

MIND, BODY, AND WORLD:
RESOLVING THE DREYFUS-MCDOWELL DEBATE

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By

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PREVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In recent years Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell have engaged one another in several fora, debating the pervasiveness of our conceptual experience. Dreyfus offers arguments unique to the debate over nonconceptual content, claiming that our situated, skillful and embodied engagement with the world (or what he calls skillful coping) is an intentional, personal-level phenomenon that is inappropriate to and in fact serves as a ground for conceptual activity. McDowell responds alternately by defending the conceptual nature of skillful coping, claiming it to be orthogonal to his own conceptualist concerns, or by dismissing the relevance of the normative phenomena to which Dreyfus calls attention.

I argue that while McDowell is correct concerning the pervasively conceptual nature of human experience, he and Dreyfus both misunderstand the nature of the phenomena in question. Dreyfus is right to insist on the relevance of our skillful and unreflective bodily practices, but he misunderstands the relationship between coping and language specifically, and hence between coping and conceptuality more generally. This leaves him with a problematic dualism in the nature of human experience and understanding. On the other hand, McDowell lacks a phenomenologically plausible explanation of how conceptual capacities are operative even in unreflective activity, and likewise misses the intimate connection between coping, unreflective social norms, and conceptuality. The way forward lies in a more careful analysis of both reflective and unreflective experience together with a

recognition that possessing conceptual capacities—no less than possessing skillful, action-oriented bodies—changes the nature and content of perception.

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the wake of my first semester as a graduate student in philosophy I had the privilege of attending the staged debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell at the 2006 American Philosophical Association's Eastern Division Conference. While I thoroughly enjoyed myself, I didn't realize then the retrospectively clear significance this debate would have for my own intellectual development and interests. Consequently, I would like to begin by acknowledging the philosophical "background conditions" that allowed this dissertation to be written—the lifetime of rigorous debate and analysis performed by these two scholars. It has been a genuine pleasure to study their works and argue with them both.

In trying to turn my personal musings into serious philosophical engagement with the issues of this debate, I could not have been more fortunate than I was to work with a committee composed of brilliant scholars who are themselves former students of Dreyfus and McDowell. Bill Blattner in particular has helped me along with incredible generosity and kindness, from before I was a graduate student and throughout the writing process—a mentor in every sense of the word. Mark Lance has perhaps taken my diverse interests and arguments more seriously than anyone else and has helped me to unite my genuinely pluralistic pursuits. And it was in Mark Wrathall's class that I first learned about and discovered a genuine passion for philosophy. I am incredibly grateful for my committee's time and dedication—particularly for their challenges and demands for rigor and clarity. Without their help this dissertation would have remained hopelessly inchoate.

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Far from a mere intellectual exercise, philosophy is inseparable from the rest of my life and an integral part of my own attempts to achieve *eudaimonia*. Consequently, the most important context for this dissertation has been my own family. I am especially grateful to my loving parents, Deborah and Randy Olsen for a lifetime of encouragement and stability. My uncle Jeff Olsen first gave me a glimpse of what it was to be a scholar and has always nurtured my intellectual interests.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One:

Conceptualism, Phenomenology, and Epistemic Architecture:
An Introduction to the Dreyfus-McDowell Debate 1

I. Beginning where they left off: characterizing the debate..... 1

II. Unwitting allies: underlying commitments in the debate..... 6

III. A diagnosis and prescription 18

IV. Overview of chapters 27

Chapter Two:

Evaluating Dreyfus Vis-à-Vis the Debate Over Nonconceptuality 33

I. What do we mean by conceptual vs. nonconceptual? 35

II. Situating Dreyfus 41

 Dreyfus’s nonconceptual coping thesis 45

 Situation Dreyfus: a second attempt 51

III. Dreyfus, language, and world-disclosure 58

 The traditional view of language and propositionality 59

 Dreyfus’s considered view of language and propositionality 62

 Abandoning Dreyfus’s presupposition 70

IV. Conclusion 76

Chapter Three:

McDowellian Conceptuality: Updating the Dialogue with Dreyfus 78

I. McDowell’s shift to non-propositional conceptuality 80

II. Nonconceptualist challenges 88

 McDowell’s total content conceptualism 88

 Bermudez’s concept-possession nonconceptualist challenge 91

 Hanna and Chadha’s situated nonconceptualist challenge 96

III. Dreyfus’s phenomenological challenge reexamined 115

IV. Conclusions 128

<u>Chapter Four:</u>	
Language and Practical Engagement: An Intimate Dance: Part I	134
I. The difficulties of Dreyfus’s dualism(s)	135
II. The resolution: language as a fundamental, integrated capacity	140
Conceptual coping	142
Embodied and engaged rationality	149
III. Language and motor-intentional content	151
IV. Conclusion	170
 <u>Chapter Five:</u>	
Language and Practical Engagement: An Intimate Dance: Part II	173
I. Concepts and the intentional arc	174
II. Perception, skillful dispositions, and conceptual capacities	178
III. Skillfully coping with conceptual teleologies	184
IV. Summary	197
V. Conceptual standing practices: a refrain	201
 <u>Chapter Six:</u>	
Conclusions	211
I. Conceptually catching a Frisbee	212
II. Objections	225
Difference in access	225
Partial does not imply total content conceptualism	229
Two-streams theory of perception	230
Worries about non-propositionalism	234
III. Final thoughts	243
 Bibliography	 251

Deux excès: exclure la raison, n'admettre que la raison.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* 253

PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALISM, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND EPISTEMIC ARCHITECTURE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DREYFUS-MCDOWELL DEBATE

The discussion which has developed out of the work of [Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein] has reached unparalleled articulation and sophistication as we enter the twenty-first century. The interesting debate between John McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus, and the way in which their differences have been clarified and refined, is an index of the progress we have made in recent decades.

-Charles Taylor¹

I. Beginning where they left off: characterizing the debate

The debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell—beginning with Dreyfus’s 2005 APA Presidential Address, continuing at the 2006 Eastern APA, published with responses in *Inquiry*, and culminating in a recently published reprisal²—is significant not merely because it involves two leading figures in philosophy today, but even more on account of its fruitfully bringing into dialogue two disparate traditions that have a good deal to say to one

¹ 2013: 87.

² Dreyfus’s initial foray can be found in “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise,” (2005). McDowell’s part in the 2006 APA debate can be found in *Inquiry* 50 no. 4 as “What Myth?” (2007a), and Dreyfus’s part as “The Return of the Myth of the Mental” (2007a). Their responses are also found in the same issue, printed as “Response to Dreyfus” (2007b) and “Response to McDowell” (2007b). McDowell then wrote an essay titled “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” (2008a and 2008b), which is external to but bears directly on the themes developed in the debate and which will play a large role in our discussion. They have also written a recap and summary of their debate for Joseph Schear’s edited volume examining themes from the debate, *Mind, Reason and Being-in-the-World*, New York: Routledge (2013).

another. Some have pointed to Martin Heidegger's debate with Rudolf Carnap as the decisive point at which the analytic and continental traditions diverged.³ While I believe the divide to have been far more sociological than substantively philosophical, it has nevertheless been a real divide, one that successfully filtered important figures and insights into one camp or the other. Thankfully, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have seen a flurry of cross-over activity and a welcome narrowing of the divide.⁴ The debate between McDowell and Dreyfus is perhaps the culmination of this process—a historical turning point wherein the rupture caused by that earlier debate is made obsolete.

Such appears to be the underlying motivation for Dreyfus's original critique of McDowell. While his Presidential Address focuses on what both the tradition and McDowell lack, he is also eager to acknowledge the similarities he sees, and he concludes the address with this remark:

The time is ripe to follow McDowell and others in putting aside the outmoded opposition between analytic and continental philosophy, to begin the challenging collaborative task of . . . work[ing] together to understand our grasp of reality from the ground up.⁵

It is in the same spirit that I analyze and evaluate the positions set out in their debate. The resolution that I ultimately argue for in this dissertation draws directly on both traditions.

³ See Friedman (2000).

⁴ Due credit must be given to Hubert Dreyfus on this end, not simply for initiating the debate with McDowell, but for a career spent working to bridge the divide. He has not only doggedly engaged and criticized various philosophers on the basis of "continental" insights; he has likewise done more than any other single philosopher to make Heideggerian philosophy both accessible and relevant to mainstream contemporary philosophy.

⁵ 2005: 19-20; the second half of the quotation is a rhetorical question in the original, the pragmatic status of which is accurately represented in the quotation.

John McDowell famously works out an epistemology that makes our knowledge and claims about the world accountable to the world without succumbing to what he calls (following Wilfrid Sellars) the “Myth of the Given.” In order to do so he argues that human experience is “conceptual all the way out.”⁶ Hubert Dreyfus attacks this claim, arguing that our higher-order conceptual capacities supervene on our more pervasive practical capacities, or what Dreyfus calls skillful coping—an unreflective but normative, practical engagement with things that serves to make the world intelligible in the most basic sense.⁷ In brief, Dreyfus argues that our ability to grasp the world conceptually—to do things like step back and think about the world propositionally or express judgments about specific features of the world—is a “top floor” intellectual capacity that is grounded in our skillful, embodied ability to have the world meaningfully before us at all. According to Dreyfus, the necessary “ground floor” of human interaction with the world consists in our skillful ability to be involved with things and practically make our way about the world. Even engaging in what seem to be conceptually saturated activities like philosophical debates are possible for us only because we are at the same time and in the background maintaining a skillful, embodied grip on the world, which allows us to have the world meaningfully before us,

⁶ 1994a.

⁷ As Dreyfus’s insights get discussed in the contemporary literature, there is a tendency to shy away from his use of ‘skillful coping’ and substitute terms such as ‘unreflective action’ or ‘skillful bodily movement’ and the like (for example, see Rietveld (2010) and Montero (2010)). I find this move unfortunate; while on the one hand it makes it easier to correlate Dreyfus’s discussion with other discussions going on in the literature, it does so by flattening out the phenomenon that Dreyfus is attempting to point to. ‘Skillful coping’ as a term of art is sensitive to the fact that our skillful, unreflective actions are not merely a matter of action or movement, but are a matter of intelligent, intentional action by which we make our way about the world, come to grips with our immediate environment, and disclose the world to ourselves as intelligible. Hence, it carries with it the connotations important in the non-English terms used by continental philosophers. Consequently, I will retain Dreyfus’s term and discuss it more fully in Chapter Two.

granting the necessary context for our conceptual activity. Consequently, McDowell's claim that human experience is "conceptual all the way out" amounts to a claim that it is "upper stories all the way down."⁸

While Dreyfus begins the debate on the offensive, marshaling his phenomenological arguments against what he perceives as McDowell's overly intellectualist position, he spends much of the debate defending his claim that human experience is pervasively and at root both skillful and non-conceptual.⁹ He concludes the debate in *Inquiry* with something of a plea that readers consider seriously this claim and its potential significance. By way of summing up his phenomenology of human practices and articulating the difficult challenge still facing his account, he states that the "[existential 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...[the] world of facts, features, and data." That is, granting his claim that the world is made intelligible via non-conceptual coping, Dreyfus has yet to explain how this intelligible world is made apt for conceptual activity. He then claims that "the conceptualist can't give an account of how we

⁸ 2005: 1. At the end of the debate published in *Inquiry*, rather than maintaining the ground-floor/upper stories metaphor Dreyfus suggests a "horizontal" relationship of foreground versus background; at that point (putting words into Dreyfus's mouth), he accuses McDowell's account of being "foreground all the way back." More recently, Robert Hanna has taken up the "bottom-up" metaphor and strategy from a Kantian angle. He has argued that "essentially non-conceptual content constitutes the semantic and psychological substructure, or matrix, out of which the categorically normative a priori superstructure of epistemic rationality and practical rationality – Sellars's 'logical space of reasons' – grows," (2011): 328; see also (2008) and Hanna and Chadha (2009).

⁹ Skillful coping is what Dreyfus would call (following Heidegger) a *primordial* phenomenon; that is, it characterizes the most direct and revealing way in which we encounter the world, and likewise enjoys a privileged status that is explanatorily prior to our other ways of encountering things (e.g., in reflection or linguistic expression). See (1991): 198-201 for his discussion of this term.

are absorbed in the world, while the phenomenologist can't account for what makes it possible for us to step back and observe it."¹⁰

Taking this as a trenchant summary of the debate as a whole, the purpose of this dissertation is to supply an answer to Dreyfus's challenge—not in the sense of a partisan defense or refutation, but primarily in the sense of heeding Dreyfus's call to move forward collaboratively. Specifically, I will argue for an account of human experience and intelligibility, compatible with McDowell's conceptualist epistemology, that accounts for the pervasive phenomenon of skillful coping, but without the mysterious dualism that (I will show) confuses Dreyfus's position. What's more, I will make use of Dreyfus's phenomenological tools in order to make sense of McDowell's mysterious claim that conceptual capacities are "operative" in perception and other skillful activities, even if they are not being exercised, such that both perception and our skillful embodied capacities can be understood as genuinely conceptual. In doing so, I mean not to simply work out a position that technically avoids stepping on the philosophic toes of the two positions in question, but rather to provide an answer that is committed to rigorous conceptual analysis as well as an accurate description of lived human experience.

In order to accomplish this, I will first criticize both philosophers' positions as articulated during and subsequent to the debate. This includes defending and developing McDowell's conceptualism vis-à-vis Dreyfus's phenomenological criticisms. Second, I will argue for a reconciliation of the two positions that rests on a more comprehensive phenomenology of human experience and intelligibility. Specifically, I will argue that the key to accounting for both the richness of our embodied experience and the way in which

¹⁰ (2007a): 364.

the world is conceptually articulated is a more careful analysis of the phenomenon of language and the way that it not only picks out or expresses features of one's experience, but also is holistically integrated with our other skillful bodily capacities and perceptual modalities, and thus contributes to the fundamental disclosure of the world.¹¹

If I am right, then on the one hand, Dreyfus is correct to urge contemporary philosophers to take phenomenology and embodied coping seriously, even if he misunderstands the relationship between that coping and language, and hence between coping and conceptuality. On the other hand, McDowell's account and his approach turns out to be the more fruitful, despite his clumsy phenomenology and the absence from his account of an explanation of how it is that the world is experienced as conceptually articulate. The way forward lies in a careful resolution of the two positions set forth in the debate.

In this chapter I will set the stage for this reconciliation by first outlining the significant and easily overlooked agreement that exists between Dreyfus and McDowell. Doing so will begin to help us get clear about what is actually at stake in the debate. I will then start to unpack Dreyfus's summary (quoted above), briefly characterizing the problems that exist for both philosophers in the debate. In doing so I will also outline the nature of the reconciliation that I propose. Finally I will give an overview of the dissertation as a whole.

II. Unwitting allies: underlying commitments in the debate

¹¹ Importantly, I consider language to be critical to world disclosure in both of the very different senses used by Dreyfus and McDowell. See (2007a): 356-360 for Dreyfus's discussion of the matter, including a chart on page 357 meant to distinguish the two senses. Much more will be said on this below, particularly in Chapters Four and Five.

Since the goal of this dissertation is to take up Dreyfus's challenge and extend the productivity of the debate, it makes sense to begin with an overview of key similarities brought out in the debate. It is revealing that McDowell's initial response to Dreyfus's attack is to largely agree with his criticisms when redirected toward much of contemporary mainstream philosophy.¹² Despite their disparate backgrounds, they are in fact responding to similar features in the contemporary philosophical landscape and do so in broadly similar ways. Nevertheless, the devil is in the details, and it is those details that fuel the debate. Acknowledging the broad areas of overlap will not only serve to highlight the contentious details, it will also lay the foundation for the later reconciliation of their positions that I will work out. Toward this end then, I will first make good on the claim that Dreyfus and McDowell share similar goals and commitments vis-à-vis the tradition.

Dreyfus and McDowell are both explicitly interested in overturning certain aspects of the philosophical tradition, perhaps most significantly its myopic emphasis on context-independent rationality. In his major work *Mind and World* McDowell offers a Wittgensteinian diagnosis "of some characteristic anxieties of modern philosophy . . . on the relation between mind and world." Specifically, he examines the tension created by two widely held commitments. First is our commitment to empiricism, whereby our judgments are accountable to the tribunal of experience. Second is our commitment to the *sui generis* nature of what Sellars called the logical space of reason—that is, the normative space wherein our claims can be justified. These two commitments have made it difficult to see how experience of the world (when conceived as taking place outside the realm of normativity) can ever serve as a tribunal, as something that can justify our normative

¹² His final word is to argue that Dreyfus's claims are orthogonal to his own; see (2013).

claims. Refusing to dismiss the plausibility of either commitment by collapsing norms into nature or nature into norms, and keen on avoiding a new dualism, McDowell's manner of relieving the tension is to expose as mere illusion the anxieties stemming from these commitments, opening up a way for us to move beyond them.¹³ His goal "is to see how we need not seem obliged to set about *answering* the questions that express the anxieties;" rather, we ought to achieve "a way of seeing things in which there is after all no tension there."¹⁴

To do so, McDowell offers us a picture of human experience that is saturated with conceptuality. Our conceptual capacities are "operative" in perceptual experience, so that experience is always already conceptually articulate—a position that accounts for the thoroughly normative nature of experience. Central to this is his attempt to convince the tradition to abandon the growing dualism of norm and nature by acknowledging that "second nature," or the capacities we acquire through socialization and initiation into a linguistic community (and hence the development of our conceptual capacities), count as genuine nature.¹⁵ That is, McDowell aims at a neo-Kantian reenchantment of the world via the (ofttimes passive) operation of our rational (conceptual) capacities in perceptual experience. Thus McDowell attempts to overturn the tradition by placing norms on an equal footing with the non-normative features of the world, placing both within the province of nature, and in doing so achieve an epistemology that makes our judgments accountable to the world without the Myth of the Given.

¹³ (1994a): *xi*.

¹⁴ (1994a): *xx-xxi*.

¹⁵ See especially (1994a): Lecture IV.

Dreyfus's main criticism of McDowell is that in his attempt to overturn the tradition he simply doesn't go far enough. That is, McDowell, seduced by the thoroughly traditional view of our being essentially rational animals, fails to recognize that the normative articulation of the world comes not from the operation of our conceptual capacities in perception (and hence experience) of the world, but on account of our (non-mental) ability to cope with the world physically and skillfully. Dreyfus offers a phenomenological account of human experience that gives preeminence to the practical and passionate side of human experience in the world, making it both prior to and necessary for our ability to make judgments about the world. Thus Dreyfus agrees that experience is pervasively normative, but rather than account for this fact by claiming experience to be saturated with conceptuality, he claims that our most basic and pervasive grasp on the world—the grasp we must maintain in order to even have a world in view—is skillful and nonconceptual.¹⁶

This stark contrast—with Dreyfus insisting that our skillful coping is the primary means whereby the world is meaningfully articulated¹⁷ and McDowell maintaining instead that it is the involvement of capacities that allow us to make judgments—is manifest at every stage of the debate. But equally manifest is their mutual criticism of a tradition committed to an account of rationality as primarily situation-independent and pervasive in human experience. I do not mean to overstate their similarity, nor gloss over the important differences involved in their mutual critique of mainstream views of rationality.

Nonetheless, McDowell and Dreyfus substantially agree on three fundamental features of

¹⁶ See the conclusion to (2007b) for a summary statement.

¹⁷ It is important for Dreyfus that the world is normatively articulated in a structural sense via our skillful coping *before* it can be articulated in a linguistic sense. I will distinguish the two by explicitly referring to *linguistic* articulation when referring to the way in which the world is or can be linguistically expressed. This distinction is critical to understanding Dreyfus's position; see (1991): 208-224 for a detailed discussion of how the two relate.

human experience: our unmediated openness to the world, the primary importance of *phronesis* as a mode of human engagement, and an account of human intelligence that includes what I will call a feedback loop between agent¹⁸ and world.

Both philosophers are committed to a form of perceptual naïve realism that posits a direct openness to the world. Dreyfus worries in the debate that in claiming human experience to be conceptually saturated, McDowell cannot consistently maintain this kind of unproblematic openness to the world.¹⁹ McDowell believes, however, that such a worry assumes the dualism of reason and nature that plagues recent philosophy. Rather than serving as an intermediary between us and the world, the conceptuality imparted to us as second nature via language and culture is an intimate part of our openness to and reception of the world. As he states, language and culture are “constitutive of our unproblematic openness to the world.” Responding to a similar charge elsewhere McDowell claims, “We can take it that spontaneity is rationally vulnerable to receptivity without the unwelcome effect that receptivity seems to get in the way between us and the world, if we reject the framework that is the real source of the problems of traditional empiricism, namely, the dualism of reason and nature.”²⁰ Regardless of how successfully McDowell argues for this position, it is clear that he rejects the notion that in experience something stands between us and the world itself.

¹⁸ I use the term ‘agent’ neutrally with respect to whether an agent *qua* agent must act with a degree of self-awareness as McDowell claims or if, when optimally engaged, an agent’s self-awareness is absent as Dreyfus claims. See Dreyfus (2007b): 373-376.

¹⁹ Dreyfus first raises this worry in Section III of (2005).

²⁰ (1994a): 155.

Similarly, Dreyfus argues along with Heidegger that once we fall into a Cartesian paradigm and epistemologically²¹ separate subjects and worlds, we can never get them back together again.²² More importantly, Dreyfus claims that any such separation, including any position that would separate agents from engaging directly with the world (e.g., by positing experience as representationally mediated), runs afoul of an accurate phenomenology of human experience. First, we simply do not represent the world in our basic engagements with the world, nor do we respond to features of the world that can be captured in propositional representation. Rather, we respond directly to the affordances of an environment, motivated by the tensions we feel to get a more “optimal grip” on the situation.²³ According to Dreyfus one does *not* adjust one’s position in a game of tennis because one sees (even implicitly) *that* doing so will allow one to better hit the ball (at least, one does not do so when playing well); rather, one feels an inherent tension, one is physically drawn into a different position that allows a better shot at the ball. Developing this sort of sensitive attunement to situations and possibilities for action is what skill development entails.²⁴ So in the first place, claiming either that representations serve as an intermediary between agent and world, or even that agents when absorbed in skillful action respond to definite, representable features (rather than to whole situations and the tensions within and possibilities afforded by those situations) is simply mischaracterizing

²¹ Just as important to Dreyfus (and Heidegger) is the ontological separation inherent in the Cartesian paradigm of subject and object. My present purpose, however, is to discuss the overlap of their criticism with that of McDowell. As noted, both eschew an epistemological mediation between humans and their perceptual environment.

²² See Dreyfus’s discussion in (1991): 46-54.

²³ See (1991): 61-83.

²⁴ See Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (1988): 16-51.

human experience—getting the phenomena wrong.²⁵ Second, as is prominently on display in all of Dreyfus’s characterizations of human action, representing one’s experience, whether reflecting on it or attempting to articulate it, inevitably degrades one’s expertise.²⁶ Finally, Dreyfus has spent much of his career criticizing artificial intelligence programs for trying to create robots that represent their environment (which inevitably gave rise to the intractable frame problem²⁷). His position here is perhaps best captured by his slogan, “The best representation of the world is the world itself.”²⁸

For both McDowell and Dreyfus embodiment is a critical component of our openness to the world. Both acknowledge that experience of the world requires embodied and contextually embedded skillful engagement. Hence for McDowell, “If we begin with a free-standing notion of an experiential route through objective reality, a temporally extended point of view that might be bodiless so far as the connection between subjectivity and objectivity goes, there seems to be no prospect of building up from there to the notion of a substantial presence in the world,” and any such picture “is quite unsatisfying.” Rather, we should recognize that what we are as humans is “a bodily presence in the world.”²⁹ And this is exactly the sort of picture that Dreyfus’s phenomenology reveals—one in which

²⁵ Dreyfus is fond of saying things like “the job of the phenomenologist is to get clear concerning the phenomena that need to be explained” (2005, 4).

²⁶ This line of reasoning plays a large role in (2007a). See (2002) for an overview of Dreyfus’s views on the stages of skill acquisition and why representation degrades expertise. Dreyfus of course allows for the importance of observation, self-monitoring, or reflecting on and responding to rules in action in certain situations, such as when one is first developing a skill. His claim is that once a skill has been developed beyond mere competence, however, reflective activities then degrade performance.

²⁷ See for example (1972), (1988), (1992), and (2007c). For more on the frame problem, see Ford and Pylyshyn (1996).

²⁸ See particularly (2002). Dreyfus credits the actual articulation of this slogan to MIT professor Rodney Brooks, but also claims that Brooks was regurgitating Dreyfus’s original critique; see (2007c): 249-250, fn 17-18.

²⁹ (1994a): 102-104.

what we *are* is bodies that are directly attuned to the demands of the situations in which we are always already engaged.³⁰ Dreyfus notes this similarity between McDowell's epistemology and the claims of existential phenomenologists at the start of his 2005 APA Presidential Address but then claims that the similarity is specious, belied by McDowell's commitment to conceptuality. Nevertheless, as becomes more and more evident during the course of the debate, McDowell shares Dreyfus's concern that we recognize the centrality of our skillful embodiment and eschew the "myth of the disembodied intellect."³¹

This shared commitment to the importance of our situated embodiment leads to a second important point of common ground. While a good deal of energy is exerted in clearing up various mis-readings, one clear outcome of the debate is McDowell's and Dreyfus's shared commitment to the importance of *phronesis*.³² While they remain at odds concerning the pervasiveness of conceptuality in situation-specific activities, both acknowledge that the content of our engaged experience is not fully specifiable in detachment from the situation. That is, both "reject the idea that the content of practical wisdom . . . can be captured in general prescriptions for conduct, determinately expressible

³⁰ While McDowell acknowledges the importance of this point, it plays a small role in his philosophy and he spends little time helping the reader to see *why* it is important. In contrast, these claims and their justification permeate Dreyfus's work. See the start of (2005) for an overview of Dreyfus's claims on this point.

³¹ Part of this shared commitment might well come from a shared commitment to getting the phenomenology right; that is, both are committed to the irreducible importance of accurately characterizing lived experience. Dreyfus's concern here is quite explicit. Erik Rietveld claims that McDowell's commitment, though not as apparent, is just as real, stemming from the influence of Wittgenstein; see (2010).

³² It also comes out in the debate that both are heavily influenced by Heidegger's reading of Aristotle on *phronesis*. For McDowell, this influence is mediated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor. See McDowell (2007a): 340, and Dreyfus (2007a): 353.

independently of the concrete situations in which the *phronimos* is called on to act.”³³ They agree instead that *phronesis* involves “a kind of understanding that makes possible an immediate response to the full concrete situation.”³⁴ Both reject the idea that our being rational means that the intelligibility of specific situations can be independently, propositionally specifiable. For this reason, *phronesis* requires “situation-specific discernment.”³⁵ More particularly, both claim that in much of our experience we skillfully engage with the world without ever linguistically articulating those experiences. This is in part because at least some of what we experience is *not* conceptual in the sense that we already have a determinate grasp on that aspect of experience. That is, we do not already possess mastery over language that would correctly express the experience, and for at least some of our experiences, we never do.

The important difference between the two here concerns whether or not the content of experience is, in the experience itself, in a form such that it could *in principle* be linguistically expressed. For Dreyfus, the fully immersed nature of our situatedness and the immediacy of our skillful involvement in that situation leaves no room for anything recognizably minded at play in the situation. Instead, any attempt to linguistically express the contents of that situation will either distort the true nature of the experience or will remain necessarily inadequate.³⁶ For McDowell on the other hand, the inadequacy of situation-independent rationality to specify what takes place in *phronesis* means not that our particular, skillful involvements are devoid of mindedness, but rather that we ought to

³³ (2007a): 340. Dreyfus responds, “I’m happy to hear that McDowell and I agree in our reading of Aristotle on *phronesis* as a case of situation-specific skillful coping (2007a, 353).”

³⁴ (2005): 5.

³⁵ McDowell (2007a): 340.

³⁶ This is a pervasive theme in Dreyfus’s writing. For a recent articulation, see Dreyfus and Kelly, (2007).