

Two Forms of Deliberation

McDowell and Dreyfus on Responsibility in Aristotelian Phronesis

Recently, John McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus have been involved in a debate concerned with the question of whether our basic everyday actions are non-conceptual, non-rational and free of self-awareness (Dreyfus' standpoint) or permeated with conceptuality, rationality and self-awareness (McDowell's position). A significant part of this discussion is battled out via their contrasting views of Aristotle's account of phronesis. The overall objective of this paper is to compare their readings of phronesis and to argue in favor of McDowell's position.

Roughly put, phronesis designates a virtuous agent's ability to be immediately responsive to the moral demands of a particular situation. Dreyfus and McDowell both view this in terms of a perceptual capacity through which the virtuous agent [*Phronimus*], perceives the situation in a certain light, that is, the morally correct light. Those features of the situation that demand a moral response are immediately seen as relevant, while other features that might stand out under different circumstance, remain silently in the background. Understood as such, the perceptual capacity of the phronimus *just is* what having the right moral outlook amounts to.

Where Dreyfus and McDowell are in *disagreement*, is on the status of the content of this perceptual capacity. Dreyfus argues that the phronimus's perceptions are non-conceptual, which roughly means that he takes the moral agent to act without reasons or rationality, deliberation, or self-awareness being operative.¹ This stands in stark contrast with McDowell's view, which presents phronesis as conceptual or rational all the way out and holds that the moral agent's deliberation and self-awareness are necessary features of expressions of phronesis.² In sum, Dreyfus and McDowell agree on understanding phronesis as a perceptual capacity to be immediately responsive to the moral demands of a specific situation, but they disagree on what needs to be in place in order for this immediate perceptual take on the situation to count *as* an expression of phronesis.

At stake in this disagreement is the possibility to account for a moral agent's responsibility for his actions. Although I believe Dreyfus gets Aristotle right on a descriptive level, I regard his reading of phronesis problematic for marginalizing the crucial notions of *deliberation* and *choice*. Deliberation, as Dreyfus presents it, is a matter of situation-detached reason or rule-application. I argue that this is an unnecessarily rigid notion of deliberation, which motivates Dreyfus to propose a problematic dualism between what he calls ground floor absorbed coping (under which he places phronesis as well), and secondary detached conceptual intentionality (which is where he places deliberation). My main objective in the next section is to show that his commitment to this dualism makes it difficult to see how the phronimos can be held accountable for his expressions of phronesis.

In the section thereafter we will turn to McDowell who rejects Dreyfus' dualism between ground floor non-conceptual coping and upper level conceptual intentionality and finds the resources to do so precisely in Aristotle's approach to deliberation, which he reads as an alternative to the more rigid, modern notion of deliberation Dreyfus entails.³ I believe that, once we have widened Dreyfus' approach to deliberation to McDowell's thin Aristotelian one we will see that McDowell's account can largely make space for what Dreyfus registers on a descriptive level, without losing the space for the moral agent's responsibility.

Phronesis as a Paradigm Case of Absorbed Skilful Coping

Dreyfus presents phronesis as a straightforward case of basic non-conceptual action. In order to assess what is problematic about this reading, the main objective of this section will be to get a better sense of what Dreyfus considers as a non-conceptual action. This will allow us to compare his reading to Aristotle and to assess the space his view leaves for responsibility.

The everyday actions Dreyfus is concerned with are those we tend to execute without having to reflect on what we are doing or on ourselves as agents doing them. The term Dreyfus

introduces to refer to these actions is *absorbed skilful coping*. Cases of this are abundant in the world of sports, where athletes are able to make high paced and complex moves within a game without having the time to dissect the situation in different components in order to then reflect on what to do next. Instead these athletes ‘simply act’ while being in a state of ‘flow’ [Dreyfus, 2007a: 356].⁴ Dreyfus holds that a large part of our everyday lives is lived in this state of flow as well. We walk mindlessly down the street, ride our car or bicycle, open and close the fridge, grab the doorknob to leave the house, or, a favorite example of Dreyfus’, we walk into an elevator and, without thinking about it, take up the appropriate distance to the others in it.

Although we don’t pay attention to ourselves as agents nor to the objects we deal with as objects, we nevertheless portray a highly nuanced, situation-specific understanding of our environment while absorbed in everyday coping. Dreyfus argues, I believe justifiably so, that this form of understanding cannot be dissected in terms of situation-detached rules or principles for acting. But he takes one step further and reasons that, *because* the situation-specific know-how of the absorbed skilful coper cannot be broken down in terms of detached rules, the content of absorbed skilful coping has to be non-conceptual, which he lumps together with without deliberation, reasons for acting, rationally, or self-awareness. Extending this view to his reading of phronesis, and placing himself in opposition to McDowell, Dreyfus holds that “Aristotle’s account of phronesis does not assume, as McDowell does, that ethical expertise can be conceptually articulated. ... most of our ethical life consists in *simply seeing* the appropriate thing to do and responding *without deliberation*, as, when we help a blind person cross the street or, when after years of experience, we unreflectively balance, case by case, the demands of our professional and personal lives.” [Dreyfus, 2005: 6]

Dreyfus takes himself to be arguing against McDowell again when he discusses the process whereby we become agents capable of absorbed, yet highly skilful coping. Rather than having our parents teach us the skill of, for example, distance-standing through rules of how much distance to keep depending on the space we are in and the amount of people in it, we tend to follow their

example without thinking about it and, through an unreflective process of trial and error, we gradually acquire a sense of what counts as the right distance in each particular case. And so, when it comes to acquiring ethical know-how, Dreyfus writes, “phronesis shows that socialization can produce a kind of master, whose actions do not rely on habits based on *reasons* to guide him. Indeed, thanks to socialization, a persons’ perceptions and actions at their best would be so responsive to the specific situation that they could not be captured in *general concepts*.” [Dreyfus, 2005: 6, my italics] Note that Dreyfus entails a very specific notion of reasons, concepts and deliberation that takes them to refer to a situation-detached stance of abstract reason or rule application. In the next section, when I turn to McDowell’s reading of Aristotle, we will see an alternative approach.

To a certain extent we find ideas very close to Dreyfus’s in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle too holds that the process through which our ethical outlook is instilled follows a largely unreflective, or as Aristotle sometimes puts it ‘non-rational’ process of habituation. Jonathan Lear offers a description of this ‘non-rational’ process of habituation in *Aristotle - The Desire to Understand*, which I presume Dreyfus would happily agree with:

“A person’s entry into the ethical is inherently non-rational. We do not get a child to act considerately by giving him the reasons for doing so ... [for] these reasons cannot really be appreciated from outside the perspective of a considerate person. ... The child will typically begin acting considerately in order to gain the reward or encouragement; that is, for an external pleasure. But, through repetition, the child begins to derive pleasure from the considerate acts themselves. In this way the child grows into the ethical world.” [Lear, 1988: 169]

The ethical world that this process of habituation opens us up to is not dissectible in abstract situation-independent rules or reasons for acting. Instead it is a world of messy, constantly differing particular situations that require a perceptual sensitivity to cope with. As Aristotle writes of virtuous responses to ethically demanding situations: “It is not easy to fix in words, anymore than anything else that belongs to the sphere of perception; for such things depend on the particular circumstances, and the judgment of them lies in our perception.” [NE, ?] Dreyfus takes passages such as these as an important indication that Aristotle’s notion of perception should be understood

as non-conceptual. My aim for the remainder of this paper is to show that this claim of non-conceptuality is incompatible with some of the most important elements of Aristotelian phronesis, namely choice, deliberation, and, tied to this, moral accountability.

Although our initiation into the ethical life is certainly not a matter of following explicitly given reasons for acting, we have to be careful how exactly we define it as ‘non-rational’. If non-rational means outside the range of reasons, and therefore inaccessible for critical self-reflection, it seems impossible to hold someone accountable for their habitually acquired ethical outlook.⁵ This is certainly a reading Aristotle wants to avoid, since he holds that “at the beginning the unjust person and the self-indulgent person had the option not to become like that,” [NE, 1113b5-b10] emphasizing the point further down that “each of us is himself somehow responsible for his disposition.” [NE, 1114a20-a22]

In order to account for this responsibility, it is necessary that the part of our ‘agency’ that regulates our so-called ‘non-rational’ initiation into the ethical life, is responsive to what Aristotle views as the more explicitly rational, reasoning part of the soul. Ultimately it is only by scrutinizing, critically assessing and reflectively endorsing our ‘non-rationally’ acquired ethical outlook that we truly become a virtuous agent, who is accountable for his actions.⁶ Hence, Aristotle makes a point of stressing that “the non-rational is in a way persuaded by reason,” adding that, “if one should call this too ‘possessing reason’, then the aspect of soul that possesses reason will ... be double in nature: one element of it will have it in the proper sense and in itself, another as something capable of listening.” [NE, 1103a1] To speak with a Sellarsian/McDowellian term, the phronimus’ habitually acquired dispositions, and the actions that flow from them, although not acquired through an explicit reason-following process, have to be located within the space of giving and asking for reasons.

Dreyfus sees this very differently. The notion of reasons and concepts he entails commits him to the view that “the Phronimus’ actions are not in the space of reasons at all.”⁷ Instead he proposes that our absorbed skilful coping, which includes expressions of phronesis, takes place

within what he calls the 'space of motivations,' a notion he derives from his particular reading of Merleau-Ponty's discussions of motor-intentionality in *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁸ According to Dreyfus' reading of him, Merleau-Ponty teaches us that through our perceptual and motor-skills we enjoy a primordial openness onto a world that precedes the world of facts and reasons that we as self-aware, rational beings are situated in as well. Dreyfus terms this 'more primordial world' in terms of the space of motivations, which consists of a network of so-called interconnected 'solicitations' that are correlative with our perceptual and motor-skills and therefore capable of immediately inviting or motivating us to act. Because I have, for example, developed the skill of opening and closing doors, a situation can invite me to act by walking towards the door, reaching for the door handle, and walking through the door opening, without having to think of what I am doing. As Dreyfus puts it, "in flow ... there are only attractive and repulsive forces [i.e. solicitations], drawing appropriate activity out of an active body." ... "We don't experience ourselves as subjects but respond bodily to solicitations."⁹

In fact, it is precisely when I do think about what I am doing that my absorbed skilful coping loses its fluidity. When an athlete, for example, starts to focus his attention on how his hand throws the ball, this can seriously affect his athletic abilities.¹⁰ Based on the phenomenological evidence that this detached attitude negatively interferes with our absorbed skilful expertise, Dreyfus concludes that having reasons, deliberation and self-awareness cannot be operative in absorbed skilful coping. As he puts it: "In general, paying attention to a solicitation as one responds to it leads to a regression from expertise to mere competence. If the expert copier is to remain in flow and perform at his best, he must respond directly to solicitations without attending to his activity or to the objects doing the soliciting."¹¹ Note how Dreyfus' argument moves from cases that indicate that reflection *can, at times*, interfere with absorbed skilful coping to a claim that conceptuality, self-awareness and reflection *cannot* be operative *in all cases* of absorbed coping. It is also important to see that Dreyfus is not merely making a descriptive claim about the copier's

experience. He holds that there is no space for rationality, deliberation and self-awareness in a conceptual story about absorbed coping.¹²

Because rationality, deliberation, reflection and self-awareness are portrayed as the enemies of absorbed coping it seems that, on Dreyfus' account we can only be *either* absorbed in our responding to solicitations *or* taking up a fully detached stance towards the world and ourselves. In other words, we seem to live in two mutually exclusive spheres; the space of motivations or the space of reasons. When absorbed within the space of motivations the coper is immediately drawn to act by the normative force of the world's solicitations. Although Dreyfus does not refer to his model in these terms, Dreyfus is thus committed to a dualism between so-called primordial or ground floor absorbed coping and upper level, secondary conceptual intentionality. As Dreyfus puts it: "One must distinguish motor-intentionality, and the interrelated solicitations our coping body is intertwined with, from the conceptual intentionality and the world of propositional structures it opens onto."¹³

It is this dualism, caused by his view that deliberation and self-awareness are incompatible with situation-specific absorbed coping, which makes it unclear how responsibility can play a role in Dreyfus' account. Before laying this out in more detail I want to turn to McDowell and his view of deliberation, choice and self-awareness in Aristotle.

Deliberation, Choice and Self-awareness as Necessary Conditions for Phronesis

Just like Dreyfus, McDowell sees phronesis as a perceptual responsiveness to the immediate, particular demands of a morally demanding situation. He writes, "Virtue, in general, is an ability to recognize requirements that situations impose on one's behavior. It is a single complex sensitivity."¹⁴ And, "phronesis, the intellectual excellence operative in behavior that manifests good character, is a perceptual capacity." Although *virtue* or *excellence* is often characterized as a

disposition of character that aims at well-being, and phronesis as the excellence of wisdom necessary for virtue, both Dreyfus and McDowell use these terms interchangeably as expressing the same phenomenon, namely the phronimus' perceptual capacity to be immediately sensitive to the moral demands of each particular situation and to act accordingly. McDowell justifies this conflation of virtue with practical wisdom as follows:

“Already in NE book 2, in which the stress is on states that result from upbringing, he insists that the actions that manifest virtue must be *chosen*. ... It is already implicit, even at this early stage in the exposition, that *virtue of character requires an intellectual excellence*. ... The topic of book 2 is surely initiation into a conceptual space, by way of being taught to admire and delight in actions in the right way.”¹⁵

As opposed to Dreyfus, McDowell understands the developed sensitivity of the phronimus as fully rational, as situated within a conceptual space. Seeing a particular situation in a certain light and as requiring a certain response *just is* our reason for acting. This, in turn, requires that the moral agent is self-aware of his responses to situations as being expressions of phronesis. In other words, the phronimus needs to hold that doing this thing, under these circumstances *just is* what being a virtuous person amounts to, and this requires that “it must be something of which on each of the relevant occasions, he is aware.”¹⁶

McDowell's reading of phronesis as permeated with self-awareness, deliberation and choice or decision [Phrohaireisis], enjoys strong textual support. In an important passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that should have warned Dreyfus against understanding phronesis as straightforward forms of skilful absorbed coping, Aristotle writes:

“The things that come about through the agency of skills contain in themselves the mark of their being done well, so that it is enough if they turn out in a certain way, whereas the things that come about in accordance with the excellences count as done justly or moderately not merely because they themselves are of a certain kind, but also because of facts about the agent doing them - first *if he does them knowingly*, secondly *if he decides to do them, and decides to do them for themselves*.”¹⁷

Aristotle views decision or choice as the upshot of deliberation. At times this characterization seems to promote the following reading of moral reasoning: first seeing that the situation requires a moral response, then stepping back in order to deliberate from a detached position what needs to be

done, and then choosing a certain path for action. Aristotle writes, for example, “Virtue makes us choose the right end to aim at, but practical wisdom makes us choose the right means.”¹⁸ Or, “the practically wise man should know ... what are the things good for man ... and he should deliberate as to the means by which this may be attained.”¹⁹ The challenge for McDowell is to provide a reading of deliberation and choice that is compatible with phronesis as an immediate situation-specific sensitivity.

In order to make sense of the phronimus’ virtuous actions as the culmination of immediate, sometimes even unreflective perception, McDowell insists on reading Aristotle as presenting a kind of non-instrumental notion of deliberation. As we read earlier, and as McDowell stresses as well, “one of Aristotle’s conditions for action to manifest ethical character ... is that the action undertaken be chosen for its own sake.” This leads McDowell to conclude that, “if choice here retains its usual link with deliberation, there must be a non-instrumental kind of deliberate structure.”²⁰ By emphasizing the point that ethical action has to be chosen for its own sake, McDowell can hold that deliberative choice is not a tool towards virtuous activity, but intrinsic to it. As he puts it in this lengthy but important passage,

“The choices that display character are choices for the sake of doing well. ... These choices reveal character because they display in practice the agent’s conception of how a human being should conduct his life. The fact that these choices are for the sake of doing well ensures that they conform to the general claim about choice, that what is chosen is chosen ‘towards’ an end. But in these cases an agent’s choosing his action for the sake of doing well is his choosing it as a case of doing well. If he is right, doing well ... is what doing well, here and now, is; doing well is not something external to what he does, to be brought about by it.”²¹

Aristotle’s emphasis on well-being indicates that the phronimus acts not merely from some Kantian sense of duty. On the contrary expressions of phronesis are meant to bring a deep sense of enjoyment to the phronimus. Although McDowell rejects the idea that Aristotle offers a detailed, substantial view of what kind of life guarantees this well-being he does offer an important description of the kind of life Aristotle’s account excludes, based on Aristotle’s famous function argument. This argument holds that well-being is a life lived in accordance with man’s function

[Ergon], where this function lies in man's logos (roughly reason). As McDowell puts it, eudaimonia is "rational activity in accordance with excellence." And he concludes that this "thesis ... obviously excludes what might otherwise have been a conceivable view of eudaimonia, namely, a life of unreflective gratification of appetite; in the spirit of the ergon argument, we might say that that embodies no recognizable conception of a distinctively human kind of excellence."²² It is unclear how Dreyfus, who views phronesis as a non-deliberative, responding to the world's immediate attractions and repulses, would integrate this insight into his account.

McDowell specifies what his approach to eudaimonia amounts to as follows: "To embrace a specific conception of eudaimonia is to see the relevant reasons for acting, on occasions when they coexist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but *silencing* those other considerations - as bringing it about that, in the circumstances, they are not reasons at all."²³ It is important for McDowell that these other reasons are *silenced* instead of overridden because the idea of overriding other reasons implies too much of an internal struggle for the moral agent. This is problematic if we want to take seriously Aristotle's view that the phronimos does not act out of strict duty, but that his actions actually bring him pleasure. As McDowell puts it: "Even though the attractiveness of the missed pleasure would have been a reason to pursue it if one could have done so without flouting a requirement of excellence, nevertheless in the circumstances that reason is silenced. And if one misses something that one had no reason to pursue, that is no loss."²⁴

McDowell's notion of silencing sets up an interesting point of comparison with Dreyfus' view of attractions immediately soliciting us to act. On McDowell's view what does or does not show up as important, or, to put it in Dreyfusian terms, what 'solicits us', is prepared by our self-conception qua moral agent directed at well-being. Although Dreyfus stresses a similar point in his Heidegger book²⁵ this seems to get lost in his debate with McDowell when he rejects McDowell's claim that the virtuously acting agent has a reason for action, which "must be expressible on these

lines: “Doing this is what, here and now, doing well is.”²⁶ Dreyfus wants to avoid this McDowellian view of phronesis because he believes this to be incompatible with our ability to respond unreflectively and immediately to the demands of the situation at hand. But reasons for acting for McDowell don’t have to be understood as accompanying our action as an explicit, supplemented thought. On the contrary, our expressions of phronesis can, for McDowell, be described in Dreyfusian terms, that is, as an immediate, pre-reflective response to a solicitation that compels us to act. On McDowell’s view this is compatible with the idea that there is a *reason* why we are solicited by this and not that solicitation. The other possible demands a situation could exercise on us have been silenced as a direct result from our self-understanding qua ethical agent directed at acting well. To rephrase the point: even though McDowell’s phronesis might have acted unreflectively, it is senseless to characterize his response as virtuous if it weren’t permeated with a deep understanding of what acting morally right requires.

If it wasn’t for our self-understanding qua moral agents structuring the situation by silencing certain possible demands, we couldn’t begin to make sense of the ability to be immediately solicited by the right thing to do within a highly complex, ethically demanding situation. For Dreyfus the phronimos is *either* immediately solicited by what needs to be done, *or*, if the situation gets too complex, he resorts to explicit deliberation. He writes,

“Of course, there will be problematic cases of conflicting goods where the phronimos does not see immediately what must be done. Thus, Aristotle says the phronimos must be able to deliberate well. But, according to Heidegger, most of our ethical life consists in simply seeing the appropriate thing to do and responding without *deliberation*.”²⁷

McDowell on the other hand, argues, and I believe correctly, that it is precisely an achievement of phronesis that he immediately sees or is solicited by what needs to be done, in the midst of all the complexities of a situation. Because Dreyfus leaves out the overarching role of our self-understanding in expressions of phronesis, he cannot see that this is what phronesis is: being able to see the demands of the situation immediately, often even un-reflectively, because our self-

understanding of what it means to act well has silenced all other possible solicitations in the specific situation.

Responsibility in Expressions of Phronesis

The final task of this paper is to compare Dreyfus's with McDowell's picture of phronesis with the issue of responsibility in mind. We saw that, on Dreyfus' view self-awareness and having reasons for acting play no role in absorbed coping and that solicitations immediately motivate us to act precisely insofar as they are not deliberated on. Within this view it is unclear how the absorbed copier can disengage himself from these immediately motivating solicitations. It seems that, on Dreyfus' view, the phronimus has no choice about whether he let's himself be solicited or not. As a result of Dreyfus' dualism between absorbed coping and rational deliberation, choice, as the upshot of deliberation, seems to emerge as disruptive, rather than constitutive of expressions of phronesis.

Not only does the absorbed phronimus of Dreyfus' account not have the possibility of choice within his unreflective expressions of phronesis, he also lacks the ability to retroactively ascribe his unreflective actions to himself and to take accountability for them in this way. Absorbed coping takes place within the space of motivations, which, as we saw, means that our behavior falls outside the space of reasons - which is a requirement for retroactive criticizability. Dreyfus insists throughout the debate that the absorbed copier is responsible insofar as he can disrupt his coping and retroactively ascribe the action to himself. He writes, "Of course the coping going on *is* mine in the sense that the coping can be interrupted at any moment by a transformation that results in an experience of stepping back from the flow of current coping. I then retroactively attach an 'I think' to the coping and take responsibility for my actions."²⁸ However, what I hope to have shown is that Dreyfus doesn't have the conceptual tools to back up this claim.

Dreyfus seems to register these difficulties in his latest contribution to the debate when he writes:

“McDowell could counter that, if there is no ego actually acting nor somehow operative, how come we all agree that, if Sartre knocks down a pedestrian as the streetcar draws him to race after it, we don’t blame the streetcar but hold Sartre responsible. McDowell might plausibly claim that this shows that the ego must be at least *formally* involved.”

The solution Dreyfus presents to this well anticipated criticism is unsatisfying. Turning to Heidegger for answers he writes,

“Heidegger, however, has a different response to the problem of egoless responsibility. He would grant the responsibility but place it in the coper’s responsibly for his absorption. He would point out that the human absorbed coper, unlike an animal that is captivated by its experience, is always free to break out of his or her captivation. Thus, if he is absorbed, he is responsible for not having broken out of his absorption. Therefore, even when he is egolessly absorbed, he is nonetheless responsible for what he is doing.”

I don’t see how this answers the problem that McDowell’s anticipated criticism has posed for Dreyfus. What remains to be answered is from what position the egoless coper is able to “break out of his or her captivation,” within a space of immediately motivating solicitations. Dreyfus appears unable to successfully tackle this major issue. In fact, it is questionable if he even registers this as a major issue. Instead he moves on to criticize McDowell’s reading of Phronesis, which he sums up as follows:

“The demands of the situation cannot serve the kind person as *reasons* for his best actions. For *either* the kind person remains absorbed and responds directly to the demands of the situation, *or* else he distances himself from the situation and has to reason out what a kind person should do McDowell offers an implausible account of the role of reasons in the virtuous person’s actions when he claims that in perceiving that in a specific situation a specific action is called for, “it is enough if [the kind person] thinks of what he does, when—as we put it—he shows himself to be kind, under some such description as “the thing to do.” The trouble is that this is *more* than enough. To claim that the skilled person requires a reason in order to act is the equivalent of what Bernard Williams in another context calls one thought too many.”²⁹

What this quote reiterates is the dualism within Dreyfus’ own view between *either* absorption or else *distanced* rationality. Because these are his only options, deliberation necessarily emerges as the enemy of virtuous conduct. Presumably because he registers the inconsistency that this sets up with Aristotle’s own account, Dreyfus tries to make space for deliberation as a useful supplement to the phronimus’ perceptual capacity, when he writes that the phronimus has to deliberate well in order to cope with highly complex moral situations. As we have seen, there is, however, overwhelming textual evidence that Aristotle sees deliberation and having reasons for acting as

internal to all expressions phronesis, rather than a supplement used by the phronimus when things get foggy.

McDowell has helped us show that staying true to this textual evidence does not commit us to the view that phronesis is a matter of detached reflection by means of general concepts or reasons. Instead, when we frame our understanding of deliberation in terms of McDowell's Aristotle, we can hold on to situation-specific responsiveness to the moral demands of the situation, without losing the ability to self-ascribe and reflect on these responses and take responsibility for them. McDowell wants us to think of Aristotle's discussion of choice and deliberation in phronesis in terms of the space of reasons or concepts that this places our actions and perceptions in. Even when we act immediately, even unreflectively, expressions of phronesis are not immediate, mindless responses to solicitations but full reasons for his actions.

“The form of deliberation is a form into which we can cast an explanation by reasons, and such an explanation can be appropriate for actions that did not issue from prior deliberation. ... It is best to give Aristotle a pinch of salt on this: to take it, for instance, that when he suggests choice is the upshot of deliberation, his point is really that the conceptual structure that is characteristic of deliberation figures in the proper explanation of the relevant actions, whether or not prior deliberation takes place.” [24]

I believe that, if Dreyfus is willing to budge on his rigid view of reasons and deliberation, he shows a much closer affinity to McDowell's view than he acknowledges. This, then, places the burden of proof on Dreyfus, who will have to convince us why non-conceptuality and lack of self-awareness within absorbed coping need to be maintained on a *conceptual* and not just on a *descriptive* or *experiential* level, and who will have to provide a convincing account of how responsibility can figure in his conceptual story.

Lear, Jonathan, (1988), *Aristotle The Desire to Understand*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988

¹ Cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus, "The Return of the Myth of the Mental," (*Inquiry* 50, No 4, 2007) 373

² Cf. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: *Harvard University Press*, 1998), 39 & 51

³ As McDowell puts it in his introduction to *Mind, Value and Reality*, "My main aim ... is to counteract a way in which, as I see it, modern prejudices about rationality tend to distort our understanding of Greek ethics." And he believes that these modern prejudices reflect "a dualism between reason and the more evidently "natural" aspects of character." Vii/viii

⁴ Dreyfus' phenomenology relies heavily on these cases. For example, he often refers to Celtics player Larry Bird, who, in L.D. Levine's, *Bird: The Making of an American Sports Legend* is quoted as saying: "[A lot of the] things I do on the court are just reactions to situations ... A lot of times, I've passed the basketball and not realized I've passed it until a moment or so later." In a negative sense Dreyfus presents the case of Chuck Knoblauch, second baseman for the Yankees, as support for his account. As Dreyfus tells the story, Knoblauch became captivated by an irreversible tendency to reflect on his bodily movements during the game. This tendency to reflect affected his skills for playing baseball to the extent that he was forced to quit the team and give up baseball altogether. Dreyfus takes this as evidence for his view that reflection, conceptuality, and self-awareness are the enemies of skilful absorbed coping. [Cf. Dreyfus, "The Return..." 354, 355 & 360]

⁵ With regard to this point I presuppose some familiarity with McDowell's project, which, following Wilfrid Sellars, is concerned with rejecting the myth of the given. Supporters of this myth hold that our perceptual knowledge, for example, the belief that it is raining outside, is justified by pre-conceptually given data, or, as Sellars also puts it, data that is "unacquired." The problem with the idea of pre-conceptual givenness as a ground for perceptual beliefs is that it combines two irreconcilable claims. On the one hand the given serves an epistemically *grounding* role; my perceptual belief that it is raining is justified by the pre-conceptually given impression that it is raining. At the same time, to have an impression to the extent '*that it is raining*' is to already operate in the space of reasons or conceptual experience. As McDowell sums it up in *Mind, Value, and Reality*: "What is pre-conceptually given has to be outside the space of reasons, since it is not in conceptual shape and therefore not capable of standing in rational relations to anything. But it has to be such that being given some of it can be conceived as

happening inside the space of reasons since getting a piece of the given is supposed to constitute a *ground* or *justification* for our lowest level conceptualizations.” [280/281] In order for something to ‘stand in rational relations to anything,’ and thus be available for critical reflection, those who support a kind of non-conceptualism will thus have to face the challenge of avoiding these two irreconcilable claims. Dreyfus believes he successfully does so when, in his debate with McDowell he inserts his idea of a world of solicitations as a meaningful, rather than a bare, given. But due to his dualism and his portrayal of conceptuality and rationality as the enemy of absorbed skilful coping it remains unclear to me how Dreyfus’ meaningful given stands in relation to the sphere of rational criticizability.

⁶ Cf. David Ross, *Aristotle*:

⁷ Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise” (APA Pacific Division Presidential Address 2005), *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79:2 (November 2005), 6

⁸ I disagree with Dreyfus’ reading of Merleau-Ponty, which I believe ignores the crucial notion of abstract movement leading up to Merleau-Ponty’s introduction of motor-intentionality. As I read Merleau-Ponty, motor-intentionality facilitates both abstract and concrete movements, where abstract movements are ... And where concrete movements are ... Dreyfus, on the other hand, seems to read motor-intentionality as facilitating concrete movements alone. For a detailed discussion of Dreyfus’ reading of motor-intentionality and the role of abstract movement, or as he calls it ‘abstract attitude’ see Dreyfus ...

⁹ Dreyfus, “Response To McDowell” (*Inquiry*, No 4, 2007) 374 & 376

¹⁰ Cf. Dreyfus’ discussion of Chuck Knoblauch, as mentioned in endnote 4 of this paper.

¹¹ Dreyfus, “Response ...” 374

¹² Cf., Dreyfus’ conclusions about what explains the Chuck Knoblauch case on page 360 in “The Return ...”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 352

¹⁴ McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 53

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ? [My Italics]

¹⁸ Ross, *Aristotle*, 226

¹⁹ Ross, *Aristotle*, 223

²⁰ McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 25

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26

²² *Ibid.*, 12/13

²³ *Ibid.*, 17

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18

²⁵ Cf. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World, a Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991), 18. Here Dreyfus characterizes Heideggerian disclosure or understanding of being, which, along with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of motor-intentionality serves as Dreyfus’ model for thinking about what makes unreflective coping possible, as “practices containing an interpretation of what it is to be a person, an object, and a society.” This fundamental role for self-understanding or interpretation seems marginalized in Dreyfus’ emphasis on solicitations immediately drawing us to act in his debate with McDowell.

²⁶ McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*,” 7 [Dreyfus explicitly rejects this in his latest, yet to be published contribution to the debate, “The Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental”, presented at The New School for Social Research in March 2009. See the lengthy quote on p.15 of this paper]

²⁷ Dreyfus, “Overcoming ...” 6

²⁸ Dreyfus, *Return of the Myth of the Mental*, 356

²⁹ Dreyfus, “The Pervasiveness ...”