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*McDowell's Unexpected Philosophical Ally*¹

Abstract. In this paper I will explore the philosophical exchange between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell regarding the role of conceptual capacities in our openness to the world. According to Dreyfus, McDowell fails to do justice to instances of embodied coping from which conceptual mindedness is completely absent. That is to say, when we are fully, pre-reflectively absorbed in our activities, we respond to the affordances and solicitations of the environment without the assistance of mindedness or conceptual articulation. On Dreyfus' view, McDowell displays serious symptoms of 'intellectualism' – privileging the higher levels of our cognitive abilities and overlooking what occurs in engaged, bodily activity. In order to counter Dreyfus' objections, McDowell must provide a satisfactory account of the pervasiveness of conceptuality in our openness to the world, without neglecting and distorting the phenomenon of embodied coping. Fortunately, he is not alone in this task: in fact, McDowell is very close to the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics that came into prominence in the twentieth century with thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. This affinity, however, is discounted by Dreyfus' reading of Heidegger with its emphatic insistence on the preconceptual and prelinguistic character of our most basic openness to the world. My main purpose in this paper is to suggest an alternative reading of Heidegger that places him closer to John McDowell, and further removed from Dreyfus' phenomenology of absorbed coping.

With his Presidential Address to the APA Hubert Dreyfus initiated a series of exchanges with John McDowell regarding the role of conceptual capacities in our openness to the world. According to Dreyfus, McDowell is able to "successfully describe the upper floors of the edifice of knowledge" only at the high price of "ignoring the embodied coping going on on the ground floor" (Dreyfus 2005: 37). By defending the view that human experience and action is infused with reason, McDowell supposedly falls for what Dreyfus calls 'The Myth of the Mental', an intellectualist position according to which "mind is everywhere the pure given is not" (Dreyfus 2005: 52). In Dreyfus' words, "the Myth of the Mental is just this transcendental claim that every way we relate to the world must be pervaded by conceptual, rational, mental activity" (Dreyfus 2009: 2). The problem with this intellectualist position, according to Dreyfus, is that it ignores instances of embodied coping from which conceptual mindedness is completely absent. When we are fully absorbed in action we respond to different solicitations and affordances in a way that need not be conceptualized or articulated in thought. The world we live in is a "shifting field of attractions and repulsions" (Dreyfus 2009: 5), which is neither conceptual nor rational in any way. Indeed, this seems to be the position defended by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who, according to Dreyfus, develop phenomenological approaches that successfully register embodied coping.

In order to counter Dreyfus' objections, McDowell has to show that the thesis of the pervasiveness of mind is continuous with, and in fact supplements, a proper phenomenology

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gy of embodied coping skills. To do so, he has to challenge Dreyfus' conception of mindedness as "detached from immersion in activity" (McDowell 2009b: 324), and show that even absorbed coping is pervaded by conceptuality and rationality. This, however, is not an easy thing to achieve, especially when we consider the rich and detailed phenomenological descriptions provided by Dreyfus as evidence of the non-rational and non-conceptual nature of absorbed coping. Not only must McDowell provide an account of the pervasiveness of conceptuality in our openness to the world; he must do so without neglecting and distorting the phenomenon of coping. Fortunately, he is not alone in this task: in fact, McDowell is very close to the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics that came into prominence in the twentieth century with figures like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. This kinship, however, is discounted by Dreyfus' famous interpretation of Heidegger, which reduces our most basic mode of Being-in-the-world to the non-rational and non-conceptual. Of Course, Dreyfus concedes that in *Mind and World* McDowell "sounds as if he is channeling Heidegger when he speaks of 'our unproblematic openness to the world' and how 'we find ourselves always already engaged with the world'" (Dreyfus 2009: 1). However, he claims the parallel comes to an abrupt end where McDowell speaks of our openness to the world as a 'conceptual' activity. According to Dreyfus, Heidegger's 'world' is an interconnected totality of solicitations that is opened to us "only through our unthinking and unthinkable engaged perception and coping" (Dreyfus 2005: 59). My main purpose in this paper is to present an alternative reading of Heidegger that places him closer to John McDowell, and further removed from Dreyfus' existential phenomenology. By briefly examining some key concepts of Heidegger's early hermeneutics, I will try to elucidate his affinities with McDowell's project and examine the possibility of a shared answer to Dreyfus' objections.

The meaningful world of McDowell and Heidegger

In her article *Hermeneutics* Cristina Lafont defends the view that

the central feature of Heidegger's hermeneutic turn lies in his replacement of the subject-object model, that is, the model of an observing subject posed over against the world as the totality of entities, by the hermeneutic model of an understanding *Dasein* which finds itself always already in a symbolically structured world. (Lafont 2004: 6)

At first, it might come as a shock that Lafont refers here to the world in terms of a symbolic structure –especially if we accept Dreyfus' interpretation of 'world' as a web of non-conceptual, non-rational solicitations. To say that the world is symbolically structured is to commit oneself to the view that our openness to the world is "conceptual all the way down", as McDowell likes to put it. But can we really attribute this view to Heidegger? First of all it is important to appreciate that, for Heidegger, far from a totality of objects,

worldhood is constituted in references, and these references themselves stand in referential correlations, referential totalities. It is not things but references which have the primary function in the structure of encounter belonging to the world. (Heidegger 1992: 200)

Dreyfus seems to acknowledge this structure of references when he speaks about the web of solicitations, attractions and repulsions that constitute our openness to the world. He even goes so far as to say that these solicitations have their own kind of intelligibility,

which is not reducible to the kind of intelligibility proper to rationality and conceptual meaning. But rather than as a context of meaningful relations, Dreyfus' existential notion of "world" is composed by forces that attract and repel us –a model which does not require concepts and in fact precludes them. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it ignores Heidegger's emphasis on 'meaningfulness' (*Bedeutsamkeit*) as the constitutive structure behind his original concept of world. In a lecture presented two years before the publication of *Being and Time*, we find the following illuminating passage:

When we say that the basic structure of worldhood, the being of the entity which we call world, lies in meaningfulness, this amounts to saying that the structure as we have characterized it thus far, the references and the referential contexts, are basically correlations of meaning, meaningful contexts. (Heidegger 1992: 203)

This by itself does not undermine Dreyfus' thesis that the 'world' has its own non-conceptual, non-rational intelligibility. Someone sympathetic with his interpretation could still argue that Heidegger's notion of meaningfulness refers to the understanding we possess by virtue of being unthinkingly absorbed in a web of non-conceptual solicitations. Nevertheless, the problem with a reading along these lines is that it fails to grasp the relationship that Heidegger is trying to establish between the notion of *Bedeutsamkeit* and linguistic meaning. In the same lecture cited above, Heidegger points to this relation when he frankly admits that he was unable to find a better expression that would

give voice to an essential connection of the phenomenon with what we designate as meaning in the sense of the meaning of words, inasmuch as the phenomenon *possesses just such an intrinsic connection with verbal meaning*, discourse. (Heidegger 1992: 202)

Beyond our ability to respond unthinkingly to a constellation of attractions and repulsions, our most basic openness to the world consists in our capacity to understandingly navigate a system of meaningful relations. Certainly, Dreyfus is on the right track when he recognizes that Heidegger seems to be a conceptualist with the claim that, "my being in the world is nothing other than this already-operating-with-understanding" (Heidegger 1976: 144). Instead of just coping with the forces around us, we live in the midst of a meaningful world that is opened to us through our shared traditions and language.

Heidegger's revolutionary notion of world enables us to think of human beings as "inhabiting a symbolically structured context, in which everything they encounter is already understood as something or other" (Lafont 2007: 2). Furthermore, one of the main features of his hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology was the discovery of the as-structure that underlies and permits our openness to the world:

The 'as' makes up the structure of explicitness of something that is understood. In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we 'see' it as a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge; but what we have thus interpreted need not necessarily be also taken apart by making an assertion. Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets. (Heidegger 1962: 189)

This passage suggests that Heidegger's notion of world is not as non-conceptual and non-rational as Dreyfus would like us to think. On the contrary, Heidegger's emphasis on the universality of the as-structure should be read as an indication that our openness to the

world *is* meaningful all the way down. Clearly, this conflicts with Dreyfus' understanding of world as a web of solicitations in which we find ourselves in pure absorbed and unthinking immersion. For Heidegger what matters is that *Dasein* is always already open to a symbolically structured world of significance, which should not be confused with Dreyfus' world of interconnected solicitations. This thought is compounded when Heidegger affirms that "being-a-sign-for can itself be formalized as a universal kind of relation, so that the sign-structure itself provides an ontological clue for characterizing any entity whatsoever" (Heidegger 1962: 107). That is to say, in our openness to the world it is not to "attractions and repulsions" that we respond, but to the totality of significance that is articulated in the traditions we inhabit and the language we speak. In one of his early papers, Heidegger writes:

Factic life always moves within a particular *interpretedness* that has been handed down, or revised, or worked anew. Circumspection gives to life its world as interpreted according to those respects in which the world is encountered and expected as the comprehensive object of concern. These respects, which are for the most part available in an implicit form, and into which factic life has simply slipped by way of habit, prefigure the paths for the movement of caring upon which this movement can actualize itself. (Heidegger 2007: 160)

What is so wonderful about this early passage is that it expresses the core of Heidegger's hermeneutic thought. Everything we encounter in the world is already understood as something or other owing to the interpretations that have been handed down to us by language and tradition. There is nothing mysterious about Heidegger's account of meaning; it is just the result of being raised in a certain way. As Lafont points out, "part of what it takes to grow up into a culture, that is, to become familiar with the whole of significations available within it, is first of all to learn the normative patterns of interpretation and conduct that such a culture prescribes" (Lafont 2007: 8). The same point is made by McDowell in *Mind and World* in the context of his discussion of second nature and our openness to the intelligibility of the space of reasons. There, his central claim is that in our life "what we experience is not external to the realm of the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning" (McDowell 1996: 72), and he echoes Heidegger in claiming that all we require to be open to the totality of significance –the space of reasons– is a proper upbringing. Once initiated into the traditions and practices of our ancestors, we have our eyes opened to a world of meanings that 'prefigure' the way we experience and understand everything around us. There is nothing unnatural about this process of upbringing; nothing, at any rate, that would mystify our openness to the world. Although it is easy to be seduced by the picture of a supernatural space of meaningfulness constituted "independently of anything specifically human", McDowell argues that our responsiveness to meaning "belongs to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals" (McDowell 1996: 78).

The pervasiveness of meaning and embodied coping: A response to Dreyfus' objection

By exploring a little further this responsiveness to meaning that is so central for both Heidegger and McDowell, we will be able to address some of Dreyfus' objections regarding embodied coping skills. As I mentioned above, Dreyfus thinks that McDowell's account of experience (i.e. being conceptual all the way down) is incompatible with a proper phenomenology of engaged action and perception. His basic idea is that

if we understand concepts as context-free principles or rules that could be used to guide actions or at least make them intelligible, a phenomenology of expert coping shows concepts to be absent or even get in the way of masterful response to the specific situation. (Dreyfus 2005: 58)

Moreover, Dreyfus claims mindedness is the *enemy* of embodied coping because it completely distorts the phenomenon of our openness to the world. On Dreyfus' reading, a proper phenomenology of expert coping shows that in immersed action we respond to solicitations without concepts or rationality being involved. He gives the example of a Grandmaster playing a form of chess called lightning chess in which all moves must be carried out within a two minute frame. At such a speed, the player only has time to respond to the solicitations of the game without thinking or stepping back to assess the situation from a distance. Thus, Dreyfus concludes, to be absorbed in the game is to be submerged in a field of forces that attract and repel us. "When the Grandmaster is playing lightning chess he is simply responding to the patterns on the board. At this speed he must depend entirely on perception and not at all on analysis and comparison of alternatives" (Dreyfus 2005: 53). Dreyfus is thus led to conclude that expertise does not require concepts, just responsiveness to the web of solicitations that constitute the world of absorbed coping. In this light, "masterful action does not seem to require or even to allow placement in the space of reasons" (Dreyfus 2005: 58).

It is easy to see why from Dreyfus' perspective McDowell must be wrong when he claims that our openness to the world is conceptual all the way down. For Dreyfus rationality entails detachment and distance, the human ability to step back and reflect. Consequently, McDowell's world can only be a world of objective facts and propositional structures to which we rationally respond from a distance. And as Dreyfus persistently points out, in such a conception of 'world' there is no room for an appropriate account of everyday absorbed coping; the phenomena is lost completely. What McDowell needs to show, in order to meet Dreyfus' objection, is that our meaningful (rational) openness to the world is not something artificial or supernatural but just our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. Moreover, if he wants to avoid the Myth of the Mental that Dreyfus burdens him with, or the accusation of intellectualism, McDowell must demonstrate that mindedness is not the enemy of embodied coping.

Contrary to Dreyfus' conception of rationality as the human ability to step back from absorbed immersion, McDowell defends the view that mindedness is not absent from engaged action and perception. Indeed, from his early essays, McDowell has persistently pointed out the inconsistencies of a conception of rationality that understands concepts as "context-free principles or rules that could be use to guide actions", to use Dreyfus' words. Following Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, McDowell rejects the assumption that concepts should be conceived of as detached universal rules that are to be applied to particular situations. In other words, he rejects the idea "that the content of practical wisdom, as Aristotle understands it, can be captured in general prescriptions for conduct, determinately expressively independently of the concrete situations in which the *phronimos* is called on to act" (McDowell 2009a: 311). Nonetheless, if we really want to do justice to McDowell's view of concepts we must acknowledge the huge influence that Kant—one his great philosophical heroes—exerts on his thinking. In the opening lines of *Mind and World*, just after stating that his general topic is "the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world", McDowell makes the following claim: "One of my main aims is to suggest that Kant should still have a central place in our discussion on the way thought bears on reality"

(McDowell 1994: 3). McDowell appeals to Kant's conception of empirical intuitions in the first *Critique* in order to support his idea that conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity. Based on his reading of the Transcendental Deduction he arrives to the conclusion that one of Kant's main insights was the realization that intuitions should be conceived of as "configurations in sensory receptivity that are categorically structured" (McDowell 2009c: 127). But McDowell doesn't stop here. He also wants to preserve the Kantian relation between conceptual capacities and spontaneity, understood as the freedom that allows us to reflectively participate in what Wilfrid Sellars has called the 'space of reasons'. In lecture III of *Mind and World* we find the following revealing passage,

The way I am exploiting the Kantian idea of spontaneity commits me to a demanding interpretation of words like "concept" and "conceptual". It is essential to conceptual capacities, in the demanding sense, that they can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own credentials. When I say the content of experience is conceptual, that is what I mean by "conceptual". (McDowell 1994: 47)

McDowell connects the idea of conceptual capacities with a notion of rationality that requires the ability to step back from embodied coping and reflectively respond to the norms of reason. However, what is crucial here is to realize that McDowell is *not* suggesting that the ability to assess reasons through judgment and reflective thinking should be operative all the time. All that matters is that the rational subject *possesses* the capacity to step back from embodied coping and rationally assess the situation.² Of course, McDowell concedes that when we are absorbed in engaged bodily action we are not exercising the ability to step back. Nevertheless he wants to insist that "the capacities that are operative in ordinary engagement with the world belong to the subject's rationality in the strong sense" (McDowell 2009: 324). Ultimately, McDowell establishes this connection between conceptual capacities and spontaneity because he needs to dodge the "Myth of the Given" and show that receptivity doesn't make "an even notionally separable contribution to its cooperation with spontaneity" (McDowell 1994: 51). With this he achieves one of the main goals of his philosophical project, namely, the defense of what he calls *minimal empiricism*. McDowell argues that if we want to do justice to the empiricist claim that experience has an epistemic role, we have to endorse the idea that the world exerts rational constraint over human beings. And as McDowell has persuasively shown throughout his work, this is only possible if spontaneity 'goes all the way down'.

Dreyfus is certainly right when he claims that the ability to step back is crucial for McDowell's understanding of conceptual capacities. However, as we have seen, McDowell's picture of rationality is much more complex. For one thing, it is clear that for McDowell mindedness is not the enemy of embodied coping but just the opposite; it is the condition for the possibility of human experience. Opposing Dreyfus' excessively narrow conception of rationality as "detached conceptual intentionality", McDowell defends the view that our absorbed coping "is part of the way of being that is special to rational animals"

² McDowell's position regarding this issue is succinctly summarized in the following passage: "Let me stress that what matters is the capacity to step back and assess whether putative reasons warrant action or belief. If someone actually steps back, of course that shows she has the capacity to do so. But if the capacity is present without being exercised, we have in view someone who can respond to reasons as the reasons they are. And rationality in the sense I am explaining may be actually operative even though the capacity to step back is not being exercised. Acting for a reason, which one is responding to as such, does not require that one reflects about whether some consideration is a sufficient rational warrant for something it seems to recommend. It is enough that one could" (McDowell 2009c: 129, emphasis added).

(McDowell 2009a: 315). In other words, our absorption in the world does not entail leaving our rationality aside and letting our animal nature take over. This bizarre split between the rational and the animal is rather the consequence of Dreyfus' notion of rationality as something detached from worldly engagement. Thus, he can sincerely claim that happily for us, "we are only part-time rational animals" (Dreyfus 2007a: 354) the rest of the time we are just animals responding to attractions and repulsions like other members of the animal kingdom. To put it in McDowell's terms, according to Dreyfus we are "peculiarly bifurcated with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections" (McDowell 1994: 78). This is precisely the idea that McDowell wants to challenge when he introduces the notion of second nature, and the related distinction between inhabiting an environment and having an orientation to the world.

Our responsiveness to the space of reasons is not the detached activity that Dreyfus pictures, but our own way of actualizing ourselves as animals. In McDowell's words, "we need to see ourselves as animals whose natural being is permeated with rationality" (McDowell 1994: 85). In our brief discussion of the notion of 'world' in the philosophy of the young Heidegger, we suggested that, by virtue of our human upbringing, our eyes are opened to a world that is no longer a field of attractions and repulsions but a 'totality of significance'. In *Being and Time* Heidegger makes clear that, "this everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which *Dasein* has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication" (Heidegger 1962: 213). McDowell arrives at a similar conclusion when, drawing from a reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he introduces the notion of second nature in lecture IV of *Mind and World*. Through a normal human upbringing, we obtain a second nature that enables us to recognize the dictates of reason and participate in the space of meaning. "Human beings acquire a second nature by being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons" (McDowell 1994: xx). Upbringing (*Bildung*) is not a mysterious process whereby human beings gain access to a supernatural structure but the "normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are" (McDowell 1994: 88). Rather than thinking of reason as a mysterious thing that is added to our underlying animal nature, McDowell argues that we must see rationality and openness to meaning as constitutive elements making us the kind of creatures we are. Once our eyes are opened to the demands of the space of reasons, there is no going back, it becomes part of our animal nature. This doesn't mean that we become some sort of artificial beings mysteriously responding to a supernatural structure. In fact, when our eyes are opened to the requirements of reason, what we see is nothing spooky but the world itself.

Certainly, if Dreyfus had a notion of second nature, he wouldn't be so disturbed by McDowell's suggestion that absorbed coping is permeated with mindedness. Instead, he would see that a "normal mature human being is a rational animal, with its rationality part of its animal, and so natural, being, not a mysterious foothold in another realm" (McDowell 1994: 91). Although we share perception with other members of the animal kingdom, our perceptual sensitivity to the environment is informed by mindedness and reason. To participate and respond to the demands of the space of reason is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals, as McDowell likes to put it. Thus, "we have what mere animals have, perceptual sensitivities to features of our environment, but we have it in a special form" (McDowell 1994: 64). While animals *respond* to the biological imperatives of their environment –what Dreyfus calls attractions and repulsions– human beings have an orientation toward the world. When a decent upbringing (*Bildung*) opens our eyes to the space of reasons "our

lives come to embrace not just coping with problems and exploiting opportunities, constituted as such by immediate biological imperatives, but exercising spontaneity” (McDowell 1994: 115). Therefore, our openness to the world shouldn't be assimilated to the model of animal coping, precisely because when we acquire second nature the world is no longer a succession of problems and opportunities but a context of meaning. The difference between inhabiting an environment and having an orientation towards the world (an idea that McDowell borrows from Hans-Georg Gadamer) indicates the ‘free and distanced orientation’ we gain once *Bildung* has opened our eyes to the space of reasons. Unlike human beings, Gadamer writes, “other creatures do not have a relationship to the world, but are, as it were, embedded in their environment” (Gadamer 2006: 441). Once again it is important to insist that this ‘free and distanced orientation’ is not to be equated with detachment and distance from practical engagement, but with a normative status that is acquired through normal upbringing.

Whereas the environment is just a web of solicitations for the creature that is embedded in it, “the world is where a human being lives, where she is at home” (McDowell 1994: 118). This, however, is not to say that human beings are free from biological imperatives and the solicitations of the environment. On the contrary, what McDowell wants to show is that once we acquire second nature, our relation to the environment is *transformed* and becomes something different. In his response to Dreyfus we find the following passage:

There is more to our embodied coping than there is to the embodied coping of non-rational animals. Becoming open to the world, not just able to cope with an environment, 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. (McDowell 2009a: 315)

The main idea here is that “our embodied coping is not exhausted by its similarity to the embodied coping of non-rational animals” (McDowell 2009a: 317). From McDowell's perspective, Dreyfus is wrong when he claims that human beings share absorbed coping with infants and animals. And he is not alone in this conclusion. Both Heidegger and Gadamer make very clear that openness to the world is an exclusively human phenomenon. As we have seen from our brief overview of Heidegger's notion of world, once we learn how to speak, our experience is no longer a response to a field of attractions and repulsions but an active participation in a world of meaning. This is precisely the idea that Heidegger wants to defend with the introduction of the as-structure, which lies at the heart of his hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology. Dreyfus, however, misrepresents this crucial idea when he says that for Heidegger most of our activities “don't have a situation specific as-structure” (Dreyfus 2007b: 371). We have seen that for Heidegger our openness to the world is always mediated by understanding, which means that the as-structure is constitutive for what we are as human beings. On the other hand, “the animal's behavior is never an apprehending something as something. Insofar as we address this possibility of taking something as something as characteristic of the phenomenon of world, the as-structure is an essential determination of the structure of the world” (Heidegger 2001: 311). In plain and simple terms, animals and infants don't have a world, and they don't have it precisely because they have no access to the as-structure that we acquire through normal human upbringing and language.

Although it is uncertain whether McDowell would accept the universality of the as-structure,³ it might be helpful to illustrate his conception of mindful absorbed coping with some assistance from this Heideggerian notion. Imagine a simple action like entering a room through a door. It is true that a trained dog or monkey can easily perform the same action and successfully enter the room after opening the door. The question here is whether human action can be exhausted “by its similarity to the embodied coping of non-rational animals”.⁴ It is clear that Dreyfus’ answer would be ‘yes’: absorbed coping is the same for infants, animals, and human beings. If I am absorbed in the activity of opening a door, “I don’t see the doorknob as a doorknob” (Dreyfus 2007a: 361), but just respond to the solicitations of the situation and enter the room. This, however, conflicts with Heidegger’s insistence on the universality of the as-structure and his refusal to accept that animals have a world. According to Heidegger, “an animal can only behave but can never apprehend something as something –which is not to deny that the animal sees or even perceives. Yet in a fundamental sense the animal does not have perception” (Heidegger 2001: 259). Evidently this fragment is closer in spirit to McDowell’s philosophical project than it is to Dreyfus’ existential phenomenology. For human beings, opening a door is much more than just responding to situation-specific solicitations; it is an activity that involves conceptual mindedness and meaningfulness. In other words, when we enter the room what we experience is the door *as* a door and not a mysterious field of forces pushing us to act in a certain way. We don’t just respond automatically to solicitations; we *understand* solicitations as this or that. Thus, “a human individual’s relation to affordances is no longer what it would have been if she had gone on living the life of a non-rational animal” (McDowell 2009a: 315). Since McDowell and Heidegger each share the view that in normal human experience what is disclosed is a world of significance in which we dwell understandingly, they have no problem providing an account of absorbed coping that includes mindedness and meaning.

What ultimately lies at the heart of the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is a contrast between two different views of what it is to be a human being. While Dreyfus thinks we are only part-time rational animals, McDowell advances the idea that rationality is not alien to our animal nature. I think it is not unfair to say that Dreyfus falls prey to a Cartesian dualism⁵ between mind and body that makes him blind not only to McDowell’s proposal, but also to some of the key insights of one of his phenomenological heroes, namely, Martin Heidegger. With his rigid distinction between the rational and the animal, Dreyfus departs from Aristotle’s conception of what it is to be a human being. In his existential phenomenology, “reason is separated from our animal nature, as if being rational placed us partly outside the animal kingdom” (McDowell 1994: 108). McDowell, on the other hand, follows Aristotle and supplies a very convincing account of the way in which rationality and animal nature go hand in hand. Accordingly, responsiveness to reasons should be seen as part of what Wittgenstein calls our *natural history*; “the natural history of creatures whose nature is largely

³ Here there seems to be some tension between McDowell’s insistence on a formal account of the role of conceptuality in our openness to the world and the hermeneutic philosophy of both Heidegger and Gadamer. Indeed, the as-structure of understanding implies more than just categorically unified experiences; it prescribes the specific way in which things show up in the world as something or other. Thus what we experience, according to Heidegger, is a manifold that is already articulated and ‘carved out’, to use McDowell’s expression.

⁴ A similar question is raised by Heidegger in the following passage: “But a skilful monkey or dog can also open a door to come in and out. Certainly. The question is whether what it does when it touches and pushes something is to touch a handle, whether what it does is something like opening a door. We talk as if the dog does the same as us; but there is not the slightest criterion to say that it comports itself towards the entity, even though it relates to what we know as an entity”. (GA 27, 192 trans. Cristina Lafont)

⁵ This point is made by McDowell in “Response to Dreyfus”, where he accuses Dreyfus of “taking for granted that mindedness is detached from engagement in bodily life”. (McDowell 2009b: 328)

second nature” (McDowell 1994: 95). Unfortunately, Dreyfus’ narrow conception of rationality restrain him from seeing that mindedness is not the enemy of our being-in-the-world, but its very possibility.

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