptual capacities'" (2007a, p. 360). Carl B. Sachs expresses a similar point when he in "Discursive and Somatic Intentionality: Merleau-Ponty Contra 'McDowell or Sellars'" argues that "somatic intentionality" constitutes an external constraint on our discursive intentionality (2014, e.g. p. 219).[4] However, while it is certainly true that Merleau-Ponty posits a distinction between two kinds of intentionality, where one of them in some sense grounds the other, it might not be correct to interpret this in the way Dreyfus and Sachs do, that is, as something that necessarily opposes McDowell's view.

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty sympathetically renders Husserl's distinction between *act* intentionality and *operative* intentionality; respectively defined as, on the one hand, the intentionality of judgments and voluntary decisions, and on the other, the intentionality that "establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life […]" (2012, p. lxxxii). In other words, act intentionality is the kind of intentionality that is the result of an active determination of content by subsuming it under actual concepts in a judgment or explicit thought, whereas the notion of operative intentionality refers to a unified directedness towards the world that is *prior* to our active judgments of it and that further "provides the text that our various forms of knowledge attempt to translate into precise language" (ibid.). For Merleau-Ponty, the distinction between act intentionality and operative intentionality represents a way to move beyond the intellectualism he finds in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is evident already when he, in first mentioning the distinction, adds to his explanation of act intentionality that it is the only kind of intentionality examined in Kant's first *Critique* (ibid.). Kant's project in that work comes to exemplify an intellectualism that blurs the common sense distinction between judging, understood as an active "position-taking" (ibid., p. 35), and sensing, as a "giving of oneself over to the appearance without seeking to possess it […]" (ibid., p. 36), because it holds that "judgment is everywhere pure sensation is not, which is to say that judgment is everywhere" (ibid.). Thus, we might understand Merleau-Ponty as wanting to restore a more natural distinction between perception and the act of judgment. To judge, as it is usually understood, is to actively *determine*; it marks a kind of manipulative intervention into that which is judged where meanings are *brought together* in order to constitute a propositional unity. This is certainly not the case with perception; we can judge *about* what we perceive, but the perceived is already there in its own clarity. In short, we can say with Merleau-Ponty that in perception we *find a sense* without ourselves having *created* that sense by way of a "constitutive operation" of consciousness (ibid., p. 225).

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[4] Sachs thus admits that "the phenomenologist of perception is committed to precisely what McDowell calls the Myth of the Given: the view that receptivity does make a notionally separable contribution to experience after all" (2014, p. 210). He does, however, contrast McDowell's notion of the Myth from that of Sellars, and argues that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology avoids the latter of these – an interesting point that will not be pursued further here.

While this distinction between act and operative intentionality certainly problematizes the view expressed by Kant in his first *Critique,* it does not – from what we have seen thus far – necessarily do the job Dreyfus and Sachs wants it to against McDowell's conceptualism. After all, we can find a similar idea in McDowell's own works. Already in *Mind and World* he acknowledges the important difference between the *passive* nature of experience and the *active* nature of judgment:

> In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play […] before one has any choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together oneself, as when one decides what to say about something. (1994, p. 10).

The distinction is arguably appreciated to an even greater extent in his later writings where, as we have seen (1.4), he rejects the thought of propositionally structured experiential content on the ground that intuitional content is unarticulated and hence not *discursive* properly so called (2008, p. 6). “The unity of intuitional content,” he argues, “is *given*, not a result of putting significances together” (ibid, p. 7). Like Merleau-Ponty, McDowell recognizes that Kant seems to advocate a different picture. He criticises Kant for sometimes implying that intuitions must be understood as the result of an *active putting together* of significances (2008, p. 7). In stating that “all combination – whether we are conscious of it or not […] – is an *act* of the understanding” (2007, B130, my emphasis)[5] Kant seems to be arguing that the only difference between an intuition and a judgment is that the latter goes on at a conscious level whereas the former owes its being synthesised to something like an *unconscious judgment.*[6] This is surely a recipe for an intellectualist theory properly so called, and McDowell’s scepticism towards it rhymes well with Merleau-Ponty’s own objections to Kant’s project in *Critique of Pure Reason*, the main aim of which is exactly the thought that perception in general can be construed on the model of the act of judging.

That perception in its most primordial form is not judgment and, in other words, that there is a kind of intentional unity that precedes the unity of what Merleau-Ponty calls act intentionality is thus something we can establish as a point of agreement between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty. This, however, does not address the most central concern regarding this topic. For McDowell, intuitional content corresponds to – is of the same kind as – the content of judgments in that it is categorially unified. The same function underlies them both, but in one case it is passively drawn into play in “bringing our surroundings into view,” (2008, p. 11) and in the other it is actively exercised in articulating or “carving out” (ibid., p. 7) unarticulated intuitional content. On McDowell’s view, an experience is not a case of an active “taking things to be so,” but rather something that “entitle us to take things to be so” (ibid., p. 11). In short, intuitional unity *precedes* and works as a *ground* for actual judgments, but does not constitute a factor in our relation to the world that is *nonconceptual* in the sense of preceding *any* kind of involvement of the capacities exercised in speech and thought. The question, then, is whether Merleau-Ponty’s notion of operative intentionality corresponds to

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[5] In a more sympathetic reading of Kant one might argue that ”act” does not have to entail an activity or action – one might take it to mean merely that the understanding is involved in some way, for instance by being passively drawn into play, which is McDowell’s own claim.

[6] Here McDowell and Merleau-Ponty’s interpretations of Kant differ from that of Land, who – as we saw in chapter one (1.4) – argues that Kant does not ascribe the structure of thought or propositions to our intuitions.

McDowell's notion of intuitional intentionality in this sense. Is it possible that Merleau-Ponty would agree with Kant in that "the same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment likewise gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition" (2007, A79/B104-5), or is even that – as Dreyfus and Sachs seem to think – too intellectualist?

There are a couple of important clues directly connected to the notion of operative intentionality that seem to entail that it is not as "nonconceptual" as it might first seem. Kant, we saw, serves as an intellectualist contrast to the view Merleau-Ponty wants to advocate with his division between two kinds of intentionality. However, Merleau-Ponty also credits him with having put forward a better alternative to his own intellectualism. Against Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*, and in anticipation of the Husserlian distinction between act intentionality and operative intentionality he will introduce only moments later, Merleau-Ponty argues that "the unity of the world, prior to being posited by knowledge through an explicit act of identification, is lived as already accomplished or as already there" (2012, p. lxxxi). Now, this fact is supposedly something Kant himself acknowledged - at least to some extent – in the *Critique of Judgment*, by demonstrating that there is a "unity of the imagination and of the understanding," and that in experiences of beauty we experience "a harmony between the sensible and the concept" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxxi). The subject of experience is here not "the universal thinker […], the positing power that imposes the law of the understanding upon the manifold," as is the case in the first *Critique*, but rather "a nature spontaneously conforming to the law of the understanding" (ibid.). While Kant primarily exploits this insight with regard to the experience of beauty, Merleau-Ponty argues that this "hidden art of the imagination" – that is, the harmony of sensible and concept – must be understood not only as conditioning aesthetic judgments, but as the ground for judgments and knowledge in general (ibid.).

Now, to talk about a spontaneous *conforming* to the law of the understanding, a *harmony* of sensible and concept, and a *unity* of imagination and understanding is something quite different than establishing a nonconceptual ground only externally related to the activities it is supposed to be a ground for. On the contrary, the idea seems to be precisely that the relation between operative and act intentionality is *not* external, but rather that the former can be the ground for the latter because it already displays a harmony between sensibility and understanding, and thus reveals itself as suitable for being taken up in acts of judgment.

This seems to be further confirmed if we consider Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *intentional arc*. This is a term Dreyfus has exploited in some of his writings – though not in his debate with McDowell – in order to explain the dynamic "feedback loop" between action and milieu that enables past learning experiences to inform present perceptions by making new affordances and solicitations appear (e.g. 2005, p. 132). Dreyfus, then, takes the notion of the intentional arc to support his own view, where the skilful body's disclosing of mere motor significances is given a foundational role in relation to other human activities. As Berendzen notes, however, Dreyfus's citations of the relevant passage tend to cut it off at a crucial point and thus to ignore features of it that are apt to be an obstacle for his "phenomenological foundationalism" (2010, p. 636). Dreyfus (2005, p. 132) quotes the following part of Merleau-Ponty's passage: "[T]he life of consciousness – epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life – is underpinned by an 'intentional arc' that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu […]." But it continues:

> […] our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships. This intentional arc creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity (2012, p. 137).

The role of the intentional arc, then, seems to be broader and more complex than Dreyfus's view can allow for. Merleau-Ponty is not talking about an autonomous "ground function" consisting of elements only relevant for the disclosing of a field of mere practical solicitations and on which our other human activities depend by way of an external connection. Rather, the full passage indicates a phenomenon in which *all* our human capacities are implied and inform each other or work together in a dynamic interaction. That "the unity of the senses with intelligence" is one of the things the arc is taken to be responsible for suggests that our intellectual capacities are not left out of the picture. Moreover, the fact that Merleau-Ponty ascribes to it the role of ensuring that we are situated within our ideological and moral situation has similar implications. "Morality and ideology must," as Berendzen remarks, "have strong connections to conceptual activity, and involve concepts, not just practical abilities and skills" (2010, p. 636). The phenomena of morality and ideology are realized in linguistic discourse

We find further evidence that Dreyfus might rely on a too simplified understanding of the notion of the intentional arc in the passage immediately succeeding the second time it is mentioned in *Phenomenology of Perception*. "Sexuality," Merleau-Ponty states, "is not an autonomous cycle" (2012, p. 160). Rather, he continues, "it is internally linked to the whole *thinking* and *acting* being and these three sectors of behavior manifest *a single typical structure*, they are in a *reciprocal* expressive relation" (ibid., my emphasis). We surely seem justified to conclude from this that neither does acting (or thinking, for that matter) constitute an "autonomous cycle" that is primordial in relation to the other human behaviours, or only externally related to them; they are all interrelated and inseparable elements of the "single typical structure" that is our human being-in-the-world.

These brief considerations of the function of the intentional arc seem to confirm that Merleau-Ponty sees our openness to the distinctively human or cultural world as manifested already in the pre-judged unity of the perceived world. The intentional arc lets features from the totality of our human situation inform our perceptual openness to the world; it enables significances relevant to our form of life to appear prior to being actively judged as such. The aforementioned notion of "sedimentation" (3.2) is relevant here. That is, we can account for the way in which the intentional arc integrates the relevant aspects of our human lives by pointing out that our culturally and intersubjectively instituted meanings are sedimented in language ("spoken speech") as always available expressions, which thus constitutes a constantly operative background to our perceptual engagements in the world.

This entails that we must reject the notion of a "ground floor" of perception altogether.[7] Perception does not have "ground;" it does not include an impenetrable foundation that constrains the sphere of meaning from outside it, which is the idea Dreyfus subscribes to with his notion of mindless embodied coping. Put differently, the perceptual life of human beings is not hierarchically structured of separable and autonomous elements, with a privileged position for one of the elements relative to the others. Rather, the openness and responsiveness to intersubjectively available and linguistically expressible meanings are integrated *in* our embodied copings; the world in which we cope is the world in which we live – that is, a distinctively *human* world with all the features such a notion involves.

What we have here is the phenomenological version of McDowell's notion of second nature.[8] To be initiated into a language is to gain access to a fortune of available significations and to have one's character formed so as to be able to cope within the world they express. This, then, constitutes one of the elements that are drawn upon in the way in which the intentional arc enables our openness to the world. The nature disclosed to us in perception is thus not given us prior to the significances it has within our human world. When I see my black mug, or when Heidegger copes with the blackboard in the lecture room, what we perceive is not primarily "sense-data" or a "field of practical forces" indifferent to their being perceived by an animal inhabiting a culture and a language; we disclose features of the world that always already expresses meanings suitable for being exploited in our characteristically human activities. To the extent that we can still say that we primarily perceive a field of forces or solicitations to act, we must understand this "field" or these solicitations not as "mindless" in Dreyfus's sense, but as *including* features relevant for the activities first enabled when we come to inhabit a language. The perceived world constrains our thoughts about it and the expressions we make on the basis of it, but it does so from *within* the sphere of meaning suitable for figuring in such activities.

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[7] The sense in which it is appropriate to talk about a "ground" in perception is this: The not yet judged unity of operative intentionality, which is the primordial perceptual intentionality, is the ground for act intentionality; when we make judgments about the perceived world, we judge *on the basis of* a meaningful unity that was there already prior to the judgment. The point is that, on this view, the pre-judged unity of the perceived world is already permeated with linguistically expressible meaning and can thus not be nor include an autonomous "ground floor" as Dreyfus conceives it.

[8] That Merleau-Ponty subscribes to this sort of view was arguably more or less clear already in the previous section (3.2), where his thoughts on the relation between nature and culture were considered. I drew attention to the apparent convergence with McDowell's notion of second nature already there. As Merleau-Ponty's notion of

Thus, it seems clear – with the considerations from this and the previous section in mind – that mindedness is not left out of Merleau-Ponty's picture of our primordial perceptual relation to the world. We are, however, still in lack of a more detailed account of how Merleau-Ponty understands this. In the next section I will examine the notion of sense and its role in language and perception. This will prove to be the area where we find the most notable differences between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty with regards to the relevant discussion, though it will also further confirm the fact that there is no aspect of human that in principle escapes the possibility of linguistic expression.

3.4 Gestural Meaning in Perception and Language

A central feature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is that perception is inextricably connected to the notion of *sense*. In an argument against an empiricist thesis clearly recognizable as the Myth of the Given, he states that it is a mistake "to treat [quality] as 'mute impression' when it always has a sense" (2012, p.5), and a few pages earlier he asserts that "*everything* has a sense" (ibid, p. lxxxiii, my emphasis). Perception, then, is always the perception of a certain sense – but how are we to understand this term?

As is often pointed out, the word used in the original French – "*sens*" – is translatable not only to "meaning" or "sense," but also to *direction* (2012, transl. intro., p. xlviii). It is thus

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the intentional arc further confirms that there is such a convergence, I delayed a more elaborate account of this until that was established.

natural to relate the notion of "sense" to Kelly's reading of the role of the perceptual background (3.2). The perceived world has sense because the contribution of perspectives from the background constitutes a norm that "directs us" towards a better grip on it, and thus always already involves more than what is strictly speaking given to our senses. The notion of "sense," then, must be understood as involving the way in which the body accomplishes a practical grasp on the perceived world. However, though this in many ways aligns well with Dreyfus's own view, there is more to the story than he seems aware of. On his account, at least concerning the "mindless" coping he takes as foundational, perception discloses *nothing but* mere solicitations. The problem with this is that it reduces perceptual sense to its motor significance, and in effect rids it of its *meaning*. What Dreyfus overlooks is that, on Merleau-Ponty's view, this amounts to ignoring the way in which perceptual presence is achieved in the first place.

The sense of the perceived world is a *gestural* or *expressive* sense, and our access to it is enabled because we possess the bodily capacity to ourselves produce or imitate the gestures we perceive. The human body is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "a natural power of expression" (2012, p. 187) and even "the very actuality of the phenomenon of expression" (ibid., p. 244). As we shall see, this initially marks the primordial bond we have to other human subjects as gestural bodies, and is thus inextricably connected to intersubjectivity. However, it also defines human perception as such; our way of perceiving the world in general is in some sense derived from our perceptual relation to other humans. "[The] revelation of an immanent or nascent meaning in the living body extends […] to the entire sensible world, and our gaze, informed by the experience of one's own body, will discover the miracle of expression in all other 'objects'" (2012, pp. 203-4). In a way analogous to human bodies, features of the world appear to us as physiognomies or gestures expressing "intentions" or "modes of existence," and we grasp these by taking up the perceived expressions in our own body. The phenomenon of expression, Merleau-Ponty argues, grounds "the pre-predicative unity of the perceived world" and, moreover, "its verbal expression […] and intellectual signification" (ibid., p. 244). Put another way, the unity of operative intentionality is essentially an *expressive* unity, and this is what enables it to be taken up in speech and thought. When we later establish language too as a bodily gesture, we will see that speech is an actual exploitation and taking up of the gestural sense that is at the core of perceptual presence. Thus, in taking the full meaning of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "sense" into account, we get a picture that seems to further confirm the absence of a mindless ground floor of perception.

How does this notion of expressive or gestural sense undermine Dreyfus's notion of a perceptual ground floor? By ascribing to mere "motor intentional" content a primordial perceptual role separable from our other human capacities, Dreyfus ignores what Merleau-Ponty takes to be the essence of our not yet judged perceptions of the world. That is, the expressive sense of the perceived world is at the core of primordial, pre-thematized perception – together with the human body as an expressive power, they constitute the dynamic relationship that brings about the unity of operative intentionality.[9] Merleau-Ponty uses the word "communion" in order to describe this phenomenon (2012, p. 219). This refers to the dynamic relation between the body, which anticipates and expects what it perceives, and the perceived, which in some sense is the origin of the expectation in the first place.[10] Another way to picture this process is to say that we are *invited* by the sensible, and we must respond by adjusting our bodily readiness towards it. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "A sensible that is about to be sensed poses to my body a sort of confused problem," so that "I must find the attitude that *will* provide it with the means to become determinate […]" (ibid., p. 222, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis). Now, both this "confused problem" and the attitude that constitutes my bodily response to it ultimately concern the phenomenon of expression.

The sensible presents itself in the form of a gestural expression, and I grasp it by taking it up in an analogous bodily expression. As Merleau-Ponty explicitly states, this means that the primordial unity of perception "does not merely have a motor and a vital signification" (2012, p. 219). Perceptual sense is never merely an immediate pragmatic or biological relevance; "[it] is rather nothing other than *a certain manner of being in the world* that is proposed to us from a point in space, that our body takes up and adopts if it is capable" (ibid., my emphasis). This is obviously related to the idea considered earlier (3.2), about human perception being distinct from that of other animals in that we are open to *things* as such. Thus, we can now build on that idea and say that this phenomenon is anchored in our being perceptually open to expressive unities that in their presence reveal something similar to an intention the perceptual access to which is enabled by taking it up in a bodily act of *imitation*:

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[9] To the extent that we can talk about a synthesis underlying the unity of operative intentionality, it is not a synthesis of *act* – a putting together of significances, in McDowell's words – but rather, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, a *passive* or "transition" synthesis (e.g. 2012, p. 33). The synthesis is not a *creation*, but rather a discovery or a disclosing of a unity that we find in the world; this is what the dynamic between the expressive sensible and the expressive and mimetic human body enable.

[10] It will turn out that *temporality* is the essence of the perceptual synthesis. ”Perceptual synthesis is a temporal synthesis” and ”subjectivity, at the level of perception, is nothing other than temporality” (2012, p. 248). For my purposes it is not necessary to discuss this any further here, though it is easy to see how the dynamic I have described is essentially linked to time. That is, there is an *anticipation*, an expectation for the future, which, when it is satisfied, will be presented as in some sense triggered by what it anticipates, in the sense that the anticipated object *precedes* the anticipation or readiness on which our perception of it depends. Thus, ”the act of seeing is indivisibly prospective (since the object is at the end of my focusing movement) and retrospective (since it will be presented as anterior to its appearance […]) […] In every movement of focusing, my body ties a present, a past, and a future together" (ibid.).

> The constant regulation of bodily equilibrium, without which no function (and in particular no perceptual function) would be possible in the child, is not merely the capacity to reunite the minimal conditions for balancing the body, but is more generally the power I have to realize with my body the gestures that are analogous to those I see. (1964b, p. 145).

In order to fully understand the nature of this phenomenon, we will have to see it in the context of the perception of others. Expression as such is essentially connected to our intersubjective understanding; it marks the ability to find the behaviour of others intelligible, and to oneself produce behaviour that is intelligible to others. The very definition of the human body is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "to appropriate […] meaningful cores that transcend and transfigure its natural powers" (2012, p. 199).[11] The notion of imitation or *mimesis* primarily refers to the phenomenon by which this primordial link to the other is established. "Mimesis is the ensnaring of me by the other, the invasion of me by the other; it is that attitude whereby I assume the gestures, the conducts, the favourite words, the ways of doing things of those whom I confront" (1964b, p. 145). The reciprocal understanding between human subjects is marked by a certain bodily interaction; the body of the other sketches out a sense that I can grasp by adjusting my bodily readiness accordingly. I do not understand the behaviour or gestures of the other by *comparing* them to my own gestural possibilities and recalling the situations in which I would exploit them; neither do I perceive the gesture merely as an external reference to, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "a psychological fact hidden behind [it]" (2012, p. 190). There is, in other words, no active intellectual operations going on in the process of perceiving and understanding the other. Rather, the sense or meaning of the gesture resides *in* the gesture – the other's bodily expression – itself, and I understand it immediately by accepting it into my own body. It is the other's gesture itself that invades me, thanks to my body's so to speak being open for invasion in the sense of having the capacity to take up or assume the relevant gesture in a certain attitude, the capacity to immediately return the gesture.

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[11] The passage continues: "This act of transcendence is initially found in the acquisition of a behavior, and then in the silent communication of the gesture: the body opens itself to a new behavior and renders that behavior intelligible to external observers through the same power" (2012, p. 199). Merleau-Ponty elaborates this with a reference to Darwin, who drew attention to the fact that the behaviour of squinting and knitting one's eyebrows, which originally served the biological purpose of protecting the eyes from the sun, has come to signify the act of meditation to human spectators (ibid., p. 200).

What, then, does the understanding enabled by this process amount to? The perception or understanding of a gesture, the assuming of the other's gesture in our own body, entails an *existential modulation* of the situation. "Everything happens as if the other person's intention inhabited my body, or as if my intentions inhabited his body" (2012, p. 191). To understand another's gesture is to witness the opening up of a new space of possibilities; in adjusting my body to the other's gesture, I leave my current situation and let another emerge. "The gesture is in front of me like a question, it indicates to me specific sensible points in the world and invites me to join it there. Communication is accomplished when my behavior finds in this pathway its own pathway" (ibid.). We are, in other words, talking about a whole restructuring of experience. Take, for instance, the perception of an angry gesture. At the moment I perceive a gesture as one of anger, I am thrown into a new situation – the actions and reactions that were open to me only seconds earlier, when I misunderstood it for a friendly gesture, are gone, and radically new ones have emerged. In short, the whole scene is perceived differently.

The perception of a gesture, then, entails a certain restructuring of experience, brought about by a bodily act of mimesis. Now, this is the account we must now transfer to perception in general. "The thing and the world," Merleau-Ponty notes, "[…] are presented to perceptual communication like a familiar face whose expression is immediately understood" (2012, p. 336). The sense of the perceived is present to us in the same way as the other's gestures or expressions. Its physiognomy, posture or style communicates a meaning or intention to us, which enables us – as expressive bodies – to gear onto it and thus become ready to deal with it in the ways it allows. "We understand the thing as we understand a new behavior […] by taking up for ourselves the mode of existence that the observable signs sketch out before us" (ibid., p. 333). Thus, we perceive the thing so to speak *as if* it were a person with an intention; its "inner nature" is manifested in and expressed by its physiognomic outside. This is ultimately what enables us to say that the unity of the perceived world is already given, rather than the result of an intellectual act. That is, the grasp of the perceived object as a physiognomy or gesture is anterior to and *grounds* the possibility of conceiving of it as consisting of various "parts" or individual perspectival appearances. We always already have a grasp of the perceived object as an expressive whole, and it is from that starting point that we are able to understand its various appearances as appearances of the same thing.[12]

By placing the phenomenon of expression at the core of human perception we get a new understanding of what perceptual presence amounts to and, consequently, an existential phenomenology of perception that differs significantly from the view Dreyfus advocates under the same name. It is surely the body that primarily discloses the perceived world, but what it discloses cannot be reduced to mere forces of attraction and repulsion affecting only a mindless system of motor capacities. The human body is always already an intersubjective significance, and it is this fundamental capacity to find a meaning – an intention – in the other's behaviour that defines the way in which we approach the world in general. We do not find the primordial structure of human perception by starting from the notion of *forces*, but rather by considering the perception of a human *face* – a physiognomic and emotional whole capable of displaying an indefinite amount of nuanced expressions, which we immediately (though more or less accurately) grasp as *meaningful* in some way or other. Such a grasp of a meaningful whole certainly involves practical significances; it opens a new space of bodily possibilities, and we can even say that it *draws* us to respond in certain ways. This, however, is always grounded in the perception of an expressive sense, and the space of possibilities it opens up is *never* limited only to the kind of activities Dreyfus would call mindless. On the contrary, our capacities for linguistic expression are involved already in enabling the sense of the perceived world to appear; to make an expression in language is not to create a new sense detached from the world of perception, but to take up and exploit the meaning that constitutes perceptual presence.

In order to see how the expressive value of the perceived grounds the world's "verbal expression" and "intellectual signification," we will have to proceed to examine Merleau-Ponty's understanding of language and thought. I argued at the end of the previous chapter that what McDowell's view lacks in order to positively confirm its compatibility with a proper phenomenology of embodiment, is an account that explicitly situates language and linguistic capacities as embodied phenomena. This is accomplished by Merleau-Ponty by establishing speech as a *gestural expression* (2012, p. 190). Though this in some sense provides what McDowell is missing, its implications will prove to be such that it cannot be understood as a mere "filling in" of details that leaves his picture as a whole completely intact.

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[12] The thing is always already presented "in its own clarity" and as the "common signification" of all the appearances it offers to different perspectives (2012, p. 191).

To establish speech as gesture is to immediately situate it among the capacities of the expressive human body. One of the consequences of this is that it marks a definite surpassing of the intellectualist view of language the idea of which is that there is a source "behind" linguistic signs that really carries and determines the expressed meaning – in other words, that speech is translated thought. Like other gestures, speech is a bodily way of creating and expressing meaning, where the meaning is not to be found in some hidden fact or representation behind the expressive sign, but resides in the very expression, in the word's physiognomy or embodied actuality, in its sonorous and articulatory style (2012, pp. 186-7). Thus, rather than being the ultimate foundation for linguistic meaning, thought is on the contrary completely dependent upon possible means of bodily expression. "A thought, content to exist for itself outside the constraints of speech and communication, would fall into the unconscious the moment it appears, which amounts to saying that it would not even exist for itself" (ibid., p. 183). There could be no *meaning* properly so called without an expressive style in which it can be embodied – just as a musical idea would be meaningless if it did not involve a sense of the sounds required for it to come to life. Thought, then, rather than being an autonomous and primary carrier of meaning, always *tends toward* and is *accomplished by* speech (ibid., pp. 182-3). This approach enables us to situate the thinking and speaking subject in the embodied human organism. Thought and speech do not issue from a detached subject only externally related to our bodily anchoring in the world. Linguistic meaning *belongs to* its embodied expression, and is thus always already anchored in the gestural human body, which ultimately means, as Merleau-Ponty observes, that it is the living body that thinks and speaks (ibid., p. 203).

A consequence of this gestural approach to speech is that competence in any particular language must essentially be understood as the ability to use one's body in certain ways (as opposed to the possession of a stock of intellectual representations). There is no need to go via a representational thought in order to recall how a word should be pronounced. "It is," Merleau-Ponty notes, "enough that I possess its articulatory and sonorous essence as one of the modulations or one of the possible uses of my body" (2012, p. 186). This enables a direct comparison between language use and the way in which we skilfully deal with the natural world. That is, like objects in our immediate surroundings, we "reckon with" or "count upon" words, and they "constitute a certain field of action" (ibid.). In expressing and understanding linguistic meaning, we are orienting ourselves in a world of available significations – the "spoken speech" mentioned earlier. The available significations constitute a mental landscape – a "common world between speaking subjects" – where "culture offers what nature does not provide" (ibid., p. 192). In short, linguistic capacities are bodily skills for orienting ourselves within a cultural world[13].

The inclusion of language in the category of gestural expression entails, as is probably already clear, that the understanding of linguistic gestures must be understood in a similar way to what we saw above regarding the understanding of gestures in general. That is, linguistic perception must also be understood as a mimetic taking up of the perceived gesture manifested in a certain alteration of the situation. "[T]he phonetic gesture produces a certain structuring of experience, a certain modulation of existence" (2012, p. 199). The speech of my conversational partner marks an immediate invasion in me, her words inhabit me and it is in some sense as if her intentions are my own; I follow the path she sketches out – sometimes I can even anticipate what she is going to say next – and I become open to the situation in a new way. This is not to say that language is not in any way a special kind of gesture. Speech is the gesture that provides the ultimate introduction to the cultural world; it is the only expressive operation "capable of sedimenting and of constituting an intersubjective acquisition" (ibid., p. 196). Moreover – and related to this – Merleau-Ponty notes, "speech installs in us the idea of truth as the presumptive limit of its effort" (ibid.). Linguistic gestures involve implications other gestures do not; they draw from and sediment an intersubjective world of significations, and because of this they are also available to normative and rational critique.

This, however, is where we find the most important divergence between Merleau-Ponty and McDowell. For, to define linguistic capacities solely in terms of their normative and inferential implications, as McDowell seems to do, is to abstract from and forget their existential grounding as precisely *gestural* capacities. Speech is *more* than a mere putting forward of a propositional thought immediately grasped by the listener as an intellectual idea with such and such rational and normative consequences; it entails a whole existential modulation, a readjusting of the phenomenal body so as to fit over and keep track with the intentions sketched out.

Merleau-Ponty sometimes seems to advocate a distinction between speech's existential, emotional or affective meaning on the one hand, and its *conceptual* signification on the other. "[The words'] conceptual signification," he states, "must be formed by drawing from a *gestural signification*, which itself is immanent in speech" (2012, p. 184), and moreover, “speech or words carry a primary layer of signification that adheres to them and that gives the thought as a style, as an affective value, or as an existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement” (ibid., p. 188). And surely, a grasp of a word’s expressive style – the way it is supposed to sound and be pronounced – does not necessarily entail a grasp of its *meaning*, and so we might be led to believe that the proper signification of words is some extra mental entity residing behind or beneath the actual expression. This, however, is not what Merleau-Ponty is implying. After all, that would be to fall back to the intellectualism we wanted to avoid by establishing speech as gesture. The idea, then, cannot be that speech is constituted of two only externally related *kinds* of meanings, where existential meaning constitutes a so to speak nonconceptual *ground* for conceptual meaning. When a word loses its sense – as happens to some psychological patients, and can be experienced also for healthy humans if we repeat the same word a number of times in a row – it is not merely a case of a break of an associative link between a certain sound and an intellectual signification. Rather, it is the word itself that has somehow changed; it no longer displays its usual structure, but has become empty, frictionless and useless – its *perceptible appearance* as such is altered (ibid., p. 199). Thus, the point is precisely that we *cannot* establish “conceptual meaning” as an autonomous and privileged element separable from the whole gestural expression as such.

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[13] The use of the term "world" in this context must not be understood as a mere metaphor. As Merleau-Ponty insists, "it means that 'mental' or cultural life *borrows its structures from natural life* and that the thinking subject must be grounded upon the embodied subject" (2012, p. 199, my emphasis).

Conversely, and more relevant with regard to how Merleau-Ponty diverges from McDowell, neither can we say that linguistic meaning is *primarily* conceptual meaning. It is precisely the tendency to reduce meaning to its “purely intellectual” implications that gives rise to the intellectualist conception of the intellect as a self-enclosed and autonomous faculty that operates on and influences our perceptual and practical engagements from “above” our embodied situatedness. Although McDowell ultimately wants to distance himself from such an intellectualist conclusion, he nonetheless relies on an abstract definition of the intellect as his philosophical starting point, and thus arrives too late on the scene to be able to appropriately incorporate the phenomenon of embodiment into his view. Again, this is not to say that the “conceptual” depends on a “nonconceptual” ground in a foundationalist sense. The point is that the notion of the “conceptual” is an idea constructed by abstracting from linguistic meaning the features we think of as intellectually relevant and thus forget or overlook that those features are really embodied in or spread across an *existential* expression that affects not only “the mind” as an autonomous faculty, but the whole living human body. The primary layer of linguistic meaning is thus, as we saw Merleau-Ponty put it in the quotes above, more an *existential mimicry* than a conceptual statement; the “conceptual signification" is formed by drawing from – abstracting from – the gestural signification that constitutes the actual linguistic expression.

In this way we begin to understand how Merleau-Ponty manages to establish a proper de-intellectualized conception of the intellect. There is, as he says, an "organic tie […] between perception and intellection" (1964b, p. 20), and this is not because a self-sufficient intellect "reaches down" and imposes itself upon a perceptual ground floor, but because "intellection" or thought itself is a mode of perception, marked by the same fundamental structures we find in our perceptions of the natural world. This is what the focus on "existential mimicries" or gestural significations rather than "conceptual statements" with regard to linguistic expression points toward. Ultimately, the point is that conceptual statements – propositional thoughts – as such play a less important role in our intellectual activities than it might seem from an abstract perspective. That is, it is only if we construe intellection in general upon the phenomenon of explicit and formalized reasoning that conceptual statements as such seem to play an essential role.

We can get a sense of this by contrasting the way in which we usually perform intellectual tasks with the difficulties displayed by Schneider – the aphasiac patient who figures as a point of reference throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*. One of the sad consequences of Schneider's disorder is that he fails to understand simple analogies such as "fur is to the cat what feathers are to the bird" or "the eye is to light and colour what the ear is to sounds" without explicitly referring to the concept both of the terms in the analogy has in common – for instance by saying "the eye and the ear are both sense organs, thus, they must produce something similar" (2012, p. 129). Needless to say, such a process is normally not required for understanding analogies like this. That is, we do not need to first search for a category under which both of the terms in question can be subsumed in order to grasp that there is a commonality between them. Thus, we should not assume that normal understanding relies on a process similar to that exemplified by Schneider, only that in normal subjects this happens *implicitly* or *unconsciously*. Rather, we must understand that it is the *perception of the terms themselves* that is in question in this case. Schneider's need to supplement his understanding with an extra thought stems from the fact that his perceptual capacities have been constricted so that it no longer enables the words to display their *full* sense. Normally, the terms "eye" and "ear" display a sense that enables the analogy between them to be immediately grasped without any additional intellectual interventions. In other words, they are presented to us as gestural significations or physiognomic styles that themselves hint at a certain connection between them. This will be elaborated further in the next section.

Now, while the gestural approach to speech surely amounts to a correction of aspects of McDowell's view, it also enables a surpassing of Dreyfus's position in favour of an idea closer to that of McDowell. We have already established – against Dreyfus – that there is always already a *meaning* in perception that exceeds mere motor significances, and we are now in position to begin to understand how this meaning from the beginning is presented as linguistically amendable. That is, the centring of language upon the notion of the gesture allows us to establish a direct and dynamic link between linguistic expression and the gestural meaning found in perception. By considering perceptual and linguistic meaning in light of their *existential* or *emotional* – rather than conceptual – significance, we discover a connection that is even more intimate than McDowell envisages. The relation between linguistic signs and the world they express, Merleau-Ponty argues, is not an accidental or arbitrary one. This might seem to be the case if we focus merely on the conceptual signification of language, but it no longer holds when we take the gestural sense of speech into account:

> We would then find that words, vowels, and phonemes are so many ways of *singing the world*, and that they are *destined* to represent objects, not through an objective resemblance, in the manner imagined by the naïve theory of onomatopoeia, but because they are *extracted* from them, and *literally express* their emotional essence. (2012, p. 193, my emphasis).

Linguistic signs are tied to perception in the sense that the making of linguistic gestures is our way of reproducing the expressive meaning we find in the perceived world. This must be put in context with what we considered earlier regarding how perceptual presence is achieved in the first place. Perceptual presence, we have seen, is enabled by the mimetic capacity to realize the gestures we perceive in analogous bodily gestures. Now, if speech *literally expresses* the gestural sense of the perceived, it follows that the ability to designate objects linguistically must be among the capacities that are realized already in the mimetic taking up of the perceived world. Thus, the bodily taking up of the perceived world's gestures that is the way in which we achieve perceptual presence in the first place, is not prior to but *includes* perceiving the world as suited for being expressed linguistically.

If we are to make sense of the idea that our linguistic gestures are not arbitrary signs but rather *destined* to represent objects, we must also hold that the emotional value we are able to find in the perceived world is itself informed by the perceiver's affiliation to a specific linguistic community. That is, we must understand the relationship between language and perception as a dynamic one, where language literally expresses the meaning of the perceived world, and the repertoire of gestures at the perceiver's disposal play a role in enabling the way in which we grasp perceptual meaning in the first place. An acknowledgment of this dynamical relation is essential if we are to accommodate the fact that there exist a myriad of different languages into the idea that linguistic signs are not merely arbitrary or accidental. The varieties in styles of expression found in different languages do not represent alternate conventions for expressing the exact same thoughts, but rather, as Merleau-Ponty says, "several ways for the human body to celebrate the world and to finally live it" (2012, p. 193). The world we "sing" when we speak, then, is the world perceived from the perspective of a certain cultural and linguistic community; different languages mark different ways for the human body to live in the world, different existential attitudes towards the world, which has a bearing on the emotional values displayed by objects of perception. Thus, to fully come to live in a language it is necessary to *take up the world* that that language expresses (ibid.).[14]

We must be careful not to conclude from this that language is the *cause* of perceptual meaning. As said, the relationship between linguistic and perceptual meaning is a *dynamic* one – neither is primary or secondary with regard to the other. In Merleau-Ponty's words, language is neither ”meaning's servant” nor does it ”govern meaning” (1964a, p. 83). The relation is rather such that our gestural capacities constitutes a bodily readiness that makes us receptive to a certain kind of meaning found in the world of perception: ”With our apparatus of expression we set ourselves up in a situation the apparatus is sensitive to […]” (ibid.). To be initiated into a language is to acquire the bodily skills required for coping with the significances of that language, and this set of skills enables us to find linguistically expressible meanings in the world of perception.

By taking into consideration the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty discussed in this section, it becomes clear that our skills for linguistic expression does not belong to a faculty the involvement of which necessarily obscures or detaches from our bodily coping skills. Our bodies are essentially expressive, gestural organs, and, as we have seen, our mimetic capacity to realize gestures analogous to those we see is at the core of how we achieve perceptual presence. In conceiving of language as gesture and thus as a way for the human body to express itself that is continuous with, rather than merely externally related to, our other bodily skills, we are able to place linguistic capacities at the same level as the other bodily skills that are drawn upon in the way the world appears to us in perception. The world is certainly presented to us as always already in a form suitable for being linguistically exploited – the *gestural form* of the perceived world expresses a sense that can be extracted and literally expressed by a linguistic gesture.

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[14] For this reason, Merleau-Ponty argues, we can never translate the *full* sense of one language into another (2012, p. 193). In other words, the expressions used in any specific linguistic community expresses meanings that can only be found in the world as seen from the perspective of that specific linguistic community, and it is thus only from within any language's own way of expressing the world that the full existential meaning of that language's world view can be preserved.

Though this places Merleau-Ponty on the side of McDowell in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, it also – as we have seen – poses a correction to the conceptualist view. The shift of focus from conceptual meaning to gestural sense is not irrelevant to the issue in question; it marks the alteration of perspective necessary for being able to provide an account of the way in which humans relate to the world that manages to fully appreciate the phenomenon of embodiment and thus avoid any intellectualist implications.

In this section we have seen that there is a continuity between perceptual and linguistic meaning, and that this is manifested in the notion of a gestural or expressive sense. However, the above considerations do not fully account for the characteristics of perceptual sense that enables it to be available for linguistic expression. Language is constituted of *general* significances; thus, the only way in which it can be correct to say that linguistic expressions are suited to "literally extract" the sense of the perceived world is if this sense already displays a kind of generality. In other words, the perceived world must be presented as already *categorially unified*. This is what McDowell wants to ensure by arguing that intuitions are conceptual despite not being propositionally structured, and consequently by positing a "same function" as underlying the unity of both intuitions and judgments. In the next section we shall see that a similar thought can be found in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty.

3.5 The Categorial Attitude and Generality in Perception

The possibility of finding physiognomic or gestural styles in the perceived world and the capacity to speak and think are both enabled by what Merleau-Ponty calls *the categorial attitude*.[15] We can thus say that the categorial attitude is Merleau-Ponty's contender to the function McDowell appeals to in arguing that his non-propositionalist view does not subscribe him to a version of the Myth of the Given; that is, the function that underlies both the unity of perception and the unity of judgments. The categorial attitude, however, is not primarily an "intellectual" function; it is precisely an *attitude*, an *existential style* marked by the behavioural flexibility and creativity by which humans approach the world. This, then, will prove to be a notion that ties together the different points from this chapter. The categorial attitude, we shall see, is essentially that which opens us to a world implicitly understood as "seen from everywhere," and in that way liberates the perceived from its natural concretion and lets it appear as a physiognomy expressing a general, cultural and – this amounts to the same – linguistically expressible sense.

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[15] E.g. 1963, p. 176; 2012, p. 181. Merleau-Ponty adopts the notion of the categorial attitude from Gestalt psychology, but – as we shall see – makes it his own by giving it an existential definition.

"For [a] phrase to express a concept," McDowell asserts, "there would need to be a certain generality in its significance" (2013, p. 43). Though we have questioned the adequacy of centring reflections on perceptual and linguistic sense upon the notion of the concept, this requirement for generality in the significations of language still applies. To say that content is conceptual – or linguistically expressible – is to say that it displays a certain kind of generality. For instance, for *that shade* to be a proper concept its possibility of use must endure beyond the particular situation in which it was first crafted; if I were unable to understand the meaning of *that shade* unless the exact shade it first referred to were immediately present to me in experience, I could arguably not be said to have an understanding of it at all. Thus, we can gloss the notion of conceptual content by saying that it is content that *in its form* already displays a meaning that is not completely exhausted and enclosed in one particular occurrence, but rather reveals a transcendence of its temporal and spatial concretion.

If this idea is approached in the right way, it is surely possible to find support for it in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. After all, already in the notion of a *sense* of the perceived lies a thought about something that goes beyond what is immediately given from our perspective. The perceived thing is an expressive unity; it expresses a mode of existence the signification of which "contains" more than what is strictly speaking given to our senses at any given moment. A passage from *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) demonstrates that there certainly is a kind of generality involved in Merleau-Ponty's conception of perceptual sense:

> [T]his red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. […] It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom. […] A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution […] (1968, p. 132).

The concrete colour that I perceive is not an atom; that is, not a self-enclosed and self-sufficient being. Rather, its sense points towards and is in some sense defined by its relation to other colours – it links up with colours of the same kind and contrasts itself from the colours that it is not. It is a *concretion* of visibility that in its presence signifies beyond itself towards other possible situations of concretion. The "generality" or "categoriality" of the perceived world, then, is something that resides in or is expressed by the sensible itself, and not something that is explicitly *imposed* on it by an active mind. I do not understand the red in front of me as a particular instance of a general kind primarily by way of associating it with an inner idea of *redness* that is thus imposed on it in an act of judgment; it is the particular red itself, in the way it is presented to me, which signifies beyond itself and thus reveals its "rational" signification. In other words, the red is perceived as an *expression* or a gesture with a background or horizon that involves its relations to other colours.

This is relevant for a problem we touched upon in chapter one. We saw there that a motivation for nonconceptualism against conceptualism (1.3), and for Thomas Land's Kantian conceptualism against propositionalism (1.4), is the fact that concepts – *qua* general – are too "coarse-grained" to capture the fully determinate and concrete mode of presentation of features of the perceived world. If I use the word "red" to designate the concrete colour I perceive, I subsume it under a concept that comprises a wide variety of distinct shades of colour, and it thus seems that I fail to really capture *the exact shade* that I now perceive.[16] This is also the case if we use narrower and more determinate concepts of shades of red – they too seem to cover further distinguishable shades and thus fail to definitely individuate only *this red*.[17] Now, why is this the case – why does it seem impossible to craft a concept that captures only *one* specific shade of colour without allowing for slightly different ones to fall under it as well? This phenomenon is often presented as a shortcoming in the nature of concepts, but with the above considerations in mind we can ask whether seeing it as a shortcoming in fact relies on a confused view of how things appear to us in perception. That is, to assume that what we have access to in perception is a self-sufficient individual displaying a unique and unshared quality is arguably close to establishing it as an *atom*. As we have seen, however, the perception of any particular aspect of the world is always the perception of something that partakes in a "constellation" with other relevant aspects, and this is what defines it as *what it is*.

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[16] Remember that Land thinks appealing to demonstrative concepts is "cheating," as they exploit the determinacy of perception rather than crafting an actual concept that captures that determinacy.

[17] "[T]here are," as Land puts it, "a number of concepts for different shades of red […] but reflection shows that each of these can be further differentiated. Each of [the] concepts of a shade of red itself covers a whole range of more determinate shades" (2011, p. 200)

The reason for why we never can reach a concept that defines only *this instance* of red is that we can never *perceive* anything as self-enclosed in that way; regardless of how refined our understanding of that specific shade becomes, it will nonetheless "connect up from its place" with other possibilities of concretion around it and in that way afford the creation of a new *general* concept of a shade of colour. While this amounts to an argument against nonconceptualism, it is more of a spelling out of something Land's Kantian conceptualism – and McDowell's, for that matter – presupposes but does not explicitly account for. That is, it is only with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of generality in the perceived world, and its grounding in the notion of the categorial attitude, that we become able to fully account for how the world can be presented to us in a form that already suits being taken up in thought and expression.

We find a good introduction to the notion of the categorial attitude in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of empiricist and intellectualist approaches to language, and how these views bear in accounting for the disorder of *aphasia*. Empiricism is in this case represented by the view that linguistic skills are rooted in a depository of "verbal images" that are triggered in response to certain stimuli (2012, p. 180), whereas intellectualism establishes the power of *thought* as the condition underlying speech. As *aphasia* does not affect the patients' repertoire of words, but only the way in which they are able to *use* them,[18] we must agree with intellectualism in that there is something more to being a competent language user than merely possessing an amount of words. "The same patients who fail to name the colors presented to them," Merleau-Ponty observes, "are equally incapable of classifying them according to a given rule" (ibid., p. 181). It thus looks as if the disturbance in linguistic abilities originates in a disturbance of "the general power of subsuming a sensory given under a category" (ibid.). In other words, what the *aphasia* patients are suffering from seems to be a disorder in the power of *judgment*, which entails that *thought* is the underlying function conditioning language. However, we have already seen that the idea that thought conditions language should be rejected on the ground that means of expression is a necessary condition for the possibility of thought – thought tends toward expression and would be nothing without it, and is thus connected to the body as an expressive organ in the same way that speech is.

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[18] "The same word that remains available to the patient on the level of automatic language escapes him on the level of spontaneous language; the same patient who easily finds the word 'no' to express a negative answer to the doctor's questions, that is, when the word signifies a present and lived negation, cannot pronounce it when engaged in in an exercise without any affective or vital importance" (2012, p. 180).

Thought and expression are "constituted simultaneously" (ibid., p. 189), they express "one and the same fundamental behavior," which means that "neither could be the cause or effect of the other" (ibid., p. 198)[19]. Thought can thus not be the ground for speech, but must on the contrary itself presuppose a more fundamental function. This is where Merleau-Ponty's notion of the categorial attitude comes in.

Aphasia might first seem to require an intellectualist explanation, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that what it really demands is an *existential* theory – a theory, that is, "that treats thought and objective language as two manifestations of the fundamental activity by which man projects himself toward a 'world'" (2012, pp. 196-7). By locating the disorder of the *aphasia* patients within the power to actively exploit experiential features in intellectual acts, intellectualism assumes that *aphasia* patients and normal subjects are capable of receiving the same kind of perceptual "input," and differ merely in their capacity to apprehend that input intellectually by subsuming it under abstract categories. However, this kind of active exploitation is *secondary* in the sense that its possibility presupposes that the perceived world already presents itself as suitable for such activities. "[T]he categorial activity, prior to being a thought or a knowledge, is a certain manner of relating to the world, and correlatively is a style or a configuration of experience" (ibid., p. 197). It is not primarily the power of judgment that is distorted, but that on which judgment depends – the way in which perception itself is structured.[20] For normal subjects, Merleau-Ponty notes (and this is another way of expressing the idea cited from *The Visible and the Invisible* above), "all of the reds, for example, constitute a group," whereas for the patients in question "each [colour] sample is confined within its individual existence" so that objectively similar colours do not necessarily *appear* as similar to them (ibid.). Thus, what looked on the intellectualist diagnosis to be a disorder in the power of judgment is now revealed to have an *existential* source. That the judgmental capacities are distorted is merely a consequence of the fact that *aphasia* affects the whole way in which subjects are able to relate to and perceive the world, the "milieu of experience in which judgment is born" (ibid., p. 198). In short, rather than the judgmental power to subsume sensory givens under abstract categories, it is the way in which the patients are able to experience colours in the first place that is in question (ibid., p. 197).

The notion of the categorial attitude, then, refers to this readiness towards the world that enables the structuring of experience to welcome our intellectual activities. With this notion we have thus discovered the function that makes it possible for us to surpass both empiricism and intellectualism with regards to language. There is a grounding function for language, but that role cannot be played by an autonomous mental power; rather, both language and thought have their ultimate condition of possibility in this general existential attitude by which human beings normally approach the world. As Merleau-Ponty points out, "[t]he categorial act [judgment] is thus not an ultimate fact, it is constituted in a certain 'attitude'" and "[s]peech, too, is established upon this attitude" (2012, p. 198).

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[19] Merleau-Ponty cites from Gelb and Goldstein's *Über Farbennamenamnesie* (1925, p. 158).

[20] In other words, it is the unity of *operative intentionality* that is affected in the patients.

From this perspective we can better understand Merleau-Ponty's Kant-inspired remark about how we find in operative intentionality a "harmony between the sensible and the concept" (2012, p. lxxxi). By anchoring the notion of rationality primarily in an *attitude* rather than in an active power, it becomes possible to see how the sense of the perceived can be rationally significant without and before being actually rationally *exploited* – the primordial perceptual unity is not the outcome of an intellectual act, but neither is it indifferent to the possibility of being taken up in such an act. For normal human subjects, rationality – *qua* a certain attitude – is implied in the very structuring of experience; the power of judgment, though not actively exercised, reveals itself in its nascent state already in the layout of the perceived world, and thus grounds the possibility of act intentionality.

We have thus found, in the notion of the categorial attitude, a proper "de-intellectualized" conception of the intellect. The mind is not an autonomous force putting together the perceived world in front of us, presenting us with a reality already subordinated under actual categories; rather, it works "behind the scenes" as that which enables us to *find* – in the already unified world of perception – a sense, not yet judged, that transcends any immediately given perspective and impression and thus presents us with the opportunity to take it up in an act of judgment. In order to see how this, in fact, unites the insights from the previous sections of this chapter, we can begin by understanding how the categorial attitude, as Bimbenet puts it, "merges with intersubjectivity itself" (2009, p. 69).

This must be understood in light of the aforementioned role of "seeing things" in perception (3.2). Perceptual presence, we have seen, is always already grounded upon intersubjectivity in the sense that the appearance of the perceived thing is defined by the implication of "other gazes:"

> [T]he perceptible is precisely that which can haunt more than one body without budging from its place. No one will see that table which now meets my eye; only I can do that. And yet I know that at the same moment it presses upon every glance in exactly the same way. For I see these other glances too. […] Everything rests upon the insurpassable richness, the miraculous

> multiplication of perceptible being, which gives the same things the power to be things for more than one perceiver […] Everything depends upon the fact that this table over which my glance now sweeps […] inserts itself equally well into the circuit of other bodies. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, pp. 15-6).

The multiplicity of perspectives integrated in the perceptual presence of the thing is what makes it be a "thing" for me in the first place; I do not assume it to be a mere mental image belonging to my consciousness alone (a private "sense datum"). Other human subjects, *qua* other perspectives similar to my own, are implied in and constitute the thing as it appears to me, which, put in another way, means that I always already perceive *according to others* and hence that I see the thing as more than an isolated and self-enclosed atom that has as its only significance an immediate vital relevance to me at this particular moment. "I am," as Bimbenet remarks, "never totally alone in seeing" (2009, p. 69). In other words, the thing presents itself, already in my primordial perception of it, as belonging to a reality equally available to other human subjects.

It is precisely this "decentred" nature of human perception that marks the categorial attitude and enables the transcendence of the concrete and particular – the generality – we find in the perceived world. The indeterminate manifold of various perspectives involved in my perceptual grasp of the thing entails an opening or breaking up of the concrete, manifested in the emergence of a sense that expresses beyond itself. I said that the categorial attitude is not a case of active *categorization* of the perceived. We can now give it a more positive characteristic and say, with Bimbenet, that it involves a *liberation* of the perceptual given (2009, p. 69). The multiplicity of perspectives implicitly involved in perception does not only provide us with a grasp of the unseen sides of the perceived natural object, but opens it to us as something that can be coped with in a multitude of ways and situations.

Schneider has lost or damaged this crucial feature of normal human perception; he is locked in the concrete and present, incapable of dealing with things that are not of immediate relevance to his situation. "His body is available as a means of insertion into his familiar surroundings, but not as a means of expression of a spontaneous and free spatial thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 106). We have already seen a couple of examples of this.[21] The perhaps clearest demonstration of the nature of his disorder, however, is the fact that, though being able to move his hand in order to scratch where a mosquito has bitten, he cannot use it to *point* or *indicate* (ibid., p. 106).[22] This enables a refined understanding of Schneider's illness. The inability to use his body to point to or indicate features of his surroundings or his own body reveals a fundamental alteration in his way of relating to the world relative to that of normal human subjects. The pointing gesture is a communicative act; in using one's body in such a way, one presupposes that what one is pointing at is present and available also for the intended recipient of the gesture – in other words, one reveals that one is open to a world implicitly understood as equally available to other subjects. Schneider, then, has lost this kind of openness to the world found in normal human subjects.

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[21] Other fascinating, yet tragic, consequences of his disorder is the inability to visualize absent objects (2012, p. 115) and imagine hypothetical situations (ibid, pp. 106-7).

Another way of expressing this point is to say, as Merleau-Ponty does, that Schneider has lost the capacity to find *physiognomies* in the perceived world (2012, p. 134). It is only against the background of a fundamental intersubjective understanding that the world can appear in the form of an expressive sense, and this is precisely what Schneider lacks. The inability to point, then, reveals the nature of the phenomenon of expression as it relates to our human lives. Namely, that the capacity to *make* expressions and the capacity to *grasp* expressions are two sides of the same coin. Schneider has lost the ability to deliberately and spontaneously use his body as a means of expression directed towards others – he is incapable of freely making use of his body in a way that assumes the existence of other human subjects – and the exact same lack is manifested in his constrained perceptual openness to the world. It is not only that he is ignorant of the possibility of conveying information in bodily acts; rather, there is no aspect of his world that *affords* pointing to, he is not open to the world in that way at all. We can understand this in the context of the notion of *mimesis* examined above (3.4). Schneider's body is no longer essentially an expressive power; he has lost the behavioural flexibility that would let him take up new gestures in acts of imitation, and the openness to the full sense of gestural expressions – and consequently to the human world – is therefore closed.[23]

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[22] We thus discover the need to distinguish between two kinds of bodily behaviours: On the one hand, the grasping or touching gesture, which is defined by being a concrete reaction to an immediate problem, and on the other, the pointing gesture, which is more abstract and disinterested, and aimed at objective or intersubjective space. It is surely peculiar how, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "a point of my body can be present to me as a point to grasp without being presented to me in this anticipated grasp as a point to indicate" (2012, p. 106). For the present purposes it suffices to say that, whereas the possibility of the pointing gesture depends on the categorial attitude and decentred perception, the grasping gesture belongs to a more primitive and vital function.

[23] There are, of course, aspects of Schneider's condition that complicates this account somewhat. For instance, we saw in the previous section (3.4) that he is able to grasp the meaning of certain words, albeit in a constrained way. This, however, is not a counter instance to my claims in this section. The point is that he has lost the creativity or flexibility that would let him be open to *the full sense* of gestural expressions, the full potential displayed in the gestures of others and the sense of the perceived world in general.

In this way the case of Schneider becomes a concrete example of something we considered in chapter two (2.4). We saw there that McDowell follows Gadamer in exploiting the distinction between *world* and *milieu* in order to demonstrate the role of language and rationality in human perception. On McDowell's view, the involvement of conceptual capacities in perception enables a special kind of openness not enjoyed by animals that do not possess such capacities. Whereas the life of non-rational animals is constrained by the biological imperatives of a mere *milieu*, the perceptual capacities of human beings disclose a *world* the significance of which transcends natural and biological constraints: The world we live and cope in always already displays a suitability to figure as content in rational discourses. It is, as Gadamer puts it, "the common ground […] uniting all who talk to one another" (2004, p. 443). Now, the symptoms of Schneider's disorder entail that he has lost access to this "common ground" – he is no longer open to a *world* in the relevant sense of the term, but has fallen back into the concrete attitude of the mere animal, where all that he is able to perceptually disclose is that which is immediately relevant to his situation.

This makes it possible to see the above considerations of Schneider as illuminating what a world-disclosive perception actually amounts to. Both McDowell and Gadamer are of course aware that this phenomenon is essentially connected to intersubjectivity – openness to the human world is manifested in the capacity to exploit significances that are equally available to other speaking subjects. What Merleau-Ponty contributes with in this regard is – as we have seen – an understanding of intersubjectivity and the perceptual openness it entails that is inextricably grounded in the phenomena of embodiment and gestural expression. Ultimately, what Schneider has lost is the decentred perspective upon the world that lets it appear as an expressive, physiognomic unity. He no longer upholds the *categorial attitude* towards what he perceives, which would allow him to perceive according to others and thus to disclose a world liberated from the limitations of any one particular perspective.

It is precisely this liberation of the concrete and particular grounded in the human body's expressive and mimetic capacities that opens us to a cultural world constituted of a well of available linguistically expressible significations. "The act of expression constitutes a linguistic and cultural world, it makes that which stretched beyond fall back into being" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 203). That is, language is in many ways the *culmination* of the distinctive way in which normal humans approach the world. Speech is our bodily way of capturing and exploiting the full potential of the sense we find in perception; it marks the act by which the gestures of the perceived world is *completed* in the sense that they obtain a place of rest in the cultural or human world. This is why Schneider "never feels the need to speak" (ibid., 202).[24] A consequence of his loss of the decentred way of perceiving is that his experience never "tends toward speech," that it "never raises a question" (ibid.). From his limited perspective, the world no longer shows up with a sense directed towards completion in an act of expression.

According to Bimbenet, Merleau-Ponty's de-intellectualized situating of the categorial as an attitude "enters into immediate resonance with McDowell's conceptualism" (2009, p. 70). As he points out, McDowell primarily talks about involvement of conceptual *capacities* in perception rather than ascribing to it already *conceptualized* contents (ibid.). Thus, it is "not so much the given concepts […] that matter, but the tendencies they induce in the subject of perception" (ibid., p. 71). This surely resonates with what we have seen regarding Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the way in which capacities for expression inform perception. That is, they do not impose themselves on and actively form the contents of perception so as to conform to their rules; rather, they constitute a bodily readiness towards the world that lets the perceived world itself display a sense that suits being taken up in acts of expression. Moreover, just like McDowell, Merleau-Ponty takes these dispositions for expression to be drawn upon already in our primordial perceptual intake of the world and in that way ensure that we always already are perceptually open to a distinctively human world.

With this in mind there is no doubt that, in the context of the debate between McDowell and Dreyfus, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is on McDowell's side. By overlooking the possibility of situating the intellect in a way that makes it an integrated and permeating feature of our human lives rather than a faculty that is the "enemy of embodied coping" (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 353), Dreyfus ignores the importance of intersubjectivity in our way of perceiving. His positing of a mindless "ground floor" of perception is in effect the positing of a *solipsistic* ground floor – a mode of being where we are completely alone in our world and cope with mere forces relevant only for our most immediate practical needs. From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this is a devastating account of human perception. The assumption of a ground floor in perception fails to do justice to the fact that our primordial bond to other human subjects *defines* human perception. The intersubjective world does not appear first when we contemplate it; it is implied in every act of perception by allowing the expressive sense that is at the core of perceptual presence to appear. This expressive sense, moreover, is far from indifferent to the perceiver's capacities for language and thought – language, which is the enabling condition for thought, is crucial in constituting the cultural and intersubjective world in which we live, and so to say that the sense of the perceived world always already reveals an intersubjective significance also entails establishing it as always already displaying a sense suited for linguistic expression. In short, the embodied coping of human beings is always disclosive of a world suited for linguistic exploitation.

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[24] "[Schneider] hardly speaks unless he is questioned" and "[h]e can only speak if he has prepared his sentences in advance" (2012, p. 203).

That being said, we should not take the positions of McDowell and Merleau-Ponty to be identical in every respect. Though Bimbenet is correct in taking the notion of the categorial attitude to resonate with key ideas of McDowell's conceptualism, his paper does not take into account the fact that the meaning this attitude enables to appear on Merleau-Ponty's view is centred on the physiognomic style of the *gesture*. This preserves the spirit of McDowell's project in the sense that there still is an essentially thinkable and linguistically expressible sort of meaning that is in question, but accounts for it from a perspective that manages to fully avoid any intellectualist implications. For Merleau-Ponty, mindedness is anchored and realized in capacities that unambiguously belong to the living human body. The meaning of our expressions lies in the style of the bodily gestures we assume, and we grasp the expressions of both other humans and the world by taking them up in analogous bodily acts. The world-disclosing nature of human perception is thus primarily manifested not in an autonomous mind's power to identify ideas as such, but rather in the human body's capacity to find, take up, and produce meaningful gestures.

3.6 Conclusion

Contrary to Dreyfus's claims, there is no division between a minded and a mindless level of human existence in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The appearance of mind and rationality in humans amounts to a restructuring of the whole organism; it lets us inhabit a human, cultural and pervasively intersubjective world, permeated with significances implicitly understood as available to the gaze of every human perceiver, and does not leave intact a ground of mere animal instincts or ways of being. Our perceptual capacities disclose to us a world populated by *things* rather than mere forces defined by immediate biological or practical needs. We always approach the world with the attitude that lets us perceive *according to others*, and which in that way lets the perceived world appear in the form of expressive or gestural unities that characterize things as such and let them display a general significance and a multitude of possibilities.

Merleau-Ponty's anti-intellectualism is evident first and foremost in his positing of a division between act and operative intentionality; judgments are made on the basis of perception, they do not themselves create the unity of the perceived world. The unity of the pre-judged operative intentionality, however, is far from indifferent to the rational or linguistic capacities of the perceiver. It is only against a background of the fortune of significances constituting a cultural world, and by way of the set of expressive capacities in the human body and its intersubjectively instituted categorial attitude, that the pre-judged world of perception is able to display a sense suitable for being taken up in acts of judgments in the first place.

This makes Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the relation between perception and capacities for language and rationality resonate with McDowell's view of rationality as part of our second nature that opens us to a world permeated with distinctively human significances and which thus constraints our thoughts and beliefs about it from *inside* the sphere of meaning. However, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology marks an advantage over McDowell's conceptualism in that it fully manages to anchor our intellectual capacities in the living human body. Mindedness is on his view situated in the categorial attitude and our gestural capacities. The meanings we find in the world and exploit in language are primordially embodied in gestural expressions, and to grasp, produce, and cope with such expressions is a job not for a detached mind, but for the whole living human body.

Conclusion of Thesis

I have explored the notion of mindedness and its relation to perception and embodiment as this is conceived in the philosophical projects of McDowell, Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty, and examined the question about how we should understand the way in which our intellectual capacities are situated with regards to our perceptual openness to and embodied presence in the world.

McDowell's conceptualism was the main topic of the first chapter. In pursuing a balancing position between coherentism and the empiricist Myth of the Given, McDowell invokes the notion of second nature in order to show the plausibility of the claim that our empirical experiences are permeated with conceptual rationality. Although nonconceptualism might ultimately have its source in a confused understanding of what involvement of conceptuality in experience amounts to, we can acknowledge their concern to the extent that it seems necessary to do justice to the heterogeneity of thought and perception. In so doing, McDowell exploits the concept of a "same function" underlying the unity of both perception and judgments. This enables him to argue that perception can be *conceptual* despite not being *propositional* in content. He does, however, not provide a more elaborate account of the nature of this function.

Chapter two was centred on the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Dreyfus's phenomenologist perspective enables him to pose interesting objections to McDowell's conceptualism, which forces the latter to be more explicit about the actual implications of his view. While the concern regarding the compatibility of conceptualism with a phenomenology of embodiment is valid, Dreyfus's criticism presupposes a notion of mindedness that renders a harmony between the two impossible already from the start. He relies on a too intellectualist conception of the intellect that not only makes his critique of McDowell badly grounded, but also reveals a problematic view of the relation between "top" and "ground" floors of human existence on his part. In other words, Dreyfus subscribes to a "phenomenological foundationalism" – a version of the Myth of the Given. Thus, McDowell's claims from chapter one does not seem to be seriously challenged by Dreyfus's objections. However, the discussions of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate make the question of *how* from the first chapter even more pressing. What is the nature of the function that underlies the unity of both perception and judgments, and how can it be situated in a phenomenology of embodiment?

In the third and final chapter I approached an answer to this by looking into relevant parts of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the role of mind and rationality in human lives resonate with those of McDowell in many respects. We should not conceive of human nature as divided between a "ground floor" of natural instincts and interests in mere motor solicitations and a "top floor" consisting of the capacities associated with mindedness and reason. The appearance of these latter capacities entails an entire restructuring of our animal nature; they open us onto a human or cultural world in which we always already cope and live. This openness is instituted by a fundamental intersubjective understanding; it is realized through our capacity to grasp the gestures of others and consequently to understand that everything has a significance *for* others. This categorial attitude towards the world, enabled against a background of available linguistic expressions, allows for a liberation of perceptual sense so as to display an intersubjective, cultural, and linguistically expressible significance.

In this way Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology contributes with the most satisfactory solution to the question about how the human mind is situated with regards to our perceptual openness to and embodied presence in the world. There are two main reasons for this. First, it preserves the core demands of McDowell's conceptualism by making sense of how the perceived world can constrain our thoughts and expressions about it without appealing to a problematic foundationalist view. For Merleau-Ponty, the perceived world is always already meaningful, and there is no "ground floor" beyond that which is thinkable and linguistically expressible – this places him on the side of McDowell in the McDowell-Dreyfus debate. Secondly, it manages to definitely situate the solution to those demands in the phenomenon of the living human body, and thus surpasses McDowell's conceptualism in some important respects. It is by centring the notion of thinkable and linguistically expressible meaning on the bodily *gesture* that it becomes possible to positively show a continuity between the world in which we cope and the world of which we speak.

I do not claim to have provided a complete and fully developed solution to the issues I discuss in this thesis. There is undoubtedly more to be said regarding all the topics I have touched upon throughout the different chapters. Most pressing is perhaps the question of whether it is possible to establish an even more explicit harmony between the projects of McDowell and Merleau-Ponty. In other words, could McDowell embrace Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as it is presented here, or would the shift of focus from the concept to the gesture entail a loss of something he takes to be crucial for his view? It would certainly also be rewarding to see the discussions constituting this thesis, the focus of which is admittedly quite narrow, in a wider philosophical context. McDowell's project draws heavily on the history of philosophy, particularly aspects of the writings of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. A more thorough thesis could have explored whether Merleau-Ponty's relation to the same figures enables an even more interesting comparison between the two. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty is certainly not alone in advocating a phenomenological approach to language. A more explicit investigation into how it relates to, for instance, Gadamer's philosophy as well as the writings of the later Wittgenstein, would most certainly yield fruitful results.

I do, however, believe that this thesis contributes to the discussions it partakes in, perhaps primarily by sketching out a path towards conceiving of both McDowell's conceptualism and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in a different light than how they are usually understood. Furthermore, I take it to have approached the situating of the human mind in a way that allows us to see its presence in the world as less mysterious. Mindedness is a characteristic or function of the living human body, not an extra feature in addition to our animal nature. It is in the capacities displayed by the body that the mind is revealed, and it is with our bodies we cope with the human world of rational significations. In this sense human beings are truly rational animals.

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