

Conceptuality of Unreflective Actions in Flow: McDowell-Dryfus Debate

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Received 1 Dec 2014 Accepted 31 Dec 2014

Abstract — The objective of this paper is to supplement Gottlieb's challenge to Dryfus who claims that concepts are not operative in expert's unreflective actions. First, concepts that an agent develops over time with practice, starting from the stage of novelty, become deeply rooted and persist through his expertise stage, according to common sense. It is unlikely that such rooted concepts become inoperative just when it is time for the agent to put them to use during the time that he is in the zone (i.e., in flow). Second, an expert's inability to remember reasons behind his actions while he is in the zone is insufficient to prove that concepts are inoperative when he is acting in the zone. For an agent to not remember reasons as such could more likely be a consequence of the adequacy of his minimized reflections on his maximized (i.e. expert level) concepts, while he is in such a state. Moreover, not recalling every reason behind every step of an agent's actions in the zone could be a consequence of his maximum concentration on successful processing and coordination of the task at hand, as opposed to committing his finite mental capacities to memorizing the reasons behind his step-by-step actions when he is performing an expert level action in the zone. Third, I point out to the prevalence of examples when experts or observers provide testimony about use of concepts to strategize or review actions before, during, and after their 'in the zone' actions (e.g., review of video replays of a game or a tournament on sports channels), which supports the operations and conceptuality of unreflective actions in flow.

Keywords — *reflective action, conceptuality, unreflective action, non-conceptuality, flow, in the zone, myth of the given, myth of the mental, space of reason, Dryfus, McDowell, Gottlieb*

I. INTRODUCTION

The key aim of this paper is to augment Gabriel Gottlieb's objection to Dryfus's claim that concepts are not operative in expert's unreflective actions¹ [9]. I argue that expert's testimony, about neither being aware of reasons nor recalling reasons behind his actions, is insufficient to prove that concepts or reasons are inoperative when he is acting 'in the zone' [8]. I suggest that being unaware of reasons, behind one's actions in the zone, could likely be a consequence of his minimized reflections on his maximized or expert level concepts. Moreover, not recalling every reason behind one's actions could be a consequence of his maximum concentration on processing and coordination of his activity, as opposed to committing his finite mental capacities to memorizing the reasons behind his step-by-step actions, when he is in the zone.

DOI: 10.5176/2345-7856_1.2.14

To achieve these goals, I begin with a summary of Dryfus's claim that the phenomenon of embodied coping reveals that expert actions are primarily unreflective. According to Dryfus, an expert is at his best when he is acting in the flow, which does not involve mental representations, planning, or conceptual activity. Dryfus argues that in unreflective actions, embodied skills and know-how perform the role of reflection, but agrees that conceptuality operates in the actions of novices. Additionally, I review McDowell's opposing assertions that mature embodied coping is permeated with conceptual mindedness, and that one's perceptions and actions are conceptual all the way down [6].

After outlining McDowell-Dryfus's debate, I provide a synopsis of Gottlieb's position that practical concepts and unreflective intelligence in lieu of perceptual concepts operate in one's unreflective actions, contrary to Dreyfus's view.

Finally, I supplement Gottlieb's position on unreflective action, which points out that the fact that agents fail to notice or seem unaware of concepts when acting in the zone, is insufficient proof for the claim that concepts are inoperative at this level of action. I offer additional reinforcement to defend the conceptuality of one's seemingly unreflective actions by arguing that:

(i) Concepts that an agent develops over time with practice, starting from the stage of novelty, become deeply rooted and persist in his expertise stage. It is against common sense to accept that expert's rooted concepts disappear just when he puts them to work in action.

(ii) All else equal, the strengths of an agent's concepts and concentration are inversely proportional to intensity of his reflections. For example, a novice athlete, with under-developed concepts and weaker concentration skills, need to reflect more intensely on more concepts when he plays in a game. Conversely, an expert athlete, with stronger concepts and sharper concentration, may find minimal reflections on his strengthened concepts sufficient to compete. An expert mentally conditions himself to expend his finite and available mental capital to attain optimal performance and results for a given task. Such expert level mental conditioning involves leveraging strength of his concepts and sharpening his concentration on the activity and its goals as opposed to remembering every reasons for his step-by-step actions, which may otherwise require only his minimum reflections. Therefore an agent's minimized reflections may be a more

plausible culprit for how he may neither notice nor recall detailed reasons behind his actions in flow. Dryfus claims that when experts are in the flow, thinking about actions would degrade their performance from expert level to competency, and thus concepts have no use in expert's flow activities [8]. Dryfus holds that only after concepts and reasoning are relinquished, then one's expertise can return to his activity. However, as noted earlier, an expert's reflections and concentration modulate from minimum to maximum depending on the task's performance requirement and its difficulty. Therefore, while maximally concentrating on the task at hand, I suggest that an expert could minimally reflect on his strong concepts, because minimal reflections may simply be sufficient when things are going well, not because concepts are disruptive or inoperative or have no use in actions in the flow.

(iii) An expert and observer testimony about use of concepts to strategize and review actions before, during, and after the game, supports the operation of conceptual and yet seemingly unreflective actions.

(iv) And, there are alternative conceptual-friendly explanations for the examples Dryfus offers including Knoblauch's emotions such as anxiety, worry, or loss of confidence, which could have gotten in the way of his game, and not Knoblauch's reasoning and concepts which Dryfus assume to have ruined his game and flow.

II. DISCUSSIONS

A. Summary of McDowell-Dryfus Debate and Gottlieb's Objections, with Emphasis on Unreflective Actions

(i) *Dryfus's View:*

Dryfus asserts that McDowell would be committing the myth of mental by "presuming that a linguistic and conceptual deconstruction of any clear divide between 'mind and world' teaches us that perception is conceptual all the way out". He disagrees with the claim that "actions are conceptual all the way down", and that our "embodied coping is permeated with mindedness" [11]-[13][18]. Dryfus claims that we have non-conceptual, non-propositional, non-rational, and non-mental embodied coping skills, some of which we share with pre-linguistic infants and higher order animals [5][6]. He states that much of our encounters with the world is in total absorption by way of embodied coping, when we cease to be a subject altogether² [7]. Moreover, when we are in flow "there is no experience of an object and so no object to bring under a concept³" [15][16].

Following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty phenomenological positions, Dryfus holds that we have the capacity to engage in many complex or simple embodied actions when we get 'in the zone' where we can skillfully respond to our world without thinking [15]. When we are in the zone, affordances and solicitations, mindlessly draw us into embodied copings and actions - without the operation of concepts⁴. In practice, Dryfus views mindedness as the enemy of embodied coping⁵. We plan beforehand and initiate,

but when we are in the zone of the activity, we do not experience an ego doing it⁶. In skillful mindless coping, we are at our best, when we unreflectively get absorbed in a space that solicits a certain activity⁷. Dryfus uses the example of a blitz chess player who operate in speedy as 'in the zone' type actions, when he has no time to think [5]. Dryfus sees the chess player as one who does not think but just respond to the patterns on the board; and being drawn to act, the chess player does what needs to be done. According to Dryfus, we engage the world by way of our skillful body, responding to affordances in a certain way and by reacting to solicitations, such as pulling our arm towards the doorknob and not the coffee mug, move the bishop and not the queen, throw a curve-ball and not to second base [8]. Our bodily skillfulness responds to our surroundings as a field of "meaningfully configured situations that solicit some responses and repels others, and our bodily comportments are attuned to these solicitations" [8]. Dryfus holds that to gain status of expert (skill) perceiver or agent, one does not involve the internalization of such concepts or reflection, but instead short-circuit them by "developing a direct bodily responsiveness to the overall configuration of a situation" [6].

In order to retain our freedom from the casual world and keep our agnatic spontaneity, Dryfus argues that in absorbed mindless coping, we are free because we choose to respond, to being bound or not, in the flow activity⁸ [8]. Our second nature, acquired from socio-cultural practices is nature too, and our expressions of our second nature in unreflective bodily coping is not a brutal causal event⁹ [15].

We have the capacity to interrupt our bodily absorption in the flow, which enables us to step back and reflect, and then our self-consciousness reemerges. Our consciousness may be called into action, if our mind detects something has gone wrong¹⁰ [5][7]. When we are absorbed in everyday skillful coping we may well have the capacity to step back and reflect, but we may not be able to exercise that capacity without disrupting our coping [8]. Dryfus posits that reflecting and monitoring what we are doing as we are doing it, leads to a performance that is at best competent, and only after abandoning monitoring our activity, can we regain our expertise.

In summary, for Dryfus where actions are concerned, there are two separate ways of being open to the world—the conceptual and the non-conceptual way. "The conceptual way in its pure form describes what happens when one confronts a difficult situation, steps back, figures out what to do, and then responds competently" [8]. But, in so far as "one is an expert in any domain and when things are going well (when he is in the zone), one responds directly and transparently to the situation's demands mindlessly" and he remains free to choose to be bound in the zone or free himself from it, at all times [9].

(ii) *McDowell's Views:*

McDowell asserts that for mature people, embodied coping is permeated by mindedness [12]. He contends that mindedness is operative in our unreflective concepts and

actions, and this is not incongruent with our immersed bodily life¹¹. McDowell argues that our perception, thoughts, and action can only be smooth because our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way out. He reads the “phenomenology of embodied coping as supporting his recasting of rationality as thoroughly embodied, and suggests that it is Dreyfus who is clinging to a detached conception of rationality” [18]. McDowell objects to Dryfus’s suggestion that mindedness is detached from our immersed bodily life, because that would be committing to a kind dualism vulnerable to the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect¹² [11]. McDowell also objects to Dryfus claiming that man, in one hand, is free and open to bind himself to the affordances and solicitations in the zone, and on the other hand he is free to step-back from his activities in the zone and reflect on reasons and concepts [7]. McDowell implies that such discontinuous characterization, of our actions in and out of the zone, resembles a “disembodied intellect” [12].

Concepts and our capacity for conceptualization are operative whether or not we are conscious of them. When a chess, baseball, or tennis player starts thinking, “then acting is not the basic action and player loses because his means-end rationality tries to take over, but it cannot do as good of a job as his skills in controlling bodily movements¹³” [11].

For McDowell, affordances and solicitations are the same once they are made explicit, and both belong to the space of reason. When we learn how to ride a bike, the training wheels don’t become invisible. Similarly, McDowell does not agree with cognitivists who claim that when we become experts, our rules become unconscious [12]. Both McDowell and Dryfus agree that “thanks to socialization, experts conform to reasons that can be retroactively reconstructed” [5]. However, McDowell claims that reasons are not behind action but are in action such as in unreflective ones including the case of phronesis¹⁴ [5]. Unreflective actions are neither detached nor discursive [11]. For the case of phronesis, unreflective action is a case of properly formed practical intellect at work.

Dryfus implies that McDowell is afraid that without conceptuality, unreflective actions will not fit in McDowell’s space of reason. McDowell objects to Dryfus trying to force fit unreflective action to be determined by disenchanted causal interaction.

Consequential part of the Dryfus-McDowell debate hinges on how unreflective bodily coping or actions are conceptual, and how actions are permeated with rationality and mindedness. McDowell holds that, while in the phenomenology of unreflective actions, there may be an appearance of no reasoning, but there is responsiveness to reasons and rationality¹⁵ [11]. This is because, in our process of our upbringing (Bildung) we are initiated into tradition and language and inculcated into culture, when we acquire our second nature and habits of a distinctively rational form. He states that “The ability of adult humans to step back, means that the same conceptual capacities must be shaping experience, whether the subject is unreflectively immersed in action or not. The capacities that are operative in ordinary

perceptual engagement with the world, and in ordinary bodily action, belong to a subject’s rationality in that strong sense: “they are conceptual in the sense in which I claim that our perceptual and active lives are conceptually shaped” [12].

In summary, McDowell rejects the idea of existence of non-conceptual experiences [11]. He claims that our conceptual content and capacities are already operational in our experiencing the world, and because there is spontaneity in conceptual capacities, our experience is open to the world.

Zahavi characterizes spontaneity as a reflective capacity and argues that “for McDowell, only a self-conscious subject, a subject capable of self-ascribing experiences, can have awareness of an objective world”. On McDowell’s understanding it is consequently “the spontaneity of the understanding, the power of conceptual thinking, that brings both the world and the self into view” [11]. Therefore, for McDowell “creatures without conceptual capacities consequently lack both self-consciousness and experience of objective reality” [16].

However, McDowell reading of Knoblauch example, emphasizes on the capacity to reflect notwithstanding, suggests that he may be open to the idea that being able to act skillfully requires temporarily quieting down the ability to reflect [12].

(iii) Review of Gabriel Gottlieb’s (2011) paper over McDowell-Dryfus debate:

Gottlieb focused on whether embodied coping in speedy action is conceptually shaped. He objects to Dryfus by claiming that in speedy actions such as blitz chess, or baseball one’s reflection may drop out, but that does not by itself prove absence of conceptuality^{16, 17, 18, 19}. Gottlieb objects to Dryfus for failing to defend linking why if an action involves concepts, then it must involve reflection. His strategy is to “undermine Dreyfus’s general assumption by arguing that perceptual concepts (e.g. my chess pieces are white) can contribute to perceptual experiences independent of reflection” via our practical concepts, such as moving the king²⁰ [9]. Gottlieb agrees with Sellars that at least when it comes to perceptual concepts, conceptual inferential activity required for experience becomes - through habit and learning - a form of non-reflective intelligence that operates at an unconscious level²¹ [17]. The result is that thought, action, and experience are conceptual, having the structure of judgments, but without the conscious activity of comparison and analysis²².

To respond, Dryfus could shift the burden of proof to Gottlieb in that practical concepts are vulnerable to the similar kinds of challenge as perceptual concepts, since experts do not report any reflection or experience of practical concepts. Moreover, the existence and distinction of practical concepts from perceptual concepts cannot be taken for granted and needs to be substantiated. Although Dryfus agrees that practical wisdom enables one to do things intelligently, Dryfus notes that such things are done without explicit thought or concepts, as in the case of Aristotle’s

phronesis²³[8]. Hence, Gottlieb could counter Dryfus by arguing that practical concepts and unreflective intelligence are operative in our unreflective actions, similar to the case of phronesis²⁴.

In summary, Gottlieb posits that “for an action to be informed by concepts, it does not require explicit reflection during the experience”. Gottlieb concedes that Dreyfus might be right that “at certain levels in the development of skills, reflection on different practical concepts might be needed, and that it is possible in some cases for this act of reflection to eventually drop out”. However, he asserts that when our reflections drop out, “this does not necessarily mean that our practical concepts drop out” [9]. Also, Dryfus, shifting the burden of proof on conceptualists, does not prove that concepts are not operative for experts in the zone of actions, and Gottlieb throws the same burden of proof back to Dryfus.

B. Supplementing Gottlieb’s Objection to Dryfus

So far, I have outlined Dryfus’s position that one’s conceptual capacities are available and operative sometimes but not pervasive in his flow activities. McDowell position is that one’s perceptions and actions are conceptual all the way down. To prove his point, Dryfus argues in part that concepts must not be operative if agents do not experience them in the flow activity. Because expert’s phenomenological reports suggest that concepts are not noticed in speedy actions or in flow, and because of the evidence that reflections on concepts interfere with one’s successful actions, then it is concluded that concepts are neither used nor pervasive in such activities²⁵. Gottlieb agrees with MacDowell’s view that experts not noticing concepts do not automatically prove that they are not used, because unreflective actions can be guided by expert’s practical concepts or unreflective intelligence.

In the proceeding section, by expanding on the phenomenology of agent’s actions including the before-during-after flow experience, I aim to supplement Gottlieb’s defense of conceptuality of unreflective actions.

To achieve this goal, I would argue that (i) Concepts grow, take root, and carry over throughout agent’s development stages, from novelty to expertise. It seems against common sense to accept that such rooted concepts disappear or to imply that they should take a back seat in the unconscious or subconscious, just when the expert puts them to work in flow action. It is hard to endorse the idea that an expert is better off, if concepts vanished during action; (ii) For a given performance, an expert’s maximal strength of concepts and sharpened concentration, could demand minimal reflection on concepts. This could be a more plausible explanation, compared to Dryfus’s, as to how concepts are not noticed in flow; (iii) Expert agent and observer often provide testimony about use of concepts to strategize and review actions before, during (post hoc), and after a flow action such as in a game. This supports the existence and prevalence of conceptual, despite seemingly unreflective, actions during flow action; (iv) More conceptual-friendly explanations may be available with respect to Dryfus’s examples. For Knoblauch’s case, it is more plausible that lack of emotional

self-confidence caused him to lose his flow, not the interference of his concepts or reflections. Additionally, professional athletes may faintly reflect on concepts when ball is in their court, however they use the time to reflect (more noticeably) and make minor adjustments when the ball is in their opponent courts, which is also while they are in the zone.

The proceeding section contains my discussions to support Gottlieb’s defense of conceptuality of unreflective actions:

(i) Concepts Grow from Novelty and Persist in Expertise:

Dryfus has outlined five stages in the development of an agent’s skill: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, and expertise [2]. Novices learn and reflect on concepts over time to enhance their skills until they become experts. Dreyfus posits that after one has gone through the learning phase while he was being guided by concepts, then he transcends out of that stage and becomes an expert. At the expert stage, he no longer needs concepts at all, according to Dryfus. However, it is only natural for concepts to take root and become engrained in agents as they develop from novelty to expertise stages. It is against common sense to concede to the idea that expert’s rooted concepts grow and remain operative until competency, and then simply vanish from his mental operations when it is time for him to put those concepts to expert level work. Moreover, it seems arbitrary to accept the proposition that an expert is better off, if his deep rooted concepts temporarily became inoperative during his expert level action, as implied by Dryfus.

(ii) Maximal Strength of Concepts and Maximal Concentration Require Minimal Reflection: For a given performance, the strength of expert’s concepts and concentration on task at hand is inversely proportional to the required reflections. Because a novice agent’s concepts are weaker, more practice and more intense reflections are required to enhance his learning and subsequently improve his performance. Learning means being able to reflect and internalize the optimal concepts²⁶ (or re-write old ones to get better at something). When an agent becomes an expert, minimal amount of incremental learning is required as he becomes more efficient at what he does. This in turn relaxes his need for incremental or additional reflections on his actions when he is in the zone²⁷ (or improvement would demand minimal need for re-writing an agent’s existing concepts). Ultimately, when an expert gain stronger concepts via learning, practicing, and maturing, then minimal reflections may be sufficient for him to perform at the top of his game. This is how the strength of one’s concepts is inversely proportional to the intensity of his reflections needed for a given level of performance in the zone.

Another important aspect of expert’s functioning in the zone is ‘concentration’. When an agent concentrates on the activity and its goals, he zooms his focus on the present time.

Concentration has two dimensions: one is about concentrating on this task in the here and now, and the other is about not concentrating on any other task that is not in the here and now.

When the agent concentrates, he aims to forget regrets about the past (e.g. lost matches, missed opportunities, etc); he tries to stop worrying about the future (e.g. what if I lose? what happens after this set? and after this game? how will family matters, expenses, parent's illness, and media questions shape-up?); and he stays in the present moment, channeling all his mental resources on the task at hand the best he can. Concentration can quiet the mind. This ability to concentrate involves severing or quieting non-essential past and future reflections (about all other non-relevant concepts). Hence, to be immersed in an activity such as being in the zone ideally requires filtering out all else that gets in the way of that flow action.

Not recalling every reason behind one's actions could also be in part a consequence of his sharpened or maximum concentration on processing and coordination of his activity as opposed to committing to memory the reason behind his step-by-step actions, especially in high-speed games²⁸. With agent's concentration zoomed in on the task at hand and the strength of his deeply rooted concepts in his back pocket, so-to-speak, his reflections would regulate or modulate down sufficiently to the point that he can exercise his top skills and attain optimal performance.

Dryfus holds that only after concepts are relinquished, then our expertise can return to action. But, an agent's reflections and concentration can modulate from minimum to maximum depending on the level of an agent's skills and concepts about the task at hand. Hence, it is plausible that an expert minimally reflecting on his strengthened concepts while sharply concentrating on his action in the zone is because minimal reflections may simply be sufficient when things are going well, not because concepts are disruptive or inoperative or have no use in actions in flow.

In summary, strong or maximized concepts operating on expert actions with minimized reflections when he is maximally concentrating on what matters (i.e., serving the activity and its goal as opposed to memorizing every reasons behind every step in the game) could exculpate how experts may not notice or recall detailed reasons about their 'in the zone' actions²⁹.

(iii) Concepts Operative Before-During-After the Flow Action such as in a Game: Taking an expert's testimony about his transitions from 'entering flow' to 'exiting flow' in conjunction with his 'during flow' perspective may shed light about operation of concepts in one's actions in flow.

For example, people (e.g., athletes, observers, coaches, Sport TV specialists) in professional sports strategize about the game (i.e., studying their opponent past techniques, weakness, and strengths compared to their own team, competitive line up, the coach's game plan, etc) before the game. After the game, they review various conceptual aspects of their game (e.g. player and team strategic objectives versus actual results, shortcomings, reason for bad executions of plans, their opponent winning and losing or new strategies, etc). Often, when an athlete watch his own game's video replays and respond to reporters about strategies that worked or

did not work for him, he offers conceptual explanation. Contrary to Dryfus's claim, preponderance of conceptual testimony offered by expert observers and athletes about in the zone actions before, during, and after makes it much more plausible that concepts were in use in the zone than not at all³⁰.

(iv) Knoblauch Emotions Could Have Gotten In The Way, Not His Concepts: There are other conceptual friendly explanations for some of the examples that Dryfus has offered. Dryfus suggests that Knoblauch's thinking too much about his game caused him to lose the ability to throw the ball effortlessly. I suggest that it is more plausible that Knoblauch emotional challenges such as loss of confidence ruined his game. Only after his emotional challenges, he started thinking about his missteps and reasoning to figure out why he was failing³¹. His emotional imbalance and nervousness caused him to lose his flow, not the interference of his reasoning and rationalization.

Dryfus also suggests that expert's conceptualization cannot be behind the throwing, and if it is, then it can only interfere with the absorbed coping³². Earlier I argued that experts' minimal reflection and their strong concepts may not interfere with their absorbed coping and can still be operative. For example, professional athletes may faintly reflect on and not notice concepts when the ball is in their own side of the court, however many athletes testify that they use the time to reflect more noticeably and make minor adjustments when ball is in their opponent side of the court. A tennis player monitors his opponent's bodily posture and direction of his racket to anticipate the trajectory of his opponent's next move.

III. CONCLUSION

In summary the goal of my paper is to supplement Gottlieb's objection to Dryfus's claim that concepts are not operative in expert's unreflective actions. To achieve this goal, I first argued that it is against common sense to accept that expert's rooted concepts become inoperative just when it is time for him to put them to work, and that his actions become entirely unreflective when he is in the zone. For example, it may seem that we open a door without thinking. But we may think about how many steps we need to take towards the door depending on how far we are from the door. We also may think about how we might use our hands and which keys to use depending on if the doorknob is keyed, lever, or circular type. An expert tennis player may not think deeply about his move when the ball is in his court, but he does think and anticipate a possible trajectory of the ball when the ball is in his opponent's court, and plan his move depending on his opponent's posture and racket movement. A blitz chess player may not think when it is his turn to make his move, possibly because he had some time (albeit short) to think a little bit and adjust his strategy if needed while the opponent was making his move. Therefore, using some of Dryfus's own example, we can show that some thinking and some reflection albeit minimally may be at work, even when we are in the zone. Second, I argued that the strengths of an

agent's concepts and his concentration are inversely proportional to the intensity of his reflections. Therefore an expert's minimized reflections may be a more plausible reason for how experts, with maximal strength of concepts and sharpened concentration, may neither notice nor recall all reasons behind their actions in flow. Third, I suggested that expert (i.e., agent and observer) testimony about use of concepts to strategize and review actions before, during, and after a game, supports conceptual and yet seemingly unreflective actions, even in flow.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Mohammad Azadpur at San Francisco State University for his mentorship and invaluable feedbacks.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



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END NOTES

- ¹ The philosophical implications of a study of conceptual and non-conceptual unreflective actions are beyond the scope of this paper [1][4][9][15-17].
- ² Note that Dreyfus asserts 'that we don't normally reflect while we act'. For him, when an expert is 'in the zone' or in 'flow' (used interchangeably), his actions are unreflective covering a wide range of actions such as hiking or turning a doorknob. Strength, maximized, or intensity are intended to have the same meaning, as do reasons, rationality, and concepts in this paper [8].
- ³ Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty hold that we have sub-rational competences. When we interact with the world there is no we and no world, but just smoothly flowing activity [4].
- ⁴ "In stopping to think, we would dissolve any smooth-flowing skilled bodily attunement to what is taking place" [19].
- ⁵ "Dreyfus equates mindedness with reflection or rational self-monitoring to distinguish it from mindless experiencing" [16].
- ⁶ "Dreyfus claims that there is no place for experiential content in absorbed coping and speaks of the possibility of mind-free practical activity..But, how can one meaningfully speak of a phenomenology of mindless coping - as Dreyfus repeatedly does - if the coping is completely unconscious?" [16]
- ⁷ Dreyfus implies that reflections are cognitive processes involved in the retrieval of relevant and pertinent information, 'analysis and comparisons of alternatives', and he also classifies explanations as a form of reflection. I would argue that for an expert who is performing (acting in the game), his reflection would likely contain more retrieval and less process (analysis and comparison) since an expert has (through learning, practice, and maturity of his skills) already pre-processed and can anticipate various permutations of possible encounters and likely patterns (e.g. chess moves, curve balls, etc) [2]

⁸ Just as a note, McDowell had defined spontaneity as “a faculty that is exercised in actively self-critical control of what one thinks, in the light of the deliverances of experience” [11].

⁹ Our responsiveness to relevant affordances are *unreflective*, and that affordances are possibilities for action offered by the environment” [15]

¹⁰ Dreyfus likens absorbed coping to an airport radio whose beacon doesn't give a warning signal unless the plane strays off course. And as he then writes, “when the pilot is on the beam there is no experience at all”. As Dreyfus puts it, “a *cooper* must have the capacity to enter a monitoring stance if the brain sends an alarm signal that something is going wrong...Sensitivity to deviation guides one's coping” [6][8][16]

¹¹ Dryfus claims that agents must be aware of concepts to have concepts operate upon them, but we are not conscious of concepts when we are in the zone, thus concepts must not be operative. Gottlieb disagrees [6][9].

¹² McDowell argues that the dualism of norms and nature is avoided, because *Bildung* gives us the capacity to step-back (even when we are immersed into the flow or are in the zone), which is how strong rationality gets permeates into our action, including unreflective action [11][12]

¹³ “The practical concepts realized in acting are concepts of things to do. Realizing such a concept is doing the thing in question, not thinking about doing it” [12]. Once Knoblauch tried to “bring the limb movements that contribute to [throwing the ball] within the scope of intention otherwise than under specifications, he ceased to allow his skill (i.e. his ‘ingrained bodily habits’) to fill in the necessary movements. “When mindedness gets detached from immersion in activity, it can be the enemy of embodied coping”, not that mindedness is absent from such immersion. [9]

¹⁴ Phronesis's unreflective actions stems from his ethical expertise, that seamlessly enable him to somehow take not only all relevant virtues (friendship, justice, etc) into consideration but he gets things right due to reliable sensitivity to the demand of the specific situation and does it at the right time, in the right way of acting [11].

¹⁵ Rietveld raises a yellow flag with “responsiveness” to reason because it does not mean that reason (general or situation specific) somehow influences the actions of an expert. Unlike responsiveness to normative significance, responsiveness-to-reason is not experienced by us in unreflective action [15].

¹⁶ Both Dryfus and McDowell seem to say that know-how is like intuition (also they say embodied coping) and that actions involving know-how are like absorbed coping. “Dreyfus and McDowell accept that many actions are forms of embodied coping, but they differ whether the embodied coping is conceptually shaped and, thereby, rational. Dryfus claims that speedy actions are not conceptually informed and hence non-conceptual actions [9].

¹⁷ In *Mind Over Machine* Dreyfus (1986) claims, “The two highest levels of skill are characterized by a rapid, fluid, involved kind of behavior that bears no apparent similarity to the slow detached reasoning of the problem-solving process”. Dryfus must then show without equivocation that bodily actions can outstrip reflection [9].

¹⁸ Gottlieb highlight that Dreyfus “connects thinking about acting with the passage of time needed for reflection and conceptuality to contribute to action. Dryfus had implied that concepts had no place in our ‘flow’. Gottlieb points out the fact that one can even suggest some capacities diminish success, is to recognize that a practical concept is a structural component of the action”. To accept that something can go wrong (not according to one's intention conception) is to recognize a practical concept involved in the action.

¹⁹ Gottlieb highlights Dryfus's point that “unreflective actions exhibit agency, and yet do not require reflection or attention. Gottlieb reframes Dryfus position: “Reflection is required for concepts to be operative in action. Because reflection is absent in fast action, action must be non-conceptual” [9].

²⁰ According to Dreyfus, Grandmasters typically perform actions mindlessly and without reflection, yet with expertise.” Dryfus has specified five stages in the acquisition and development of skill: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, and expertise. “It is not until one reaches the level of expertise that reflection fully drops out [2]. As Dreyfus sees it, at the stage of expertise, discrimination or ‘recognition . . . is an immediate intuitive response’. When one's skills advance to a level of expertise, this stage of reflection drops out, which means the actual time required for carrying out one and the same action decreases” [9].

²¹ Gottlieb holds that *unreflective* action does not make it intelligent action. “There is a type of embodied intelligence at work rather than mental intelligence. Because intelligence' is not mental, and instead available in bodily movement, then intelligence is an embodied form of coping with what a specific situation requires” [9].

²² Gottlieb discusses “Sellars's Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, for instance, is an argument about how *perceptual experience* should be conceived as *conceptual* and *non-reflective* at the same time. Sellars's view of judgment, in contrast to Dreyfus, does not exaggerate reflection's role in judgment (an anti-intellectualist view of *judgment*)” [9].

²³ In phronesis, McDowell and Dryfus agree that one can do things intelligently, yet without explicit thought.

²⁴ See McDowell's and Dryfus's essays for further discussions regarding embodied coping, practical wisdom, second nature, intuitions, sheer receptivity, and habits, which seem similar in principle to Goettlieb's views on unreflective intelligence [9][10][12].

²⁵ “Phenomenology suggests that, although many forms of expertise pass through a stage in which one needs reasons to guide action, after much involved experience, the learner develops a way of coping in which reasons play no role” [5]

²⁶ Grossberg: Plasticity to stability trade off is about “where one must decide when to learn and when not to learn since learning involves overwriting previously learned patterns”. Action on reaction is faster than acting on intention. While errors can be made in the game, the difference in intensity of the errors varies depending on a “clutch” performer who is one that can make minor adjustments during competition while a “choker” who is one that over adjusts causing errors that amount to coming last [1]

²⁷ We have limited mental and emotional capital, and thus we have learned to be cognitively and emotionally efficient including through habit, custom, learning, and practice.

²⁸ Placing and retrieving information in and out of memory can interfere with processing and coordinating (which is where we mostly expend our concentration capital) information in the brain. It may appear that our reason and concepts aim to make themselves dispensable (shift into an un-noticeable background via minimal reflection) so long as optimal performance in our actions is not compromised [14].

²⁹ Dryfus implies that reflections are like the cognitive processes involved in the retrieval of relevant and pertinent information, ‘analysis and comparisons of alternative's, and he also classifies explanations as a form of reflection. Heidegger wants to change how we think of thinking, to take “the step back from the thinking that merely represents - that is, explains - to the thinking that responds and recalls” [2] [16].

³⁰ Gottlieb suggests that even *post hoc* exercise of “retroactive rationalization” should strengthen and not weaken the claim that concepts were, more likely than not, operative in flow like actions. If asked why I made a certain move, I can give a reason, although I may have to think about it in order to make it explicit. The fact that I cannot describe every feature of a blade of grass I saw does not mean that I did not see something that fits under the concept “grass.” A correct description of coping experience is going to be misleading, precisely because it involves an attempt to describe an experience that, by definition, was not explicitly thematized at the time it occurred. Why, then, should we focus on the unthematized experience as authoritative, rather than the thematized reappropriation of that experience?” [9]

³¹ It is a common idea that people use drugs to get in and out of a feeling, including athletes whose obsession with winning or fear of losing (disappointing) motivates their drug use. After quitting baseball, Knoblauch was charged with domestic violence, and use of illicit drugs from early 2000.

³² Gottlieb argues that Knoblauch's inability to throw the ball does not show that the ability relies on a lack of conceptualization, but only that it depends on a lack of explicit conceptualization [9].

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