

# 9

## HUBERT DREYFUS ON PRACTICAL AND EMBODIED INTELLIGENCE<sup>1</sup>

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### 9.1 Introduction

If anyone deserves to be called the gadfly of 20th-century analytic philosophy, it is Hubert Dreyfus. Like Socrates, he brought one burning insight to bear in every conversation into which he entered. Like Socrates, with zeal he went repeatedly against the mainstream in a way that could provoke and exasperate his interlocutors, never more so than when he put his finger on a fundamental shortcoming of a cherished theory. Like Socrates, he had a well-deserved reputation as a dragon slayer: his career was bookended by a devastating critique of artificial intelligence (AI) projects in the 1970s and a passionate rejection of John McDowell's conceptualism in the first decade of the 21st century. And it may be that, like Socrates, the profundity of Dreyfus' simple, single-minded philosophy was not fully appreciated during his time.

So what was Dreyfus' fundamental insight? Put simply, it is the thesis that we've been thinking about *ourselves* all wrong. There is, he observed, a "Platonic" conception of human nature so deep to Western analytic philosophy as to be all but invisible (Dreyfus 1979). According to this conception, humans are essentially rational, individual agents. Dreyfus consistently rejected each element of this picture, arguing that rather than being *individual*, *agential*, and *rational*, human beings are *embedded*, *absorbed*, and *embodied*. Drawing on Heidegger's conception of lived existence as *Dasein*, Dreyfus argued that the Platonic picture of human nature is a distortion. As Dreyfus saw it, human beings are embedded in our world like a knot in the middle of a fishing net.<sup>2</sup> Human agency, too, is nothing like the Platonic picture would have it. We are rarely—and never ideally—self-directed, explicitly purposive agents. Instead, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's perceptual, body-first conception of action, Dreyfus argued that we are responsive, self-forgetful, "absorbed copers" whenever we function normally (competently) and expertly.

Finally, Dreyfus relied on phenomenology to reject the Platonic picture of human rationality itself, beginning by casting doubt on the role of that picture in early AI research. According to the Platonic picture, human intelligence is fundamentally calculative, computational, or rule-based, involving explicit and codifiable thought, the paradigm of which is inferential reasoning. But Dreyfus argued that this picture construes rationality itself in a rationalistic and thus distorted way. For Dreyfus, human intelligence can be understood only in light of our *embodied*

manner of being-in-the-world. When we attend to our characteristic embodiment, we see that human intelligence is first and foremost, and most fundamentally, *practical* as opposed to theoretical. Because of this, the elevation of theoretical rationality that is the bedrock of the Western philosophical tradition is a profound mistake. For theory proceeds from, depends upon, and ultimately is merely one species of—*doing*.

This brings us to the particular focus, and the primary interpretive claim, of the present essay. These three contrasts—individual vs. embedded, agential vs. absorbed, and rational vs. embodied—are closely connected in Dreyfus' thought. And his accounts of each of them, and their relationships to one another, evolved over time. But while it is not feasible here to discuss each of them in depth, we believe that they can be understood in terms of a single underlying conviction. Dreyfus grasped, as very few philosophers do, *the sovereignty of practical intelligence over all other forms of intelligence*. It is this insight that led him to argue in the 1970s and 80s that computers cannot be intelligent because they lack bodies. The same insight led him in the 1990s to develop an account of embodied intentionality that does not presuppose aboutness, or representational content. And it led him, finally, in the early 2000s to develop an account of action and practical wisdom that does not depend on deliberation or purposive agency. Ultimately, Dreyfus' preoccupation with the sovereignty of the practical led him to forsake the contested terminology of practical reason, action, and intention altogether, and he couched his positive views instead in terms of practical skill, practical expertise, phronesis, and skilled, absorbed, or embodied coping.

The remainder of this essay will focus primarily on Dreyfus' late-stage contributions to practical philosophy and philosophy of action, as represented by his engagement with John McDowell and John Searle, and the alternatives that he proposed to their respective theories of mind and action. In our view this portion of his life work constitutes the fruition of Dreyfus' sustained but developing commitment to the sovereignty of the practical. His views in this domain are radical, but also more plausible and much less easily dismissed than they may initially appear.

## 9.2 Embodied intentionality vs. the “Standard Story”

In his 2005 Presidential Address to the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, Dreyfus advanced the following theses:

- That in skilled action or skilled “coping,” human beings respond to relevant features of their situation in a way that does not involve any mental *representation* of these features or the goals in virtue of which they are relevant.
- That skilled action therefore does not depend on any psychologically mediated “causal chain from input to response” (Dreyfus 2005: 107).
- That instead, skilled coping consists in a *direct*, absorbed, and self-forgetful *responsiveness* that depends on our embodied capacities and the features of the physical and social environments we engage with.

These theses were *couched* in the *form* of a criticism of John McDowell's exquisitely nuanced form of conceptualism about the mind. The core claim of McDowell's *Mind and World* is that “conceptual capacities ... are already at work in experiences themselves,” in an avowedly “demanding” sense of conceptual capacities as ones that “can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials” (McDowell 1994: 47). For McDowell, perception and action are permeated with rationality, with understanding, with

“logos” as he often calls it—a view that could not be more antithetical to the ideas that Dreyfus had spent his career defending.

Given the influence and stature of *Mind and World*, it must have felt to Dreyfus in 2005 as if he had gained very little ground against the Platonic picture. And in the context of his decades-long struggle to resist “the whole conceptual framework which assumes that an explanation of human behavior can and must take the Platonic form” (Dreyfus 1979: 232), his rather scandalous description of McDowell’s grand reconciliation as “a vulture ... feed[ing] off the carcass of the Myth of the Given” (Dreyfus 2005: 53), barely rises to the level of polemic. Yet throughout his exchange with McDowell, Dreyfus was not only playing the role of gadfly, but also continuing to develop a positive philosophy of practice and action that he had already given substantive expression in his earlier work on action theory, especially when discussing his U.C. Berkeley colleague John Searle’s theories of mind and action. For example, in “Heidegger’s Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality,” Dreyfus proposed his own account of absorbed coping, which involves “a kind of intentionality that does not involve content at all” (Wrathall 2014: 77).

Intentionality that does not involve content? Dreyfus was aware of how strange this would sound. Philosophers of mind use the word “intentional” to refer to the fact that “mental states like perceiving, believing, desiring, fearing, doubting, etc. are always about something, i.e. directed at something under some description” (ibid.). Intentionality is thus normally an intrinsically contentful, mind-involving notion. But absorbed coping, Dreyfus proposed, manifests “a more fundamental sort of intentionality” that is embodied (or bodily) *and yet still intelligent*. It is a sensitive, engaged, dynamic *orientation* of oneself in one’s practical and epistemic milieu (ibid.). This kind of embodied intentionality does not admit of a sharp distinction between mind and world at all, let alone one that construes the mind primarily or exclusively in terms of *logos*, or conceptual or rational capacities. Absorbed copers are inextricably embedded in their world. And for that reason, Dreyfus’ conception of absorbed coping also does not admit of a distinction between “mind-to-world” and “world-to-mind” directions of fit and causation, as in the account Searle had worked out in his 1983 book, *Intentionality*.

At the core of Searle’s theory of intentionality is a parallel between the kinds of representational states and causal transactions involved in perception and action, respectively. According to Searle, a perceptual experience (1) has a *mind-to-world* direction of fit, since it is a state that is accurate insofar as it matches how things are anyway in the world, and (2) is the result of a process with a *world-to-mind* direction of causation, since a person counts as being in a perceptual state only if “the way the world is *makes* [the person] see it that way” (Searle 1983: 96). By contrast, in intentional action (2’) the direction of causation is *mind-to-world*, since in acting a person makes *the world* to be a certain way, and (1’) the direction of fit is *world-to-mind*, since action is successful insofar as its result “fits” the agent’s intention. For Dreyfus, by contrast, because the absorbed, expert subject is embedded in the world, she is *pulled* into action by her world as much as she pushes it into this or that shape. The kind of skillful activity found in absorbed coping is not a matter of *making* the world outside so that it accords with an internal representation of it, any more than perception is just a matter of *taking* things in so as to generate an accurate representation of them. Instead, both are reciprocal. Just as perception is an *active* process wherein we explore the world to get it to show up for us, so absorbed coping is *responsive*, attuned; it is a way of being in touch with what one’s surroundings call for and afford (see also Gehrman 2014).

We can further clarify Dreyfus’ account of skillful, embodied coping by contrasting it with Searle’s representational account of intentional action. Searle’s account centers, first, on the following pair of theses:

- (A) That an action is intentional only if the agent is in a *mental state* that represents the goal of her action;
- (B) That this mental state is the *cause* of the bodily movement whereby the agent acts as she intends to.

While the details of Searle's account are controversial, (A) and (B) represent commitments that have been widely accepted by analytic philosophers since the influential work of Donald Davidson. Indeed, David Velleman (1992: 461) has called the picture summed up by (A) and (B) the "Standard Story" of action. Searle also defended three further claims which are, in some version, widely accepted by analytic action theorists:

- (C) That the mental state which represents the goal of an agent's action is *internal* to the agent—i.e. it can exist whether or not she acts;
- (D) That in acting intentionally, an agent enjoys an *experience* that represents her action as the cause of her bodily movement; and
- (E) That "at any point in a [person's] conscious life he knows without observation the answer to the question, 'What are you now doing?'" (Searle 1983: 90)—at least where this concerns the descriptions under which the person's action is intentional.<sup>3</sup>

Dreyfus challenged each one of these claims, arguing that *none* of them are supported by the phenomenology of purposive activity, and that to the extent that they have a basis in the logic of our ordinary action-descriptions or the psychology of "common sense" this is only because our ordinary self-understanding is distorted by the Platonic picture.

Consider first thesis (D). According to Searle (1983: 87–8) there are "characteristic experiences" of an intentional action such as raising your arm, and the intentional content of these experiences has a self-referential character: an experience of acting *represents itself as the cause* of the bodily movement whereby the agent does what she intends. Against this, Dreyfus argues that if we "return to the phenomena" with open minds, we find that "in a wide variety of situations human beings relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of a representational state which specifies what the action is aimed at accomplishing" (Wrathall, 2014: 83). He gives a range of examples:

skillful activity like playing tennis; habitual activity like driving to the office or brushing one's teeth; casual unthinking activity like rolling over in bed or making gestures while one is speaking; and spontaneous activity such as fidgeting and drumming one's fingers during a dull lecture.

*Ibid.*

All of these activities involve movement that is organized, purposive, and sensitive to environmental contingencies. Yet there is *no* phenomenological support for the claim that there are "characteristic experiences" of acting in any of these ways—let alone experiences that represent themselves as the cause of one's movements. As Dreyfus observed, when these forms of action involve any experience at all, it is not an experience of oneself as *causing* one's activity, but rather of a direct responsiveness to the environment whereby "[o]ne's activity is completely geared into the demands of the situation" (*ibid.*: 81). Indeed, there is more evidence in the phenomenology of expert action for saying that the world *causes me to act* by eliciting an expert response, than for attributing causality *to me* via my experience of what I do.

Dreyfus' argument against thesis (E) proceeds in a similar way. One often *finds* that one has been gesturing wildly or making the correct turns on a well-learned route, without having known that one was doing these things.<sup>4</sup> And yet there is usually a goal intrinsic to these kinds of activities, which the person who engages in them would treat as her own. One might say, for example, that one was gesturing wildly for emphasis, or that one turned right to avoid the traffic on Sunset, without thereby committing to the self-awareness that (E) stipulates must attend intentional actions. And Dreyfus argued that the same holds for more complex capacities: for example, he loved to cite Larry Bird, who claimed that “[a] lot of times, I’ve passed the basketball and not realized I’ve passed it until a moment or so later” (quoted in Dreyfus 1993: 84). This phenomenon supports a construal of an expert’s self-knowledge quite at odds with the one that Searle assumes. For Dreyfus, even *without* non-observational knowledge of her own activity, the expert does what she does in precisely the way that her situation demands.

Dreyfus did not claim that purposive activity *never* involves experience of one’s movements or non-observational knowledge of what one does. On the contrary, he argued that conscious self-monitoring is necessary in certain situations, including when acquiring a new skill or exercising a well-learned skill in difficult or unfamiliar circumstances. It is primarily in situations like these, he says, that one acts with “a sense of effort with the condition of satisfaction that [this] effort causes the appropriate goal-directed movements”—a way of self-consciously representing our actions that “certainly [has] a place in the overall explanation of how it is that we manage to act in a wide range of situations” (Dreyfus 1993: 89). The mistake of (E) is to conclude that the capacities for self-monitoring that we draw on in these *special* situations are also part of the explanation of purposive activity in the more ordinary situation when there is no particular pressure to attend to the structure of one’s action.<sup>5</sup>

Consider finally Searle’s thesis (C), which holds that what makes an action intentional must be a representation that can exist independently of her bodily movements and their effects, which in turn can exist without the representation. For Searle (1983: 89–90), this independence of intention from movement is shown by a pair of cases: a person whose arm has been anaesthetized and then held down may, if his eyes are closed, have a mistaken experience as of moving his arm; and a person whose arm is made to move directly by stimulation of his motor cortex will be such that his arm moves without the experience characteristic of *his* moving his arm intentionally.

Against this analysis, Dreyfus would argue that these cases do not present us with the *usual* phenomenon of moving purposively in a world we are “geared into” by our interests. Except in moments where we are forced to adopt an explicitly self-aware, reflexive perspective on what we are doing, in purposive activity we are so thoroughly embedded in the world that what happens “in us” is not a separate domain from what takes place in our “surroundings.” The binary subject-object or agent-world distinction that is implied by (C), and which the analytic tradition takes for granted, severely distorts the phenomenology of *everyday* activity, even if we can think of cases where the agent-world contrast has application.

### 9.3 A Sisyphean task?

Dreyfus (2005) avails himself of resources from “the phenomenology of everyday expertise” to criticize theses (C)–(E) and propose substantive alternative accounts of the relevant phenomena. But are those resources sufficient to ground a substantive alternative to the “Standard Story” of (A) and (B)? When he sought to slay the dragon of the computational theory of mind in

*What Computers Can't Do*, Dreyfus acknowledged that doing so would (at least at first) be a Sisyphean task:

[T]he impetus gained by the mutual reinforcement of two thousand years of tradition and its product, the most powerful device ever invented by man [namely, the digital computer], is simply too great to be arrested [or] deflected. ... The most that can be hoped is that we become aware that the direction this impetus has taken ... is not the only possible direction; ... that there may be a way of understanding human reason that explains both why the computer paradigm is irresistible and why it must fail.

1979: 232

In the AI context, Dreyfus hoped, not to replace or refute the “computer paradigm,” but rather to counteract its distorting effects by giving an *at least equally plausible* phenomenological description of human reason. When it comes to his account of skilled, absorbed coping and practical expertise, we propose that Dreyfus is best understood to have the same aims and priorities. That is, while he argued forcefully against the mentalistic models of action and practical intelligence that he sought to disrupt, Dreyfus was in the end most interested in presenting an *at least equally plausible* phenomenological account of the relevant phenomena, to show that the Standard Story is “not the only possible direction” that an account of human action can take. With this in mind we will devote the present section to motivating Dreyfus’ supposedly radical claims about practical intelligence, in order to vindicate them as an intelligible alternative to the Standard Story.

Many of Dreyfus’ best-known examples of absorbed, expert coping are things that are already readily understood as primarily embodied: playing soccer, riding a bike, wielding a hammer, and other examples of what Aristotle might have thought of as technical expertise (see Heidegger 1996: 64ff.; Aristotle 2001: 179). But the familiarity of absorbed practical phenomenology in such cases is the thin edge of a wedge that can, if we allow it, separate us gradually from the Platonic conception of ourselves as rational, agential individuals.

To this end, we can begin by observing first that the same absorbed quality that characterizes one’s competent use of a hammer or pen also characterizes many activities which, on the Platonic picture, constitutively involve the intellect. While Dreyfus’ favorite example was the skillful play of the chess grandmaster, here we will use for illustration some of the activities that are typically part of being a professional academic philosopher: teaching a class, constructing a logical proof, writing a paper, or posing a question following a colleague’s oral presentation. These are the kinds of activities with respect to which virtually all academic philosophers are expert. If Dreyfus is right that skilled coping is both *normally* and *ideally* absorbed, then even these paradigmatically intellect-involving activities ought to exhibit the absorbed phenomenology of embodied, engaged intentionality. That is, if Dreyfus is right, then in some real way even these paradigmatically intellectual activities *don't involve the mind* when they are expertly done.

So, consider what you are doing when you are giving a lecture on a familiar topic. (Non-academics can substitute an appropriately intellectual activity at which they have the relevant degree of expertise.) You are, for example, speaking certain words at a certain pace and with a certain pattern of emphasis. You are making eye contact with others in the room. You are using language in a way that aims to communicate clearly and (perhaps) eloquently. You are monitoring the reactions and interactions of the class, and inserting yourself into the developing social events as they take place, in a way that furthers the background objectives that structure and explain your actions in the first place.

Now, in doing all of this, *where is your attention?* Where is your focus? Your focus is on what you are doing. But your focus is not on what you are doing in the way that a peer observer tasked with writing a teaching evaluation would focus on you teaching the class. You are not attending to yourself as agent; you are attending as agent to what you do. Your focus is *in* what you are doing; your attention is taken up by the activity, and other possible candidates for your attention recede.

This focused, active, attuned, attentive, absorbed kind of activity *just is* (Dreyfus might say) what it is to act purposively with skill. To act in this way is to realize absorbed intentionality. In order to be skillfully or expertly teaching purposively, *you have to actually be teaching*—not thinking about teaching, not attending to yourself teaching as an observer might, not describing what it is to teach, not intending to teach, not planning how to teach another person to teach in the way that you currently are. In teaching skillfully you are simply: *teaching*. If you are doing what you do “at someone else’s prompting” (Aristotle 2001: 114), under the guidance of a set of rules, or while narrating what you do either to yourself or aloud, you are divided in your purpose, divided in your attention, not “all in” on the action that was ostensibly what you were up to. In the very dividedness of your attention, you would do what you did in a less expert (because less absorbed) way.

#### 9.4 Practical wisdom without rationality

For Dreyfus, absorbed coping is possible only when a skill is fully integrated into the subject’s way of being-in-the-world. By contrast, less-than-absorbed, less-than-embodied, less-than-embedded action is not yet truly chosen in this way; it is not yet fully, autonomously purposive or intentional because it has not yet become *part of you*.

This thought may help us to see how Dreyfus could respond to the philosophical orthodoxy that the concept of *acting for a reason* deserves a central place in any philosophical account of what it is to act intentionally. This assumption accounts for the dominance of the Standard Story of intentional action as bodily movement that is caused by an intention: for how can one *act for a reason* without having this reason somewhere “in mind”? And what would it be to act for *this* reason—as opposed to another one that is also in mind—except for this reason to make an appropriate (presumably, causal) difference to what one does?<sup>6</sup>

Dreyfus’ account seems at first especially unable to account for these aspects of everyday action-explanation. If a person’s mental states are not involved in causing her intentional actions, then there does not seem to be anything there to ground an intention-revealing answer to the question “Why did you do that?” Compounding the problem, Dreyfus frequently presents his views in a way that suggests that he is denying a role to the agent in choosing, causing, or generating her own actions.<sup>7</sup> For example in “A Merleau-Pontian Critique of Husserl’s and Searle’s Representationalist Accounts of Action,” he says:

Merleau-Ponty argues that what we might call absorbed coping does not require that the agent’s movements be governed by an intention in action that represents ... what the agent is trying to achieve. Rather, in absorbed coping the agent’s body is led to move so as to reduce a sense of deviation from a satisfactory gestalt without the agent knowing what that satisfactory gestalt will be like in advance of achieving it. Thus, in absorbed coping, rather than a sense of trying to achieve success, one has a sense of being drawn towards an equilibrium.

2000: 293

In passages like this one, experts start to seem like zombies, or like iron filings in the presence of so many magnets. And if so then the Anscombean question “Why did you do that?” might seem, as she put it, to be appropriately “*refused application*” (Anscombe 1963: 11) in any case of absorbed coping—in which case it is not at all clear that *anything* distinguishes the intentional from the non- or un-intentional on Dreyfus’ account.

Let us attempt to address this concern on Dreyfus’ behalf. The *phenomena*, he will insist, as opposed to any grammatical test, are the criteria that must distinguish intentional expert coping from other ways of being-in-the-world. And in many cases this is plausible. It is easy, for example, to think of ways in which the actions of an expert differ characteristically from the actions of a novice or an incompetent bungler. For Dreyfus, the real challenge is the automaton. How can we distinguish, *on phenomenological grounds alone*, between the absorbed, expert copier, and the absent-minded person who is operating on autopilot?

Let us consider the question in the context of a specific example. Suppose that on Monday you drive your manual transmission sedan to work along your usual route. You are relaxed and well-slept, and your cell phone is tucked away in your bag. You keep your eyes on the road, you don’t grind the gears, and you push it with the yellow lights just as much as you feel is wise, no more, no less. Now it is Tuesday. Overtired and engaged in a voice-texting argument with your spouse, you grind the gears several times getting into second, need to slam on the brakes at least once to avoid running a red, and pull in to your spot with the gas light on only to realize that on Tuesdays you have a standing appointment across town and you ought not to have been driving to work in the first place.

As with Dreyfus’ favorite comparison between the deft and sure activity of the expert and the hesitant and fumbling behavior of the novice, there are many familiar differences in the phenomenology of these two scenarios, from both the first- and the third-person perspectives. On Monday, you are coping in an absorbed, expert fashion under a number of descriptions: shifting gears, driving to work, being a defensive driver, etc. Similar to our earlier discussion of the expert philosopher, as you do these things your focus, your attention is on what you are doing under these descriptions. On this particular morning, the focus of your absorbed attention is on navigating the roads, shifting your gears, getting to work in a timely manner. There will be phenomena characteristic of being engaged in doing these things, and ways that another person who is engaged in observing you closely might be able to tell that you are doing them in an absorbed, expert way. Your passenger might notice, for example, that there is never a lurch in momentum when you shift from second to third gear. They may hear a small chuckle or see you lean forward slightly when you hit a yellow light at just the right moment to justify a small burst of speed. They may pick up on the fact that you are relaxed.

On Tuesday, what are you doing? You are certainly absorbed in *something*. But what? Not the same things you were absorbed in the morning before. Instead, your focus is on something else: the voice-texting argument, resentment about your lack of sleep, and the glowing gas light on the dashboard. These things command your attention and assume the place of proximal nodes in your net, embedding you in the world a quite different way as compared to the way you were embedded on Monday, when the gear shifter, the road, the overall drive were your proximal nodes. On Tuesday, distracted and distanced from the driving-related activities, you grind the gears. You fail to time the lights well. You do not drive where you set out to go. And the phenomenology of these activities will be very different from the phenomenology of what were in some sense the same activities during Monday’s drive, both from a first-person perspective (the stress, the sweaty palms, the constant guilty peeking to proofread the latest voice-texted zinger before hitting send) and from a third-person perspective (the palpable tension,



the vehicular lurches, the conspicuous absence of chuckles, the eyes on the dash and the phone more than the road, etc.).

On the phenomenological account that we have just sketched, it is not as if absorbed, attentive defensive driving is reason-involving in a way that driving distractedly is not. For each of these activities is in its own way embodied and embedded in the world, and thus absorbed in its own set of practical problems. And this similarity is what gave rise to the concern that there is no room within Dreyfus' account for answering Anscombe's "special sense of the question 'Why?'" But the subject in this example is absorbed in very different things on Monday and Tuesday, and the phenomenology of their activities manifests this difference. We can say: the drive on Monday is an example of expert Dreyfusian intentional action; it is expert absorbed coping. The drive on Tuesday is *not* an example of expert Dreyfusian intentional action, though the voice-texting argument might be. We suspect that anybody who thinks that the phenomenology of these two cases will be first- or third-personally indistinguishable has no direct experience of the relevant sort.

We also acknowledge that some reservations about Dreyfus' views will persist to whatever extent his interlocutors remain in the grip of the Platonic picture of humankind (and we include ourselves in this). For if our conception of intentionality is that it is essentially conceptual, representational, and self-aware, then naturally any view to the contrary will seem to lose the phenomenon of intentionality itself. And the same goes for agency, for agents and their purposive activity. But if Dreyfus had meant simply to reject or refute the Platonic picture of human mentality, he would have had no need to recruit the vocabulary and conceptual frames of phenomenology to do so. He could have simply adopted the stance of skeptic, so to speak from *inside* the Platonic tradition, arguing that rationality, individuality, and agency are not characteristics of human beings. Instead, Dreyfus sought to save the practical phenomena, and to focus attention on a very different way of understanding ourselves: as embedded, absorbed, and embodied beings. And this implies that he believed the phenomena of purposive human practical life are there to be saved. The embedded subject still interacts with her world; she is not merely acted upon. The absorbed coper still strives purposively, and can succeed (or fail) to achieve what she aims to achieve. The embodied coper still attends to her world and comports herself in a way that is informed by intelligent appreciation of that world. For Dreyfus, practical intelligence is not an illusion. It is, as we put it earlier, *sovereign* over all other forms of intelligence, and that is why the former cannot be satisfyingly explained in terms of the latter. It remains for us to work with the materials he offered to see whether we can make sense of absorbed intentionality in terms that he would have found acceptable.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is dedicated, with deep gratitude, to the memory of Hubert L. Dreyfus. We are grateful to an audience at the 2017 Southeastern Epistemology Conference, held at Florida State University, for helpful feedback on an earlier draft.
- 2 See also Dreyfus (1991), (2000), and (2014; especially Chapters 1 and 9). Dreyfus' interpretation of Heidegger is controversial and often idiosyncratic; for more on this see Braver (2011: 145ff.), Wrathall (2014), and Wrathall and Malpas (2000a, 2000b). On the self as a node in a net, compare Arne Naess (1973), who was also influenced by Heidegger.
- 3 Notably, in her seminal work *Intention* G. E. M. Anscombe flatly rejects each of (A) through (D). The language of *knowledge without observation*, in contrast, is due to her (1963[1957]: 13).
- 4 However, for some critical discussion of this sort of argument see Schwenkler (2019: 22–4, 44–5).
- 5 As Sean Kelly puts it,

just as the child assumes that the refrigerator light must always be on, since it is on every time he looks, so too our proposed analyst has claimed that since the intention to type an *f* is explicit when the subject is paying attention to his activity, so too it must have been among the conditions that characterized the content of the activity even when he was not paying attention to it. This is a bad principle in the case of absorbed activity, just as in the case of refrigerator lights.

2005: 20

- 6 As Davidson famously put it, unless we treat reason-giving explanations as causal “we are without an analysis of the ‘because’ in ‘He did it because ...’, where we go on to name a reason” (1980: 11).  
7 See Braver (2011), Noë (2013), and Gehrman (2016).

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