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# Just doing what I do: on the awareness of fluent agency

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**Abstract** Hubert Dreyfus has argued that cases of absorbed bodily coping show that there is no room for self-awareness in flow experiences of experts. In this paper, I argue against Dreyfus' maxim of vanishing self-awareness by suggesting that awareness of agency is present in expert bodily action. First, I discuss the phenomenon of absorbed bodily coping by discussing flow experiences involved in expert bodily action: *merging* into the flow; *immersion* in the flow; *emergence* out of flow. I argue against the claim that flow experience does not involve an awareness of agency for each of these features, while conceding that fluent agency does not involve self-awareness in the thetic sense. I challenge the assumption that the awareness of fluent agency must be understood in terms of a thetic awareness of agency. Instead, I develop an Anscombean account of the awareness of fluent agency in terms of the phenomenal character of knowing one's aims. I respond to the challenge that if an Anscombean account of the awareness of agency is to succeed, then agents must be able to answer Anscombean questions. I consider the objection that awareness of agency is not a form of self-awareness by outlining an account of self-awareness as self-synthesis that is distinct from self-perception and self-ascription, but which makes room for self-awareness in expert bodily action.

**Keywords** Absorbed bodily coping · Flow experience · Expert bodily action · Self-awareness · Awareness of agency · Self-synthesis

> "When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in a portrait, there is no I […] I am then plunged into the world or attractive and repellant qualities—but me, I have disappeared"
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> —John Paul Sartre (1957)
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> *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 48–49.

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I'm trail running in the pouring rain in midwinter. The trails have become a network of creeks. The water flows commandingly down the trail, yearning through exposed roots, striving to reach the lowest point. As I find my rhythm on the trail, I become aware of the fluency of my movements. Compensating with my right foot on a root. Balancing with my left arm to avoid tree branches. The more insistently the water flows, the more the creek appears to move with determined force. On some occasions, my own actions seem to join the stream. I don't reflect on the difference between moss and ice under my feet. Miles of the trail disappear from memory and I seem to have vanished. At one stream crossing, the water becomes too wide to cross with a single leap. I step back and detach from what I'm doing. I decide to rest and suddenly my concerns overwhelm me. Maybe I should be grading papers or reading books with my son. I look for a way to cross the creek. With one foot on a fallen tree, the other on a jutting rock, I hop to the other bank. I am back in the flow of running.

Hubert Dreyfus (2005, 2007a, b, c, 2013, 2014) has described similar experiences as 'absorbed bodily coping,' a type of skillful comportment of the expert, intuitively responding to situations, moving with speed and deftness, losing oneself in the moment. Endorsing the Sartre quote above, Dreyfus maintains, "there is no place in the phenomenology of fully absorbed coping for mindfulness. In flow, as Sartre sees, there are only attractive and repulsive forces drawing appropriate activity out of an active body" (Dreyfus 2007b, 374). For Dreyfus, when the expert runner is engaging in fluent agency on the trail, "the ego is altogether absent and only emerges with reflection" (2007b, 373). Dreyfus argues that an account of agency that depends upon conscious reflection upon one's intentions (a view Dreyfus finds in John McDowell's account (1994, 2007a, b, 2013)) cannot account for the phenomenology of fluent agency. To be aware of oneself in the flow is to cease to be fluent. Care and concern for one's bodily movements snaps one out of the situation. Thinking about one's actions causes one to slow down, falter, or even choke. Dreyfus defends Sartre's view above and commits himself to what I call 'the maxim of vanishing self-awareness': *If one is completely engaged in absorbed bodily coping with one's environment, then one cannot be aware of oneself by being aware of one's agency.*

However, when I am completely immersed in the expert flow of trail running, I am nevertheless able to guide my legs over a boulder. As I scuttle through a hollow, I do not lose control over my actions. If things go awry, I can still guide my bodily movements towards my short term prospective goals. Even if flow experience is central to absorbed bodily coping, I nevertheless do not experience myself as not being the source of my bodily movements. I don't sense that the trail is the source. I don't sense that my actions arise out of mere bodily movements that are non-intentional. According to this line of reasoning, in order to capture the flow of expert trail running as an intentional action, we have to appeal to a minimal form of awareness of agency while running. In addition, awareness of agency seems to require at least a minimal form of self-awareness, and thus it seems that when we focus on absorbed bodily coping through the lens of awareness of agency, then Dreyfus's view cannot be correct. In this paper, I argue against Dreyfus's maxim of vanishing self-awareness by developing an account of the awareness of fluent agency. The guiding idea of the essay is that a subject can be aware of herself in absorbed bodily coping by directing or commanding her bodily movements. My thesis is that being aware of oneself as an agent of one's bodily movements is not incompatible with immersion in absorbed bodily coping, and

in addition, that awareness of agency counts as a form of self-awareness that does not interfere, slow down, or interrupt fluent agency.

Dreyfus's maxim implies that the flow of expertise does not involve even minimal forms of self-awareness:

> Experts experience periods of performance, variously called "flow," "in the groove" and "in the zone", when everything becomes easier, confidence rises, time slows down, and the mind which usually monitors performance is quieted. Yet performance is at its peak… In fully absorbed coping, there is no immersed ego, not even an implicit one. The coper does not need to be aware of himself even in some minimal way but only needs to be capable of entering a monitoring stance in the brain, which is comparing current performance with how things went in the past, sends an alarm signal that something is going wrong. (2007b, 373–374)

In this quote, Dreyfus argues from the phenomenology of flow to the conclusion that expert bodily action cannot and does not involve self-awareness. This conclusion is reached by defense of two claims. The *phenomenological* claim is that sometimes expert bodily action involves an optimal experience of one's bodily movements in the here and now: A feeling of immersion in the activity.[1] The *conditional* claim is: if expert bodily action involves flow experience, then it cannot and does not involve self-awareness. The conclusion of the argument is that flow experience cannot and does not involve self-awareness. To consider the phenomenological claim first, while not all expert bodily action necessarily involves flow experience, the ruminations of this essay may be focused on those moments of expertise during which we do experience immersion.[2] I return below to looking more deeply into the phenomenon of flow experience. Other thinkers have responded mostly to the conditional claim, including Dan Zahavi (2013) and John McDowell (2013). Both argue that despite Dreyfus's claims that self-awareness *must be absent* from absorbed bodily coping, they argue that self-awareness *must be present*, both using transcendental arguments. Are Zahavi's and McDowell's arguments sufficient to undermine Dreyfus's maxim of vanishing self-awareness?

[1] Gottlieb (2010) argues that Dreyfus's argument commits a phenomenological fallacy. I agree that inferring directly from *how things seem* to *how things are* without argument is a faulty inference. However, it does not follow that phenomenology is not a good starting point for inquiring about the awareness of fluent agency. Dreyfus does seem to want to preserve the idea that absorbed bodily coping possesses a positive phenomenology that is first-personal (Dreyfus 2007b, 373). However, as Dan Zahavi pointedly asks, "How can one meaningfully speak of a *phenomenology* of mindless coping—as Dreyfus repeatedly does—if the coping is completely unconscious?" (2013, 321–322). An anonymous reviewer suggested that flow experience is rare in expert bodily action. However, if I can argue that self-awareness is present in flow experience, then since flow is the apex of expertise, it might be easier to argue for self-awareness in expert bodily action when flow experience is not present.

[2] Philosophers (Brownstein 2014; Hoffding 2014; Montero, *The Myth of "Just Do It": thought and effort in expert action*, Forthcoming) have argued that flow experience may not be a mark of expertise, but instead that expert bodily action could be understood in terms of situation-specific response of an agent to her environment. While Dreyfus's notion of absorbed bodily coping does include expert bodily action, the range of possible activities is broad and Dreyfus does include everyday examples of tying one's shoes, riding an elevator, and making coffee. Like Dreyfus, I intend my discussion here to capture both the fluent agency of professional experts and everyday experts.

Dan Zahavi (2013) argues via a transcendental argument for a phenomenological givenness of pre-reflective self-awareness (2013, 336). Zahavi (2013) has argued that Dreyfus was incorrect to assume that self-awareness is reflective and detached—"Dreyfus consistently interprets self-consciousness as a form of self-monitoring" (Zahavi 2013, 332), i.e., higher-order monitoring of one's intentions. He suggests that there is a form of pre-reflective self-awareness that is not incompatible with expert bodily action, because it does not represent a subject through a transitive representation of an ego. For instance, Zahavi suggests that Olympic swimmers must possess a form of intransitive self-givenness of bodily movements, and in addition argues that Sartre, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty's account of self-awareness supports pre-reflective self-awareness.[3]

McDowell (2013) argues via a transcendental argument for a minimal practical form of self-awareness, namely a transcendental necessity of reflective self-awareness (2013, 45). McDowell (1994, 2007a, b, 2013) gestures towards a dispositional account of self-awareness to the effect that it *could* be the case that an "I do" is present in expert bodily action. However, self-awareness need not be explicitly present: "self-awareness in action is practical, not theoretical. It is a matter of an "I do" rather than an "I think"… "conceiving action in terms of the "I do" is a way of registering the essentially first-person character of the realization of practical rational capacities that acting is"" (2007b, 367). McDowell briefly appeals to Anscombe's account of the awareness of agency involved in expert bodily action as a means to deflate Dreyfus's worries about the incompatibility of self-awareness with expertise (2013, 57 f. 13).

While I agree with the points made by Zahavi (2013) and McDowell (2013), I nevertheless think that Dreyfus can respond to both arguments in ways that lead to impasses. Both Zahavi and Dreyfus agree to the employment of the phenomenological method for engaging the question of whether or not self-awareness is present in experience. However, Zahavi concludes that self-awareness must be present and Dreyfus concludes that self-consciousness must not be present. In addition, I think

[3] Zahavi's (2013) discussion of the historical background enables us to see that it is at least debatable whether Sartre, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty would agree with Dreyfus's maxim. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but I think the existential phenomenologists support the telic view of sense of agency. While the Sartre quote above does suggest that self-awareness disappears, Sartre is clear that agential self-awareness is involved in immersed experience: "There is consciousness *of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken,* etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness" (45). In becoming aware of the aims of trail running, for instance aiming to sprint up a hill to the peak, I am becoming aware of myself as agent. In mundane cases of self-becoming, I am aware of the agent because I (at least minimally) am aware of the person I am striving to become. While Heidegger does repudiate detached reflection on activities based in skill and know-how, Heidegger highlights the significance of "mineness" of agency and action throughout Being and Time. As he points out, "every worldly experiencing is characterized by the fact that "I am always somehow acquainted with myself."" (Heidegger 1985, 251). Okrent (2007) has argued that Heidegger's idea of readiness-to-hand, insofar as it involves a for-the-sake-of-which something is done always involves a form of self-directedness towards one's projects. In this sense "mineness," could point towards a minimal form of agential self-awareness as an awareness of one's goals and aims in developing expertise. While Merleau-Ponty does reject the idea of being aware of oneself from a theoretical perspective, his urging that we embody the I-think in space and time as an "I can" does not rule out that minimal forms of self-awareness are involved in flow experience on the soccer field. "Consciousness is neither the positing of oneself, nor the ignorance of oneself, it is *not concealed* from itself, which means that there is nothing in it which does not in some way announce itself to it, although it does not need to know this explicitly" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 296). To be engaged in the flow of experience can be implicit in the doing of the activity, without "the announcement of oneself" vanishing.

Dreyfus would argue that it is not possible that pre-reflective self-awareness "could be introduced into the absorbed activity of the coper in the flow without abolishing that activity by creating a distance between agent and world" (29). According to Dreyfus, any self-givenness is divides subject and world—self-awareness, whether reflective or pre-reflective—does not seem to be part of fluent agency.

Both McDowell and Dreyfus agree that the description of the phenomena of expert bodily action is important. However, McDowell argues for self-consciousness as a non-phenomenological condition of experience and Dreyfus (1999) argues that the phenomenological method is privileged to an analytic method. In addition, because McDowell (2013, 46–50) suggests that self-knowledge is rational and conceptual, he commits to the idea that experts can say "what" and "why" they were performing their bodily movements. This requires the form of self-awareness in expertise to be inferential, and thus is susceptible to the critique that Dreyfus' motivates, because he thinks self-awareness, whether an "I think" or an "I do" cannot be a part of fluent agency.

Both of these responses to Dreyfus from Zahavi and McDowell lead to impasses. My diagnosis of the problem is that they employ direct methods for engaging with the question of compatibility of expert bodily action and self-awareness. In addition, neither account provides an elucidation of self-awareness in a way that can show in detail in what sense self-awareness is compatible with flow experience, because Zahavi's "pre-reflective" is defined negatively and McDowell's "I do" is illustrated quietistically. The account of the awareness of fluent agency presented here will attempt to argue for self-awareness in expert bodily action through an indirect method. First, I will focus on assumptions about the awareness of agency in flow experience. Second, I will consider whether the awareness of agency counts as a form of self-awareness. The account of self-awareness that I will motivate—self-synthesis—will differ from both Zahavi's account of pre-reflective self-awareness and McDowell's account of self-ascription of intentional actions. I will therefore avoid the impasses above by neither appealing to a form of self-awareness Dreyfus would not find given phenomenologically nor arguing transcendentally for a form of self-awareness Dreyfus would find too inferential. In addition, I will articulate multiple levels of self-awareness that might be involved in flow experience.

In §1, I outline three distinct features of flow experience relevant to Dreyfus's argument: *merging into flow* (Schear 2013); *immersion in flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Slingerland 2014; De Prycker 2011); *emergence from flow* (Reitveld 2008; Dreyfus 2013; Brownstein 2014). I argue against Dreyfus's idea that flow experience rules out all types of awareness of agency, while conceding that fluent agency does not involve awareness of agency in a purely thetic sense. In §2, I challenge the assumption that the awareness of fluent agency must be understood in terms of a purely thetic awareness of agency.[4] Instead, I develop an Anscombean telic account of the awareness

[4] The awareness of oneself as an agent of one's actions has been called variously 'sense of agency' (de Vignemont and Fourneret 2004; Gallagher 2000; Marcel 2003; Peacocke 2003; Bayne 2008, 2010, 2011), 'agents' awareness' (O'Brien 2007), 'agentive awareness' (Bayne and Pacherie 2007; Pacherie 2008; Mylopoulos 2014), 'action consciousness' (Prinz 2007), or 'control consciousness' (Mandik 2010).

of fluent agency in terms of the phenomenal character of knowing one's aims.[5] In §3, I respond to Michael Brownstein's (2014) challenge that if an Anscombean account of the awareness of agency is to succeed, then agents must be able to answer Anscombean questions, What? and Why? questions about one's actions. In §4, I briefly consider the objection that awareness of agency is not a form of self-awareness by outlining an account of self-awareness as self-synthesis that is distinct from self-perception and self-ascription, but which makes room for self-awareness in absorbed bodily coping. However, we need to pause to consider some terminological questions.

A core issue of the paper is whether or not there is a unique and distinctive phenomenology of absorbed bodily coping. The phenomenon of absorbed bodily coping is rare and difficult to pin down. However, feeling in the flow is something everyone is familiar with. One need not be an expert trail runner to immerse oneself in flow experience. A mechanic can wield a socket wrench with unparalleled aplomb. An emeritus scholar can turn pages of a well-studied book with deftness. What makes such activities absorbed bodily coping? There are diverse terms used: 'fluent agency' (Railton 2009); 'unreflective action' (Rietveld 2010, Gottlieb 2011; Brownstein 2014); 'skilled activity' (Clarke 2010); 'skilled action' (Annas 2011; Fridland 2014). Dreyfus's phrase 'absorbed bodily coping' is not entirely clear and precise. Instead, I will use the term 'expert bodily action' because that term better captures the phenomenon. 'Coping' seems to beg the question in favor of expert bodily movements being unintentional and involuntary. If we use the term 'action' instead, then it remains an open question whether actions are intentional or non-intentional and we can focus on the awareness of agency as a core phenomenon in distinguishing between intentional actions and non-intentional bodily movements, though of course there are myriad ways to draw that distinction. 'Absorbed' describes the phenomenology, but is ambiguous between an intensional reading—being absorbed in an activity by focusing—and an extensional reading—the activity absorbing oneself. The latter is a metaphorical way to express Dreyfus' meaning. Rather than elucidate the metaphor, I would rather focus on the question about flow experience in the context of expertise. Being 'in the flow' or 'immersed' is the optimal experience that is the apex of training in the development of expert skill. That optimal experience has a phenomenal character, namely there is "something it's like" to undergo the experience of being in the flow. What is the path from novice to expert?

The progression from novice to expert has a particular development (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1988). There are five levels of skill acquisition: novice, beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. The key transition for our discussion is between proficient and expert. According to Dreyfus and Dreyfus, proficiency in skill is understood as a vast repertoire of know-how in a variety of situations. The proficient trail runner's know-how is brought about by positive emotional responses to successful activities and negative emotional responses to unsuccessful activities. The expert trail runner has

[5] By talking about 'aims' I am not committed to the idea that agents have one particular aim or other in action, because it is likely that agents have several aims. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for making this point. I also do not mean to imply that aims or goals are understood in terms of solely long term future-directed intentions, i.e., distal intentions. Instead, distal intentions are sometimes background structures or contextual norms that govern the activity in expert bodily actions. I mean to discuss a new account of intentions between proximal intentions and distal intentions, what might be called "prospective intentions," namely intentions to become the agent of one's activity just beyond the here and now.

maximal facility in discriminating possible situations. She does not calculate, compare, or contrast. In addition to possessing broad array of specific abilities to respond to particular situations (cf Reitveld 2008), she acts in the flow, her actions are situated in the here and the now. Expertise is distinct from mere proficiency because it requires both situation-specificity and flow experience. I will focus on this uppermost level of expertise in which one is immersed in an optimal experience of expertise. Understanding flow as the pinnacle of expertise is essential to understanding Dreyfus's argument. However, it should be noticed that both Dreyfus and I are open to there being everyday expertise, not merely the expertise of professional athletes.

## 1 The phenomenon of flow

What is the phenomenon of flow experience and what forms of self-awareness do go missing from flow experience? Flow experience is no doubt heterogenous; however, there seem to be three distinct ways that it has been described.[6] In order to capture the phenomenology, I will highlight three different flow experiences—merging into flow, immersion in flow, and emergence from flow.

First, there is the experience of merging in the activity, what might be called "merging into flow." Compare the initiation of flow to diving into a lake. Initially, you feel yourself in the open air. Your extended arms break the water's surface. The merging with the water's plane is similar to the experience of immersion in activity. Joseph Schear (2013, 293–298) argues that the awareness of agency requires the presence of determinate objects, in particular being aware of agency involves being aware of one's reasons and one's intentions for actions. However, "the merging character of absorbed coping precludes the presence of determinate objects" (294), because merging yields the disappearance of reasons and intentions. For instance, the aim of trail running is finishing the marathon with a personal record. I might dally along the course to splash in some puddles. However, my capacity for a self-critical stance enables me to check my puddle play against the goal of achieving a personal record. My prior intention becomes for me a determinate object that my current movements are not satisfying. However, when the expert trail runner is bounding down the trail merging brings about the absence of the subject-object presence. The merging into one's activity seems to bring about the vanishing of self-awareness. The path calls forth a particular activity from the runner, wherein neither the runner nor the path are present in experience, but the agent becomes one with her world. The argument from merging presupposes that the awareness of agency must involve a judgment towards oneself, a cognitive attitude towards one's reasons or one's intentions. While it may be that merging into one's activity rules out an explicit awareness of one's reasons and intentions, however, not all awareness of agency involves an explicit presence of reasons or intentions.

Second, there is the experience of yourself being fully immersed, being completely submerged in the activity, what might be called "immersion in flow." Below the

[6] Hoffding (2014) and Montero, *The Myth of "Just Do It": thought and effort in expert action*, Forthcoming) minimize the importance of the awareness of fluent agency when thinking about expert bodily action. However, my focus is on the compatibility of fluent agency and self-awareness not on presenting a general theory of expert bodily action.

surface, the experience is of oneself and the water mixed, entwined, or commingled. Maybe the phenomenon of flow is an awareness of being currently absorbed in the activity. Dreyfus's argument has support in cases in which the goal of the activity is itself immersion in the activity. For instance, while mountaineering, one might have as the goal of one's activity the participatory engagement with the natural world (Howe 2010; Thoreau 2008; Muir 2008). According to an engagement model of the experience of natural environments—"one that acknowledges the experience of continuity, assimilation, and engagement that nature encourages" (Berleant 1992, 81)—being immersed is the aim of the activity. In these examples, it might be that there is a loss of consciousness of self, but not necessarily a loss of self-awareness (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 64).[7] It might be that there is a lack of mental effort of trying to achieve a goal, but it does not involve complete disappearance of aims of one's activity, because *trying* not to try is the aim (Slingerland 2014). However, being a well-trained expert, a creative artist, an engaged mountaineer does not mean the absence of awareness of agency. Being at home in one's activities can involve dialing in one's aims of nature-oriented activity. One is aware of oneself as an agent striving towards that aim in nature-oriented activities such as mountaineering (Howe 2010).

Third, there is the experience of yourself coming to the surface, breaking out of immersed activity into the air, what might be called "emergence from flow." It may be that it is assumed that when experts become aware of themselves, they immediately emerge from the flow. When one attends to one's activity while absorbed in the flow, that automatically causes emergence from the flow. It may be that the phenomenon of flow is discovered through an emergence from the flow, because one's bodily movements are being interfered with, slowed down, or interrupted. Dreyfus presents an argument from choking (2007a: 354–355) that when we snap out of being in the moment we usually find self-awareness at fault. Suppose you are running the last mile of a trail marathon. You feel the pressure of the situation. You step back, reflect and start to analyze your bodily movements. Self-awareness has interfered, slowed you down, or interrupted your skills carrying yourself forward in the normal way. Does this emergence from the flow provide Dreyfus with the claim that awareness of agency is not involved in the flow? The argument goes through *only if* awareness of agency—as monitoring intentions and bodily movements—is the best explanation of what causes choking. Dreyfus follows assumed commonsense intuitions of (though does not cite empirical studies by) psychologists in thinking that the best explanation of emergence from flow is becoming aware of our agency. However, these arguments by Dreyfus depends pivotally on what account of awareness of agency is presupposed.

There seem to be three senses of flow experience all of which point towards some forms of self-awareness being ruled out in optimal experience of experts. Merging into flow rules out detached awareness of oneself as an object. Immersion in flow rules out consciousness of self. Emergence from flow rules out monitoring intentions and attending to bodily movements. However, while an opponent of Dreyfus' maxim can accept that each of these forms of self-awareness is ruled out, notice that the types of

[7] As Csikszentmihalyi suggests: "So loss of self-consciousness does not involve a loss of self, and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness *of* self. What slips below the threshold of awareness is the *concept* of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 64).

self-awareness involved are purely *thetic* forms of the awareness of agency. Tim Bayne (2011) nicely distinguishes between thetic states and telic states in a discussion of awareness of agency:

> "*Thetic* states are satisfied when they fit the world; they have a mind-to-world direction of fit. Judgments are a paradigm of thetic states, for they are true (or veridical) when they fit the world and otherwise false (or non-veridical). Thetic states are in the business of responding to changes in the world. *Telic* states are satisfied when the world fits them; they have a world-to-mind direction of fit. Desires are the paradigms of telic states. They are in the business of bringing about a certain state of affairs. They are satisfied when they succeed; otherwise they remain frustrated" (2011).

I now challenge the assumption that awareness of fluent agency must be thetic by outlining a telic account of the awareness of agency that is compatible with flow experience.

## 2 The telic awareness of agency in expert bodily action

Dreyfus' arguments parallel (though don't involve citations of) empirical studies by from sport psychology that provide counterevidence against the view that self-awareness is involved in expert bodily action. According to the dominant view in sports psychology, self-awareness cannot be involved in expert bodily action (Baumeister (1984); Baumeister and Showers (1986); Beilock and Carr (2001); Masters 1992; Masters and Maxwell 2008).[8] However, in a recent review of choking literature, Christensen et al. (2015) suggest that the *status quo* should be questioned: "Can we reasonably infer from these experiments that reflective awareness plays no role in skilled action? The abnormal nature of the self-focus instructions makes this inference dubious. The fact that unusual forms of self-focus harm the performance of these skills in these (fairly simple) conditions does not show that self-awareness plays no role in sensorimotor control. These experiments leave open the possibility that experts develop forms of self-awareness that assist action control" (3.4.3). I suggest two diagnoses of the problem (For further discussion see Montero 2015).

First, sports psychologists have mostly presupposed a thetic notion of the awareness of agency and so the import of my work here is that sport psychology needs to allow for more open-mindedness about the awareness of agency. Second, when sports psychologists have presupposed a telic model of self-awareness, awareness of agency does not seem to interfere, and in addition, it may be that performance improves (Wulf 2007; Christensen et al. 2015; Montero, *The Myth of "Just Do It": thought and effort in expert action*, Forthcoming). Christensen *et al.* (2015) argue that instructional nudges—urging oneself on with encouragement, commands, orders, and directives like "Watch the Ball!" or "Keep it up!" or "Do it!"—are not detrimental to expertise (Cf. Sutton 2007, Sutton et al. 2011, and Christensen et al. (2015)). Why not consider instructional

[8] For good reviews of the empirical study of expert bodily action, consider Beilock and Gray 2007; Hill et al. 2010, and Christensen et al. 2015.

nudges to be a form of self-awareness? As I will show below, pace Dreyfus the flow experience in expert bodily action is compatible with the account of telic awareness of agency here presented. The empirical import of this paper is that sports psychologists need to develop a new paradigm of experimentation in which the telic model of self-awareness in expert bodily action can be explored.

However, what are the diverse accounts of awareness of agency that might be explored? What is the core phenomenology of the awareness of agency? To access the core of the phenomenon we can contrast awareness of agency with bodily movement that lacked that awareness of agency. The awareness of agency involves being aware of oneself as the source of one's bodily movements. The relevant case to contrast awareness of agency with a lack of that awareness would be a case in which one's bodily movements were experienced as driven by the environment. At times, one's movements are not experienced as the source of one's bodily happenings. Suppose you walk into your bedroom. You are aware of seeing your bed made. In the next moment, you find yourself completely covered by blankets in the bed. When asked, "Why did you climb into bed?" your response is "I didn't perform those bodily movements. I was aware of seeing the bed made. The next thing I knew, I was undressed and covered by blankets lying in bed."

While the experience may appear highly unlikely, it is a common experience with patients with Utilization Behavior. As Marcel (2003) discusses, "if on entering a bedroom the bed is visible they will undress and go to bed, or if a matchbox is within reach they will light the matches and if a candle is present light the candle" (Marcel 2003, 77). Patients report that the actions they are performing are completely environment-driven. They are not bodily movements performed by the subject's own accord. Now, compare and contrast the experiences of patients with utilization behavior with Dreyfus's myriad descriptions of absorbed bodily coping: "In flow… there are only attractive and repulsive forces drawing appropriate activity out of an active body" (Dreyfus 2007b, 374). It seems like Dreyfus' view of flow experience consistently describes experts' flow experiences in ways that are similar to the experiences of patients with utilization behavior. However, since experts experience moral responsibility, self-control, and care, this assimilation poses a problem for Dreyfus' descriptions.

Dreyfus might argue that what distinguishes absorbed bodily coping from utilization behavior is context-sensitivity of bodily movements and the existential care or concern about the action (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.). Agents with utilization behavior engage in complex activities that involve context-sensitivity (Lhermitte 1983). About existential care, when Dreyfus (2013, 32) describes the kind of being-in-the-world involved in absorption in the flow, he is explicit that even the form of self-awareness involved in care is not involved in fluent agency, but that the agent is determined by "attractions and repulsions" (Dreyfus 2013, 32).[9] However, pace Dreyfus' descriptions, when we have awareness of our fluent agency, we have a sense that the bodily movements are under our guidance and control (Fridland 2014). We can initiate such movements from ourselves as a source. If things go awry, we can

[9] It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue that Heidegger's notion of care implicitly involves a telic form of self-awareness; however, this quote suggests that Heidegger accepted a minimal prospective self-awareness in agency: "Care, which is essentially care about the being of Dasein, is its innermost nothing but this being-ahead-of-itself in the uttermost possibility of is own can-be" (Heidegger 1985, 313).

maintain our movements. While we may not be aware of our reasons or intentions after the fact, we do not claim that our agency vanished. This is true whether it involves the expert texting of a teenager or the expert tennis play of Rafa Nadal. However, Dreyfus's phenomenological description does suggest that awareness of agency is lacking. However, this description presupposes a purely thetic account of the awareness of agency.

The contemporary debate about awareness of agency concerns what mental states make awareness of agency possible. There are three central accounts of the awareness of agency in the literature: doxastic, perceptual, and telic (Bayne 2010). It may be that we are *making judgments* about ourselves as the cause. The doxastic model suggests that awareness of agency is best described as judgmental or belief-like. To be aware of oneself as the source is to have a belief that one is the source and endorse that thought as being true. Maybe we *perceive* ourselves as the origin. The perceptual model of awareness of agency suggests that such experience is best described as perceptual. The 'sense' of agency "should not be taken as a mere *facon de parler* but picks out a genuine perceptual system" (Bayne 2010[10]). Both the doxastic and perceptual accounts are thetic accounts, because the mental states that are appealed to have mind-to-world directions of fit. Both perceptions and beliefs are satisfied when they represent the world accurately. For the runner to represent herself as being the source of her bodily movements is to believe and/or perceive that she herself is that source.[11]

My conservative argument is that in the debates about expert bodily action, there has been little discussion of the awareness of agency in light of these different accounts. It is sufficient to undermine the maxim of vanishing self-awareness, however, to distinguish between thetic and telic accounts and open up the logical space for the telic account of the awareness of fluent agency.[12] The account of the awareness of agency so far presented in favor of the maxim of vanishing self-awareness has presupposed that thetic states must account for awareness of agency. According to Dreyfus, being aware of one's bodily movement would have to involve a form of reflective thought about one's intentions prior to the movement. If the trail runner is to become aware of her agency, then she must represent herself having the intention to stride this way or that.

[10] For a compelling dissent of the perceptual account of the awareness of agency, see Mylopoulos 2014.

[11] One way to think about Zahavi 2013 and McDowell's 2013 responses to Dreyfus's denial of the presence of the awareness of agency is to think about Zahavi's account of awareness of agency as first-order perceptual (Zahavi (Personal communication) suggested that his account of pre-reflective self-awareness should be understood to be compatible with first-order perceptual accounts of consciousness.) and McDowell's account of awareness of agency as doxastic (McDowell (2013, 55–56) suggests that the "I do" accompanying bodily movements is not reflective, detached, or higher-order; however, nevertheless the "I do" requires the subject to be able to answer "Why?" questions (2013, 50–51).)

[12] One might object that developing a purely thetic account of awareness of fluent agency that accounts for absorbed bodily coping is a better strategy. I do not wish to rule out this project. However, because the telic account of the awareness of fluent agency has never been discussed in the debates about expert bodily action, I think we might begin with the telic objection to Dreyfus. Tim Bayne (2010) has argued for a hybrid thetic/telic account of agentive experiences in terms of pushmi-pullyu representations (Millikan 1996). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide more than a promissory note for the view that prospective intentions do not produce thetic states in all cases, but only stand in reserve if the agent loses control, or lacks guidance, or gets off course in the activity. The hybrid thetic/telic account may be plausible for awareness of agency in general, but seems less plausible in accounting for fluent agency. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that a hybrid thetic/telic account of awareness of agency might also be used to respond to Dreyfus. However, the pivotal question is whether thetic contents are consistently produced in most cases of expert bodily action.

She must think that her foot should be perched higher on a rock. However, thetic states are not the only way that one can become aware of one's agency.

A third alternative is the telic account of the awareness of agency.[13] Maybe we *direct ourselves* to perform the activity. The telic account suggests that representational accuracy cannot be all there is to success in the awareness of agency. To be aware of one's agency on the telic account is made possible by a process being successfully carried out. According to the telic account of the awareness of agency, the phenomenon is best described as involving striving to bring about one's bodily movements. On this account, the telic states that are involved have different satisfaction conditions than the thetic states. Directing, commanding, or striving are satisfied when they succeed and not satisfied when they fail. According to this account, the awareness of agency is understood on analogy with performative speech acts. Just as saying "I do" at a wedding does presuppose that one is unmarried, being aware of oneself through "I do" presupposes that one's aim has not been attained (Bayne 2010). When the trail runner says after finishing, "I was just doing what I do" then capturing the agent being the source of meeting the aims of the action does not require appeal to thetic states. When she endeavors to accomplish the task of completing a half marathon, she is aware of herself endeavoring, not by thinking about her goal, but by urging herself towards the successful completion of the half marathon.

Most of the work on the telic sense of agency has focused on John Searle's account (Bayne 2010). To provide new insight, I will focus on Elizabeth Anscombe's (1957) discussion of the awareness of agency in *Intention*. As a means of responding to Dreyfus's argument, I will briefly outline a telic account of awareness of agency inspired by Anscombe that is consistent with the possibility of the awareness of fluent agency. Anscombe (1957) suggests that the awareness of agency is not thetic because our agency is "known without observation" (14). In an important passage, Anscombe discusses the phenomenology of the awareness of agency:

> "Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window'. I have called such a statement knowledge all along; and precisely because in such a case what I say is true—*I do* open the window; and that means that the window is getting opened by the movements of the body out of whose mouth those words come. But I don't say the words like this: 'Let me see, what is this body bringing about? Ah yes! The opening of the window'. Or even like this: 'Let me see, what are my movements bring about? The opening of the window'." (1957: 51, my emphasis).

In this passage, Anscombe highlights that the awareness of agency does not depend upon a thetic awareness—doxastic or perceptual—of one's intentional actions. When we are aware of ourselves as the source of our movements, on occasion we do reflect

[13] One might object that if an account of awareness of agency is telic, then it needs to be understood in terms of a trying account of intentional action. However, the objection continues, there is no trying involved in expert bodily action. But, this presupposes that trying must be understood in terms of effort. Barbara Montero, *The Myth of "Just Do It": thought and effort in expert action*, Forthcoming does think that many cases of expert bodily action do involve effort. This may be true, but the account presented here does not presuppose either that trying must be identified with effort nor that the effort is necessary for expert bodily action (Cf. O'Shaughnessy 1973).

upon, think about, or look around to see ourselves engaging in action. But, those thetic states are not necessary in order for one to become aware of oneself as the source of one's bodily movements. What has gone missing from the bodily movements of opening a window when we are not aware of ourselves as the source is what Anscombe calls "a lapse of self-consciousness" (159).

When I have a lapse of self-awareness in action, I have of a lack of self-directed movement. The world takes over as the guiding force of my activity. The mark of the awareness of agency for Anscombe is bodily movements being made intelligible as intentional through its making sense to ask certain questions about such bodily movements. (Its making sense to ask Why? questions does not require that the agent be able to answer such questions.) Does it make sense to ask Why? questions about expert bodily actions? If we focus solely on the awareness of agency in the thetic senses—judgmental or perceptual—then it seems plausible to say that such forms of thetic awareness would not be present in the flow. The point I am urging is that this thetic myopia about awareness of agency has made Dreyfus' arguments *seem* plausible. However, if we ask an expert trail runner Why? questions, while she may deny making choices, say she was not aware of intentions, swears she does not remember the precise sensorimotor intentions that urged her on, she will NOT say, "Oh! Good heavens! **I** didn't know **I** was trail running!"[14]

One puzzling aspect of Anscombe's account is that she suggests that the awareness of agency is the "'the cause of what it understands' unlike 'speculative' knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known'" (1957, 87). The Olympic commentator takes a speculative observer perspective on the runner. The announcer describes the bodily movements involved in the runner increasing pace in the last kilometer of the race. The runner, however, does not have observational knowledge of her reasons, intentions, or bodily movements. Instead, she directs, commands, or orders herself to increase her pace as the finish line comes into sight. My view is that if a post-hoc inference were the basis for who performed the activity, then it would be likely that agents would say, "Someone performed that bodily movement, but I am not sure whether it was me or not." (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that it may be post-hoc inference that enables the reference of "I" to the agent.) However, since awareness of agency in fluent action is based in future-directed intentions—what we might call "prospective intentions"[15]—that both command one to A, then if I am the runner striving to cross the finish line, then my awareness of Aing is implicit in my prospective intention to A. The phenomenal character of that experience is seemingly non-inferential, because it does not seem to depend upon any representation of the

[14] Brownstein (2014) presents several examples of athletes denying thetic sense of agency, but nevertheless still using 'I': "Walter Payton said, "People ask me about this move or that move, I don't know why I did something. I just did it."… Kimberly Kim, the youngest person ever to win the US Women's Amateur Golf Tournament said, "I don't know how I did it. I just hit the ball and it went good." (Quoted in Brownstein 2014). It may be that athletes infer they are the subejcts of the activity after the fact, but notice that they do not deny their bodily movements as being there own. Two things to bear in mind: 1) We do not interrupt athletes mid-performance to ask for reports of the source of the agency and 2) If we did, then a plausible response would be they were just trying to perform the action.

[15] Thanks to Myrto Mylopoulos for conversations about different accounts of intentions that might be involved in generating a telic sense of agency. The account of "prospective intentions" as the basis for the telic awareness of agency in the paper is partly inspired by Mylopoulos (forthcoming), in which she argues against the view that executive intentions could be the basis for the agentive awareness.

subject of the action. However, one might object that appeals to phenomenal character, or what it's like to be an agent, or the qualitative feel of fluent agency seem mysterious.

However, a compelling view of the phenomenal character of the awareness of fluent agency compatible with the telic account presented here comes from Harry Frankfurt's "The Problem of Action": "The activity of such a mechanism is normally not, of course, guided by us. Rather it *is*, when we are performing an action, our guidance of our behavior. Our *sense of our own agency* when we act is nothing more than *the way it feels to us* when we are somehow in touch with the operation of mechanisms of this kind, by which our movements are guided and their course guaranteed" (1978, 160, emphasis added). Experiencing a telic awareness of agency can be understood solely in terms of the mechanisms that enable the phenomenology of being the agent of one's actions. When I feel my foot balancing on a rock while trail running, I am aware of the character of my orientation while running. This account is a minimal dispositional account of the guidance control of an action.

Being aware of agency is to be aware of one's goals, but not solely in the thetic sense of 'aware of' as 'awareness' of oneself as an agent, but instead in the possessive sense of 'aware of,' namely as an 'awareness' that is constituted and possessed by a guidance control mechanism.[16] If I have an aim of leaping over the creek, then my being aware of that aim causes me to bring about bodily movements towards that aim. Departing from my aims is in part to depart from myself as an agent. Sacrificing my goals is in part to sacrifice myself. To be without purposes is to cease to be an agent becoming oneself. Those that argue for the lack of awareness of agency in expertise tend to overlook the idea that aims constitute our agency and actions. It is plausible, however, that if there is an account of the awareness of fluent agency, then a telic phenomenal character account would best fit with the phenomenon.[17]

A third objection might be that if we understood the mark of awareness of agency in terms of Why? What? and How? questions, then it appears that experts cannot answer such questions, because they lack an account of the reasons for what they do. Dreyfus suggests, "If [the master] could say anything at all about his reason for making a particular move, the master could only respond to the demand for a reason by saying, "I made the move because I was drawn to make it" (2013, 35). However, this appears to pose a serious problem for the Anscombean account of the awareness of agency.

[16] One might object that 'awareness' cannot be used this way. In order for a runner to be aware of herself as an agent, the runner needs to be aware of something or other. But, telic states cannot provide that form of awareness. So, it might be a bare trying, endeavoring, or urging, but it would not count as *awareness* of agency. However, this merely begs the question in favor of a thetic account of the awareness of agency, because the objection assumes that "awareness of" must be read intentionally rather than possessively (Cf. Bayne 2010, 10).

[17] John Schwenkler (2012, 9–10) outlines what he calls a "special character" view of the awareness of agency based on Frankfurt's account of intentional action according to which awareness of agency is an essential part of intentional action. According to this account practical knowledge being "the cause of what it understands" is understood in terms of the following: "If I mean to be doing something, then so long as I know I am doing it I will keep acting as I am; but if I come to see that my behavior has gone off course I will try to adjust it appropriately." (9). Rather than read the cause of practical knowledge in terms of efficient causation, I would rather interpret Anscombe as suggesting that intentional action has an awareness of agency understood in terms of goals. According to Anscombe, on this interpretation, practical knowledge is the final cause of what it understands. For such an "outward-looking" account of Anscombe's account of intentional action, see Stout (2005).

## 3 Anscombean questions revisited

In what sense are Anscombean questions possible for subjects that are exercising highly trained motor skills in expert bodily action? Michael Brownstein (2014) directly challenges the Anscombean account of self-awareness in flow experience. Brownstein argues that if Anscombean questions are central for determining that one is aware of one's agency, but experts cannot answer Anscombean questions, then it appears that there needs to be some other way to account for the agency involved in flow experience. Brownstein (2014) argues that agents engaged in expert bodily actions are not able to answer accurately "what" and "why" questions about their bodily movements. Brownstein outlines three different recent accounts of skilled unreflective action, each of which suggest that athletes are able to answer Anscombean questions (Railton 2009; Annas 2011; Velleman 2008).[18] Brownstein abstracts away from the particular views to consider the Principle of ANS: all agential skilled unreflective actions are Anscombean, in the sense that athletes can answer accurately "what" and "why" questions about bodily movements. Brownstein argues that expert athletes cannot answer Anscombean questions. However, since being able to answer "what" and "why" questions is central to self-awareness, self-awareness is not involved in expert bodily action.

Brownstein's argument leaves my Anscombean account of the awareness of fluent agency unscathed. First, I will argue that the Anscombean questions about awareness of agency are not properly Anscombean. The requirement of being able to answer "what" and "why" questions is not a requirement of the Anscombean view, because subjects do not need to be able to answer "what" and "why" questions accurately (cf. McDowell 2013, 46–50). Anscombe suggests that subjects can misrepresent what they did and can provide reasons as simplistic as "for no particular reason" (Anscombe 1963, 25) (Compare Dreyfus's concession: "I made the move because I was drawn to make it" (2013, 35).) Second, the theoretical purpose of thinking about Anscombean questions is not to extract accurate answers from agents. Instead, the Anscombean questions enable us to track *from the outside* whether bodily movements are done intentionally. Anscombe suggests that bodily movements that are done intentionally are the kinds of actions that it *makes sense to ask* "*what*" *and* "*why*" *questions about*. Importantly, it makes sense to ask "what" and "why" questions about some bodily movements without the agent being able to answer accurately such questions about those movements *from the inside*.

[18] According to Railton's (2009) account, fluent actions are Anscombean when the reports on the action represent intelligibility, nondeliberative freedom, self-directedness, and value-expressiveness (Brownstein 2014). According to Annas's (2011) account, expert actions are Anscombean when the reports on the action represent "the agent as having the need to learn and the drive to aspire" (Brownstein 2014). According to Velleman's (2008) account, expert actions are Anscombean "when the report of the agent that performs them represents her as having re-engaged with the techniques of agency which she antecedently used in the acquisition and development of her unreflective skills" (Brownstein 2014). Railton, Annas, and Velleman each hint at an idea of telic self-awareness in expert bodily action. Railton (2009, 107) suggests a distinction between self-consciousness and self-constitution in agency (minimizing the former and allowing for the latter) that provides a way to mark out a provisional distinction between thetic and telic. Annas (2011) suggests an implicit distinction between reflective skills and reflexive skills in her discussion of virtue, which suggests that reflective states are not necessary. Velleman (2008, 188) suggests a distinction between self-consciousness as self-regulative and self-critical and a telic form of self-awareness that remains in reserve should the higher wanton falter.

The important questions for agents to be able to answer in order for bodily movements to count as intentional are "Who?" questions (cf. de Vignemont and Fourneret 2004). It is sufficient for agents to be able to answer Who? questions for them to be Anscombean and in addition for self-awareness to be involved in expert bodily action. The awareness of agency in Anscombe's view has more to do with the person that is performing the action than the person's description of the reasons, intentions, or motivations. If Anscombe's account of awareness of agency involves the ability to answer "Who?" questions, then we can develop an Anscombean view that Brownstein has not undermined. We can call this Anscombean view, $ANS_T$ ("T" is for telic): 1. All expert bodily actions are $Anscombean_T$; 2. Expert bodily actions are $Anscombean_T$ when agents can answer "Who?" questions.

If athletes can answer Who? questions, then $ANS_T$ is vindicated. I provide two arguments for $ANS_T$: 1) a direct argument from reports; 2) an indirect argument from the rejected assumption that athletes cannot answer Who? questions.

Consider the following points Brownstein uses to support his rejection of ANS: "People ask me about this move or that move, but I don't know why I did something. I just did it."—Walter Payton; "I don't know how I did it. I just hit the ball and it went good"—Kimberly Kim; "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 the moment or so later"—Larry Bird (Quoted in Brownstein 2014). These quotes support Brownstein's point that experts cannot answer "what" and "why" questions. However, the claims being made here do not suggest that they cannot answer "Who?" questions. In the Payton and the Kim quotes, awareness of agency seems to be reported in the sense that they both positively report that they are the agents *who* performed the actions. Bird suggests "I've passed the basketball and not realized I've passed it" which if we understand this as a veridical report of the loss of memory of self and interpret the 'I' as thetic self-awareness, then self-awareness does vanish. However, if we interpret the expression "I" in "I've passed the basketball" as telic self-awareness, then self-awareness is still present.

One might object that athletes often use the third person or talk about their bodies as performing the actions; however, they do not talk about agents or selves. As Brownstein points out, the notion of Anscombean questions cannot be so permissive as to rule out bodily movements done automatically, unintentionally, and without an awareness of agency. However, there is a difference between "I passed the basketball" and "Oh Good Heavens! I didn't know I passed the basketball." Notice that the latter is not involved in the reports above. Athletes do not deny that they are the source of the bodily movements they perform. If this were true, then it would be obvious that the athletes' bodily movements were bodily movements that occurred without an awareness of agency. Thus, on the interpretations of the reports of flow experience, expert actions are best described as involving the capacity to answer Who? questions.

What are the experiences of athletes that cannot answer Who? questions? While these experiences probably do occur, the question would be whether such experiences occur in the varieties of flow experience. However, we should worry that if we merely assume that athletes cannot answer Who? questions then we run the risk of assimilating the flow of expertise a phenomenon such as utilization behavior (as I suggested Dreyfus's descriptions of absorbed bodily coping often do). As I discussed above, the key contrast case between awareness of agency and the lack of such awareness of

agency is through contrasting self-generated bodily movements and environment-generated bodily movements. Utilization behavior (Lhermitte 1983; Besnard et al. 2010) is a phenomenon that involves the lack of awareness of agency for one's actions. When the person is asked *who* performed the action, patients are not aware *from the inside* that their own bodies performed the action, but instead they give descriptions that suggest the actions are environment-driven. However, the phenomenology of expert bodily action is distinct from utilization behavior with respect to the awareness of agency—immersion does not remove awareness of agency completely.

I have made room for the idea that a telic model of awareness of agency is possible in expert bodily action. The agent that is overcome with utilization behavior is instructive because Dreyfus' "absorbed bodily coping" seems to assimilate flow experience to the experiences of patients whose actions are driven by the environment. However, notice that agents involved in expert bodily actions—whether the expert knitter or the professional cricket batter—are not environment-absorbed in that sense. Thus, expert bodily actions are best described as involving the capacity to answer Who? questions. However, does the idea that experts remain capable of answering "Who?" questions support the idea that self-awareness is involved in expert bodily action? [19]

## 4 Self-awareness as self-synthesis

One way to think of the problem that Dreyfus has pinpointed is in terms of a paradox of fluent agency. If one is engaged in fluent agency while trail running, then one cannot be aware of one's running movements. If one is aware of fluent agency while running, then one cannot be truly engaged in fluent agency. One way to deal with the paradox is simply to deny that self-awareness is involved in expert bodily action. However, *pace* Dreyfus, I have argued above, through an indirect argument, that awareness of agency is not incompatible with expert bodily action. The question that remains is whether awareness of agency counts as a form of self-awareness.

One unfortunate feature of the debate about whether self-awareness is involved in expert bodily action is a lack of discussion of the myriad kinds of self-awareness (Table 1). In the most minimal case, self-awareness can be the capacity to distinguish between oneself and the world—self-differentiation. Self-awareness can also be involved in perceiving one's body as one's own—self-perception. The kind of self-awareness that is my focus here is the capacity to be aware of one's agency—what I

[19] My defense of the telic account of the awareness of agency cannot touch here on the neuroscience of sense of agency. There seems to be evidence that during flow experiences, the lateral prefrontal cortex is not as active (Limb and Braun 2008; quoted in Brownstein 2014). But, it does not follow from this evidence that self-awareness is not involved in expert bodily action. First, the medial prefrontal cortex remains active during flow experiences in these experiments and medial prefrontal cortex has been suggested as central to self-awareness (Gusnard et al. 2001). In addition, if we consider awareness of agency to be a form of self-awareness realized in the pre-supplementary motor area and supplementary motor area (Marcel 2003), then there does not seem to be extant evidence that self-awareness goes missing in expertise. So, despite Brownstein's (2014) claims neuroscientific evidence so far cannot be used to rule out that some form of self-awareness is involved in expert bodily action. An anonymous reviewer sugggested that neuroscience and awareness of agency are not relevant to each other, because couched at two independent levels of description. However, interdisciplinary work on the neuroscience of awareness of agency is an emerging area (See Balconi 2010) and proceeds without confusing levels of description in most cases.

**Table 1** Kinds of self-awareness: in discussions about self-awareness, while there has been the distinction between reflective self-awareness and pre-reflective self-awareness, there has not been discussion of particular kinds of self-awareness

| 5 Kinds | Abilities | Content |
|---|---|---|
| 5: Self-reference | Linguistic ability to use 'I' | "I am Φ" |
| 4: Self-ascription | Conceptual ability to think I | [I am Φ] |
| 3: Self-synthesis | Reflexive ability to construct I | I do |
| 2: Self-perception | Proprioceptive ability | I experience my body |
| 1: Self-differentiation | Differentiation ability | I am not the other |

Levels 1–3 are pre-reflective and levels 4 and 5 are reflective

will call 'self-synthesis' (Nozick 1981). Self-awareness can involve attributing mental states, such as beliefs, desires, and intentions to oneself—self-ascription. In the most maximal case, self-awareness can be using 'I' to engage in self-reference—self-reference.

In the debates about expert bodily action, there is the tendency for accounts of self-awareness to oscillate between the perception of one's body (self-perception),[20] on the one hand, and the ascription of intentions to oneself (self-ascription), on the other.[21] However, consistent with what I have said above, this leaves out an agential form of self-awareness that is distinctively involved in awareness of fluent agency. What exactly is self-synthesis and why is it a form of self-awareness? Further, why does self-synthesis not interfere with flow experience?

In an under-discussed chapter of *Philosophical Explanations*, Robert Nozick (1981: 71–114) discusses J. G. Fichte's account of self-awareness, an account which was developed in response to worries that an account of self-awareness cannot be too

[20] Barbara Montero (2010, 2015; Montero, *The Myth of "Just Do It": thought and effort in expert action*, Forthcoming) has argued that self-awareness must be involved in expert bodily action. She argues that proprioception—what she calls "sensory bodily awareness"—does not interfere with the flow of bodily movements engaged in expertise. In fact, she argues that with increased sensory bodily awareness one puts oneself on the path towards *kaizen*, or continual self-improvement. The argument that Montero presents depends upon a distinction between *sensory* bodily awareness and *cognitive* bodily awareness. Montero argues that while some forms of cognitive bodily awareness do interfere with expert bodily action, sensory bodily awareness in proprioception does not necessarily interfere. She suggests that while Anscombe's account is based in a form of cognitive bodily awareness "knowledge of our movement based on consciously directing our bodies to move" (2010, 108). However, McDowell (2011a, b) and Haddock (2011) have both recently argued, Anscombe explicitly denies the idea that self-awareness depends upon proprioception.

[21] John McDowell (1994, 2007, 2013) does talk about his account of self-consciousness as a form of self-ascription. McDowell associates self-ascription with a practical form of Kant's I-think: "the "I do" is not a representation added to representations as Kant's "I think" is. Conceiving action in terms of the "I do" is a way of registering the essentially first-person character of the realization of practical capacities that acting is. The presence of the "I do" in a philosophical account of action marks the distinctive form of a kind of phenomenon, like the presence of the "I think", as at least able to accompany representations, in Kant's account of empirical consciousness" (2007b: 367). McDowell does not tell us more about what the "I do" is. What does it mean for the "I do" to be "practical"? What is the "essentially first-person character"? What is "the kind of phenomenon"? McDowell does not give us answers, but I hope I have at least shown that Dreyfus's worries arise because of McDowell's commitments to a doxastic account. McDowell's account of the awareness of agency as a form of practical judgment can be contrasted with the elucidation of the Anscombean "I do" presented here.

inferential— otherwise it leads to regress— and self-awareness cannot be too given— otherwise it leads to circularity. Fichte's account suggested that the agent posits itself as self-positing. Nozick interprets this account as self-synthesis in two stages: 1) "an agent as doer of the reflexively self-referring act A is postulated or hypothesized and then the boundaries of this agent, its extent in space and time, are delineated" (87); 2) "we can imagine that some entity is delineated and synthesized around the act A of reflexive self-referring and then that the I is that entity, or something that is taken to correspond to it" (87). On Nozick's account, then, self-synthesis is neither the agent of the activity nor the product of the activity, but the self-activity that creates, constructs, and constitutes the agent.

A similar view can be found in Susan Hurley's (1998) *Consciousness in Action* which Hurley calls "perspectival self-consciousness." In a discussion of a Kantian account of self-consciousness, Hurley considers whether self-consciousness is tied to intentional action in general: "For example, an intention to eat is an intention that I eat" (1998, 86). Hurley suggests that basic intentional actions have such egocentric contents; however, she suggests that this neither implies that judgments of agency makes it possible alone (the myth of the giving) nor that feelings of agency makes it possible alone (the myth of the given), but instead, that there is a dynamic interdependence between intentional action and self-activity in a way that generates a perspective or point of view.

Another account can be found in Lucy O'Brien's (2007) *Self-Knowing Agents*, which O'Brien calls "agent's awareness," according to which when a subject intends to do such and such, for instance, to carry out the activity of trail running, then the subject is disposed to engage in a metacognitive act of ascribing that activity to herself. "The core suggestion is that the very idea of an action produced by an active assessment by an agent, carries with it the idea of an assessment by an agent of actions *for her*. For a subject to engage in an assessment of what to do is for a subject to determine what she should do." (2008, 117). While O'Brien's account seems to suggest that subjects need to consciously deliberate in order to engage in intentional actions, whether bodily actions or mental actions, the account of agent's awareness is nevertheless amenable to expert bodily action.

Each of these accounts differ, but each account provides background on what I mean by 'self-synthesis.' With the background on what I mean by 'self-synthesis' in place, we can ask why does it count as a form of self-awareness? While pluralism about kinds of self-awareness is ultimately more humble, a version of Perry's (1979, 3) supermarket case[22] provides a window into self-synthesis as a mark of self-awareness that is not incompatible with the account of awareness of fluent agency. Since Perry's essential indexical provides a core analysis of self-awareness, then this provides a framework to respond to the objection that awareness of agency *qua* self-synthesis does not involve an awareness of oneself as oneself. Imagine I am an absent minded trail runner that is running along an uncommonly hiked trail in the woods. I look down at the ground and find a pattern of sneaker prints, and think "That runner has a short stride." However,

[22] "I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch" (1979, 3).

during the second lap, I discover that the person I was referring to was actually myself, and think "I am the runner with the short stride!" I submit that the discovery of oneself as oneself is disclosed through the reflexive ability to construct the I, namely self-synthesis. One expresses the constitution of oneself as a subject running along the trail.[23]

Has Dreyfus ruled out that self-synthesis is present in flow experience that is distinctive of expert bodily action? Dreyfus may be correct that neither self-ascription of intentions nor self-perception of motor specifications are involved in expert bodily action. However, I do not think he has compellingly argued that self-synthesis is not involved in expert bodily action. I will now make room for the idea that the telic awareness of agency is a form of self-awareness. In order to defend this view, I need to contrast self-synthesis with both self-perception (level 2) and self-ascription (level 4) in the context of discussions about kinds of self-awareness in the flow of expertise. Self-awareness can be a type of activity synthesizes the agent—self-synthesis.

Consider the breathing of a Yoga master engaging in the crane pose.[24] Think about the difference between breathing in the normal way in order to take in oxygen and breathing in the context of doing Yoga. The Yogi probably on some occasions engages in the former and on other occasions engages in the latter. In the case of mundane breathing, we can make sense of the Yogi's bodily movements as being purposive, because the function of breathing is understood in terms of natural selection. In the case of distinctively Yoga breathing, the bodily movements of the Yogi are understood as being intentional because of the aims the agent taken from the agent's perspective. But, beyond being the aims that the agent may be aware of, those aims are partly constitutive of who the agent becomes. One might become aware of one's breathing (via an inward looking way) in the mundane way. One might also, importantly, become aware of oneself breathing (via an outward looking way) in a way that aims at the mastery of Yoga. And, it is in being aware of those aims that one determines oneself to reach that level of expertise. This account of self-synthesis enables us a way to make sense of self-awareness being involved in expert bodily action, a sense in which self-awareness does not interfere, slow down, or interrupt the flow. Focusing on the aims of expertise is achieving the pinnacle of expertise as determining oneself as an agent.

## 5 Conclusion

As I am running down the trail, I become aware of the fluency of my movements. I run alongside a flowing creek. The more insistently the water flows, the more it appears to move sticks and leaves with determination. On some occasions, my own actions seem to join the stream. Heraclitus said that all things pass and nothing stays, and comparing existing things to the flow of a river, you could not step twice into the same river (Plato 1997, *Cratylus* 402a). Heraclitus' view is often limited to a claim about things

[23] An anonymous reviewer suggested that self-synthesis seems to rule out that pre-linguistic infants and non-human animals can possess self-awareness at level 3. However, the benefit of distinguishing between self-synthesis—as a distinctive agential level of self-awareness of action—is that it does not depend upon either a passive experience of one's bodily movements (the "for-me-ness" of my bodily movements) or upon the possession of conceptual or linguistic capacities (the self-ascription of my bodily movements). In this sense, therefore, self-synthesis can be possessed by pre-linguistic infants and non-human animals.

[24] This example is inspired by Stout (2005, 3).

becoming in the world. However, maybe Heraclitus was attempting to express the paradox of the awareness of fluent agency. The flow of the river is as much about who is stepping into rivers as about the rivers into which we step. In this paper, I have made room for the idea that fluent agency is compatible with self-awareness. While Dreyfus provides reasons to doubt that some forms of self-awareness are present in flow experience, I have argued that one core idea of self-awareness—the awareness of agency—can be present in expert bodily action. When we become engaged in an expert bodily action, we both bring about changes in the world by directing and commanding that such and such occur *and* we bring about changes in ourselves by aiming to have our goals in the environment absorb us as agents. However, because the aims of our activity are constitutive of who we are, it then becomes all the more important that we do not disappear or vanish, but instead that we achieve the experience of excellence in fluent agency.

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