

Discursive Intentionality as Embodied Coping. A Pragmatist Critique of Existential  
Phenomenology

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## 0. Introduction

Despite some intriguing parallels, there has been surprisingly little dialogue between pragmatists and phenomenologists. Though one can easily construct parallels between James and Husserl, or between Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, there are also significant obstacles to a mutually productive conversation between these two philosophical traditions. At work in the background to the present essay is their conflicting attitudes towards science. Though Husserl initially envisioned phenomenology the scientific (though non-naturalistic) foundation of all other sciences, existential phenomenology became deeply critical of what is often called “scientism” (Olafson 2001). Conversely, pragmatists have been largely (though not uniformly) accepting of naturalism, historicism, and the continuity between science and other kinds of human inquiry. Thus, while contemporary pragmatists following Dewey have also been critical of scientism (Margolis 2003), they followed a naturalized, Darwinized Hegel of Dewey and other pragmatists rather than the anti-naturalism of Heidegger or Sartre. At stake in the contest between naturalized Hegelianism and existential phenomenology is whether our philosophical task is to revise our self-understanding in light of the natural and social sciences or to isolate that self-understanding from the sciences.

I shall now turn to the recent debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell. Though McDowell is not a pragmatist, his inheritance of key pragmatist themes – in particular, the need to avoid the Myth of the Given and a conception of reason as essentially practical – makes for a

productive illustration of how pragmatist theme may conflict with existential phenomenology. Though the crux of their debate turns on whether rationality is pervasive in mindedness or in experience, in the background is Dreyfus's conception of rationality and his correlate thesis that absorbed coping is a distinct kind of intelligibility (§ 1). Building on both McDowell and Dreyfus, Joe Rouse (2015) argues that we should recognize both that conceptual capacities are realized in discursive practices and that discursive practices are forms of embodied coping (§ 2). Though Rouse's account has much to recommend it, it can be nevertheless strengthened in significant ways that undermine Dreyfus's stark contrast between the space of reasons and the space of motivations replacing it with a distinction between sapient intentionality and sentient intentionality (§ 3).

## 1. Sentience and Sapience in the McDowell-Dreyfus Debate

The McDowell-Dreyfus debate (Dreyfus 2005, 2007a; 2007b; 2013; McDowell 2007a; 2007b; 2013) unfolds within a set of intersecting distinctions.<sup>1</sup> Methodologically, the debate has been widely construed as taking place between Dreyfus's use of the existential phenomenology (especially Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Todes) and McDowell's synthesis of Aristotelian, Hegelian, and Wittgensteinian motifs. Substantively, the debate can be reconstructed in terms of two separate distinctions: the *theoria/praxis* distinction and the sapience/sentience distinction. By the *theoria/praxis* distinction, I mean a distinction between two cognitive attitudes towards a situation: that of articulating inferential relations within a model of a situation independently of the situation being modeled (*theoria*), and that of actively working through inferential relations in

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<sup>1</sup> Dreyfus (2005) cited in Dreyfus (2014a). All citations from McDowell (2007a) and (2007b) will be from the reprinted editions in McDowell (2009).

the process of skillfully coping with a situation in which one is embedded (*praxis*). Although neither McDowell nor Dreyfus use these terms, my use of them will correspond roughly to terms such as “detached,” “critical,” “distancing” on the one hand and “absorbed,” “situation-specific” on the other.

The sapience/sentience distinction is a distinction between the semantically rich, epistemically powerful, and practically responsible reasoning that appears to be unique to normal mature human beings (sapience) and the cognitive structures and processes that we share with non-sapient animals, as well as with our own proto-sapient offspring (sentience). These two distinctions are of the utmost importance precisely because Dreyfus’s view commits him to a conflation of this distinction: on his view, sapience is *theoria* and sentience is *praxis*. By contrast, McDowell avoids conflating these distinctions and strongly implies that sapience encompasses both *theoria* and *praxis*. But in lieu of Dreyfus’s detailed Heideggerian/Merleau-Pontyan descriptions of sentience as absorbed coping, McDowell has a relatively thin and curiously not-fully-embodied conception of sensory consciousness. We will need to understand both views in order to appreciate both that McDowell is (mostly) right about sapience and that Dreyfus is (mostly) right about sentience.

Dreyfus’s conflation of *theoria* with sapience (and *praxis* with sentience) can be discerned in his insistence that we should follow Samuel Todes in distinguishing between “the ground floor of perceptually objective experience and the upper storey of imaginatively objective experience” (Todes 2001, 100). Since Todes uses “imagination” to refer to our conceptual activity in general, his suggestion is that our distinctly human conceptual capacities rest on a ‘ground-floor’ of embodied coping shared with animals and infants. In support of this two-tiered view of the experience of normal mature humans, Dreyfus offers the results of the phenomenological

investigations of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, especially their criticism of intellectualism, as well as his own inquiry into the process of skill acquisition. Before turning to these influences, however, I want to consider the possibility that a neglected influence on Dreyfus's thinking is one of his undergraduate teachers, C. I. Lewis.

At the beginning of his Pacific APA Presidential Address, Dreyfus tells an autobiographical anecdote about how he fell in love with philosophy after accidentally sitting in on one of Lewis's lectures:

Back in 1950, while a physics major at Harvard, I wandered into C. I. Lewis's epistemology course. There, Lewis was confidently expounding the need for an indubitable Given to ground knowledge, and he was explaining where that ground was to be found. I was so impressed that I immediately switched majors from ungrounded physics to grounded philosophy. ... During that time no one at Harvard seemed to have noticed that Wilfrid Sellars had denounced the Myth of the Given; and that he and his colleagues were hard at work, not on a rock solid foundation for knowledge, but on articulating the conceptual structure of our grasp on reality. (2014a, 104)

From this opening salvo, Dreyfus proceeds to accuse later philosophers – especially McDowell – of having replaced the Myth of the Given with 'the Myth of the Mental': the systematic neglect of how embodied, absorbed coping makes possible our *sui generis* conceptual or rational capacities, as extensively investigated by analytic philosophers.

McDowell, for his part, responded by accusing Dreyfus of holding the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect (McDowell 2007, 349): the myth that the intellect is paradigmatically brought into view in episodes of detached contemplation, which are seemingly antithetical to absorbed coping. Nor does the Battle of Myths show any particular sign of abating; the accusations of myth-mongering continue in each of their contributions to Schear (2013). The myths have instead shifted, with Dreyfus accusing McDowell of holding "the Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental" and McDowell responding in kind that Dreyfus retains a "Myth

of the Mind as Detached”. In what follows I will talk of the Myth of the (Pervasiveness of) the Intellect to capture the similarity between Dreyfus’s original and refined positions.

The Myth of (the Pervasiveness of) the Mental is the assumption that “all intelligibility, even perception and skillful coping, *must be, at least implicitly, conceptual* – in effect, that intuitions without concepts must be blind, and that there must be a maxim behind every action” (Dreyfus 2014a, 110). To commit ourselves to this Myth is to commit ourselves to an intellectualistic self-distortion, as if the transcendental unity of apperception (or its “naturalized” equivalent) is always at work organizing the barrage of sensations into a systematic totality regardless of whether one is solving a quadratic equation or avoiding pedestrians on a sidewalk. Against this intellectualist picture, Dreyfus argues that the best insights of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Samuel Todes require us to distinguish between two fundamentally different kinds of intelligibility: the space of reasons and the space of motivations.

To clarify this distinction, Dreyfus relies on the phenomenological difference between experts and competent performers. Whereas competent performers – student nurses or novice chess players – must pay attention to explicit rules to govern their conduct, experts do not. Instead, they exhibit situation-specific responsiveness that is engaged and affective rather than detached and objective. In playing lightning chess, for example, grandmasters make moves far too quickly for them to be consulting any rules of the game or tactical strategies they have learned. On this basis Dreyfus concludes that their actions are nonconceptual – there is no maxim behind their action. It would be a kind of intellectualism to insist otherwise. Since there is no detached reflection in their absorbed bodily coping, *a fortiori* there is no mindedness either. Elsewhere, in a commentary on Todes, Dreyfus (2014b) distinguishes between perception and thought as essentially one between “*contextually determined perceptual objects with integrated aspects*” and “*decontextualized*

*conceptual* objects with *isolable features*” (100). It must be noticed here that both Todes and Dreyfus are committed to a “detached, spectatorial perception” (102) picture of what conceptual articulation is; it is only because of that commitment that Dreyfus conceptualizes the relation between perception and thought in terms of how to de-contextualize what is contextually given in absorbed coping.

In order to depict perceptual-practical involvement as radically distinct from rational thought, Wrathall (2005) contrasts the ‘space of reasons’ with what he calls “the space of motivations”. The space of motivations, Wrathall argues, is a “third term” that disrupts all forms of dualism: “instead of mind and matter, the lived body; instead of causes and reasons, ‘motives’. A full account of this disruption would require that one shows how so-called motor intentional behavior, together with much of our experience of the world, is not reducible to a purely physical event, nor commensurable with mental predicates” (112). The “motor intentionality”, as described by Merleau-Ponty, is taken by Wrathall and Dreyfus to be non-conceptual and non-rational, because “much of our experience of the world is articulated according to the ‘groupings’ of our familiar, practical dealings with the world and that this articulation is incommensurate with conceptual articulations” (113-114). A lived body enjoys a mode of existence that cannot be located within the conceptual map of Cartesian or Davidsonian dualism between physical laws and rational assessment. Since “our primary way of being in the world is a bodily existence that, for its part, is experienced neither as mental mode of comportment, with determinate conceptual contents, nor as a merely physical interaction with physical objects” (115), we need a distinct kind of logical space. Similarly, O’Conaill (2014) suggests that the distinction between the space of reasons and the space of motivations is as a distinction between two different ways in which an action can be found intelligible. Whereas in the space of reasons an action is intelligible by relating it to a

reason for that action, in the space of motivations “an agent is motivated to act in a certain way if they feel inclined, in virtue of perceiving an environmental affordance, to take up a certain course of action” (444).<sup>2</sup> Hence, whereas the space of reasons essentially involves the operations of detached reflection in acts of context-independent judgment about objects and properties, the space of motivations essentially involves our nonconceptual, pre-rational, spontaneous responsiveness to context-dependent, situation-specific motivationally salient stimuli.

Dreyfus and O’Conaill characterize this form of spontaneous responsiveness in terms of “affordances” and “solicitations”, on which the contrast with the space of reasons depends. Affordances, introduced by the ecological psychologist J. J. Gibson, can be defined in terms of the following conditions: for any given situation, an organism will perceive an affordance just in case some feature of the environment is strongly correlated with some possible corresponding movement. A solicitation is the motivational correlate of an affordance, as Dreyfus helpfully clarifies: “The Gestaltists ... were interested not in our perception of objective features of the world but in how such features are related to the needs and desires of perceivers. So they introduced the term *solicitations*” (Dreyfus 2013, 37n12; emphasis original). Solicitations are motivationally salient features of an environment, whereas affordances are the perceptible features of a situation (for some organism). The space of motivations is characterized in terms of both affordances and solicitations, though they are conceptually distinct; an apple affords eating to a human but not a cat, but it only solicits eating if the human is hungry.

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<sup>2</sup> *Pace* Dreyfus, O’Conaill denies that the space of reasons and the space of motivations are mutually exclusive because he does not identify reason-having with reflection; unreflective bodily actions can be rational. However, he also urges, against McDowell, that not *all* of our actions are done for reasons – there are spontaneous actions, such as doing a cartwheel just because one feels like it.

Importantly, the space of motivations is brought into view from the standpoint of experience itself. It is not a theoretical posit about underlying cognitive machinery introduced as a third-person, 'objective' explanation. The space of motivations is not so much subpersonal but rather pre-personal; it is the 'anonymous' life of the embodied subject, present in her experience but not attended to as such (in the absence of patient phenomenological articulation). As a pre-personal concept, the space of motivations is the logical space of absorbed coping. An expert nurse, a chess grandmaster, or someone engaged in some everyday task (say, washing the dishes or navigating traffic) do not consciously attend the rules that they are following. Moreover, Dreyfus problematically concludes that the space of motivations and the space of reasons are antagonistic: on his view, detached reflection interferes with absorbed coping and can even degrade it.

A further distinction between the space of reasons and the space of motivations requires understanding them as distinct kinds of intentionality. Here Dreyfus (also Wrathall and O'Conaill) adopts Merleau-Ponty's concept of "motor intentionality": the kind of directedness of our lived bodily orientations. To be an embodied subject is to inhabit a perceptual *perspective* on objects. An object is not only perceptually present to us as having facing sides, but also its non-facing sides are also perceptually present to us in the mode of *possibilities*: the non-facing side is what one *would* be seeing *if* the object were positioned differently in relation to the perceiver's body. This is neither a logical nor conceptual possibility, but a directly perceived perceptual possibility. The non-facing side of a coffee mug is present to me in a way that a perceptually absent coffee-mug is not. A merely imagined coffee-mug cannot solicit any bodily movements from me, whereas the real coffee-mug can solicit me to pick it up, turn it over, take a sip from it, and even ask someone else to describe the side of the mug that she can see and that I cannot. The

non-facing sides of a perceptual object are not merely imagined, but present to me through the sorts of bodily movements that they afford and solicit.

The Myth of (the Pervasiveness of) the Mental, then, is the denial of the distinction between these two kinds of intentionality, the space of reasons (detached reflection) and the space of motivations (absorbed coping). The intellectualist understands all experience in terms of the space of reasons; she denies that the space of motivations has its own internal logic that cannot be replaced by the space of reasons. Since the space of reasons is conceptually structured, but the space of motivations is not, the Myth of (the Pervasiveness of) the Mental also mistakenly conflates conceptuality and intentionality. Therefore, distinguishing between these two logical spaces requires recognizing that nonconceptual intentionality structures the experiences of non-rational animals and pre-rational infants.

Though Dreyfus quickly passes over Lewis's Given to Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given and its subsequent influence on McDowell, Lewis's insistence on "the indubitable Given to ground knowledge" is not accidental. Lewis (1947) argues that all objectively valid empirical content must be analyzable in terms of immediate apprehensions of sense (which are correlated with intentional bodily actions).<sup>3</sup> Despite claiming to share Sellars's criticisms of Lewis – accepting that the Given is a Myth – Dreyfus retains far more of Lewis's general project than he realizes. Though he seems to abandon Lewis's project of analyzing intelligible assertions in terms of "immediate apprehensions of sense" – the very project that Sellars criticizes – Dreyfus appears to have transformed Lewis's semantic foundationalism into a kind of "phenomenological foundationalism".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Sachs (2014) for Lewis's semantics and its influence on Sellars and Brandom.

<sup>4</sup> Berendzen (2010) uses this term to describe Dreyfus's position in the Dreyfus-McDowell debate, but does not make explicit the connection between Lewis and Dreyfus.

On Dreyfus's account, the 'more' that we rational animals enjoy is "not a *bare* Given" but rather "a meaningful Given" (Dreyfus 2014a, 115-116), available for phenomenological description. Dreyfus effectively retains Lewis's Kantian pragmatism but replaces the bare Given of Lewis with the account of absorbed coping he draws from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The deeper justification for this retention and replacement can be located in terms of Lewis and Sellars: we must replace the bare Given of Lewis with the richly structured Given precisely because Sellars is right – the bare Given is a Myth. Yet if we do not supplement conceptually articulated thought with *something*, we will relapse to idealism – perhaps even the absolute idealism of Royce from which Lewis attempted to save us when he posited the Given in the first place. This is precisely why Dreyfus is concerned that without *something* to do the work that the Given was called upon to do, we will have no way to avoid the Myth of (the Pervasiveness of) the Mental.

## 2. Naturalizing the Space of Reasons

In a volume devoted to pragmatist responses to phenomenology, it may seem odd to focus on philosophers influenced by Wilfrid Sellars. Sellars did not self-identify as a pragmatist, owing – he says – to his father's prejudice against pragmatism (Sellars 1979, 1).<sup>5</sup> Certain pragmatist themes – such as the rejection of the Myth of the Given and the emphasis on rationality as involving norm-governed practices – are transmitted from older pragmatists through Sellars to McDowell. Sellars, however, should be credited with developing with extraordinary

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<sup>5</sup> Bernstein (2010, 27) remarks that the important themes of Sellars' "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" are already to be found in Peirce.

sophistication the idea that intentionality, at least the kind that distinguishes ‘rational’ animals from other kinds of creatures, is fundamentally grounded in our capacity to engage in meaningful speech. Rather than hold that intentionality is *first* fully realized in thought and only then verbally expressed, Sellars argues that language is the very medium of thought; intentionality is fundamentally *discursive*.<sup>6</sup> This core Sellarsian idea has since been taken up by Brandom, McDowell, and many others. Since McDowell’s work is well-known, and because an entire volume has already been devoted to the McDowell-Dreyfus debate, I will comment only briefly on McDowell before turning to the naturalistic pragmatism of Joseph Rouse.

Whereas Dreyfus thinks that avoiding the Myth of (the Pervasiveness of) the Mental requires distinguishing between the space of reasons and the space of motivations, McDowell (2007a) maintains that “embodied coping is permeated with mindedness” (309). The conceptual capacities distinctive of rational animals permeate all the way down to our embodied coping skills. We cannot factor out the embodied coping skills of a rational animal and align them with the embodied coping skills of a non-rational or pre-rational animal; the acquisition of rational conceptual capacities thoroughly transforms our entire embodied coping skills.

As McDowell sees it, the core of his disagreement with Dreyfus is “whether our perceptual openness to affordances, which I agree is necessarily bound up with our embodied coping skills, is permeated with rationality” (315). If our perceptual openness to affordances is permeated with rationality, then our relation to affordances radically differs from that of non-rational animals; unlike non-rational animals, “[a]ffordances are no longer merely input to a human being’s motivational tendencies; now they are data for her rationality” (315). But they are not data in the sense of merely triggered inputs that reasoning then acts upon, since “[p]erceptual experiencing,

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<sup>6</sup> See the essay collected as Sellars (2007); Sachs (2014) develops the contrast between Sellars’s concept of discursive intentionality and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘motor intentionality’.

on the part of a rational animal, is not something that can *elicit* rational responses in the shape of perceptual beliefs. ... the perceptual experiencing of rational animals is *itself* rational openness to the world” (316-317; emphasis added). Though rationality is itself fundamentally perceptuo-practical, it is also a radically different kind of perceptuo-practical engagement, precisely because we perceive reasons as such and act according to them in our everyday bodily copings with our physical and social environments.

McDowell argues that Dreyfus is mistakenly committed to “the Myth of the Mind as Detached”: “mindedness is detached from engagement in bodily life” (McDowell 2007b, 328).<sup>7</sup> Only if reasons are detached, context-independent rules would one think that embodied coping is distinct from rational thought. In contrast, McDowell urges that rationality is essentially practical – rationality is not fundamentally detached reflection but rather norm-governed engagement with the world. Though detached reflection has been a paradigmatic exercise of reason in Western philosophy since Plato, it should not be conflated with what reasoning essentially is.

Though I agree with McDowell that Dreyfus runs afoul of the Myth of the Mind as Detached, McDowell’s view has its own problems. McDowell’s conception of perceptual judgment is at best only ‘thinly’ embodied. The differences between seeing a red square and seeing a blue triangle (a paradigm example from McDowell) is abstract and disembodied relative to the difference between seeing a chessboard as soliciting a checkmate in three moves or experiencing a soccer game as a play of forces. McDowell maintains that perceptual experience is a passive actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness; the very same concepts are at work in seeing that an apple is red and judging that the apple is red. The only difference is that in the former case the concepts are passively actualized in my visual consciousness, and the latter

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<sup>7</sup> All citations from reprinted in McDowell (2009).

those concepts are freely exercised in judging. But McDowell does not emphasize that sensory consciousness is essentially embodied and inseparable from bodily movement, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty, Todes, and Dreyfus; this also leaves with an inadequate view of animal minds (Sachs 2012).

I now turn to Joseph Rouse's (2015) recent work as a reconciliation of Dreyfus's phenomenological account of sentience with McDowell's quasi-pragmatist account of sapience. Rouse's complex account of reasoning involves three claims that together weaken the contrast between the space of reasons and the space of motivations. First, Rouse follows the general left-wing Sellarsian pragmatist strategy of locating reasons in discursive practices rather than in detached contemplation. Second, Rouse emphasizes (*pace* Brandom and McDowell) that discursive practices are *essentially* bodily and power-laden. Third, Rouse uses recent developments in evolutionary theory to construct a scientifically constrained, though still speculative, account of how discursive practices could have evolved from more 'primitive' kinds of animal mindedness. Rouse's account of discursive practices is naturalistic in the following senses: we should accept both metaphysical naturalism (there are no supernatural phenomena) and methodological naturalism (there is no sharp discontinuity between philosophy and science). If Rouse is right, then a Sellarsian account of discursive practices can indeed be successfully naturalized.

As Rouse frames the problem, we need an evolutionarily plausible account of the transition from animals that are responsive to affordances ('sentient' animals) to animals that hold themselves to norms of objective correctness ('sapient' animals). The evolutionary plausibility of Rouse's account depends on his use of new developments in evolutionary theory, and especially "niche construction": the process whereby an animal's behavior contributes to building the

ecological niche that the animal also occupies. On Rouse's view, philosophers have had difficulty naturalizing normativity because they were working with an inadequate conception of naturalism, and in particular, one that neglected recent developments in evolutionary theory. With the resources now available in ecological psychology and niche construction theory, Rouse argues that we can understand discursive practices as modified forms of embodied coping.

Rouse draws the basic distinction between nonhuman animals and human animals in terms of "coupling" and "displacement." Nonhuman animals are characterized by an extremely close coupling between cognitive systems and environment, whereas humans enjoy forms of symbolic displacement. For nonhuman animals, we need to understand how "the close intertwining of organisms' sensory systems with their repertoires for behavioral and physiological responsiveness shows how organisms are closely coupled with their environments" (Rouse 2015, 19). As a result of this close coupling between organism and environment, nonhuman animals are "perceptual/practical systems unencumbered by symbolic bottlenecks" (ibid., 99), which is to say that they – but not us – do not lose any data when perceptual information is converted in symbolic description. Since the nonhuman form of animal mindedness can be described entirely in Gibsonian terms of direct awareness of ambient affordances, there is no need to posit any "decoupled representations" (ibid., 107) or "symbolic displacement" (ibid., p. 112) in their perceptual/practical responsiveness to the world. Only 'enlanguaged' beings enjoy that kind of cognitive access to the world; only we sapient animals can ask whether or not how we *take* things to be is how they *really* are, which is to say that only we can hold ourselves accountable to some standard of objective correctness. Hence, the transition from animal sentience to human sapience consists of the emergence of this capacity for symbolic displacement from the close coupling of perceptual/practical abilities in nonhuman animals.

Rouse's view overcomes the opposition between Dreyfus and McDowell in three distinct ways. Firstly, Rouse affirms, with Dreyfus, that a close coupling of perceptual/practical abilities with affordances and solicitations also characterizes sapient mindedness, as distinct modifications of more basic perceptual/practical skills. Secondly, Rouse argues that we should think of language as "first and foremost a practical-perceptual capacity for robust tracking of protolinguistic performances in their broader circumstances and for flexibly responsive performances (both linguistic and nonlinguistic) motivated by them" (ibid., 122). This entails the primary positive thesis of this chapter: discursive practices are highly modified and specialized forms of embodied coping. But whereas McDowell only asserts this, Rouse shows in considerable detail exactly how this works. Once we see that discursive practices are not (*pace* Dreyfus) a categorically distinct logical space, we should emphasize "the perceptual and practical skills that are constitutive of discursive practice, through which semantic content is articulable and discernible via the intertwined abilities to correlate utterances with circumstances (including other utterances)" (ibid., 126). That is, language itself recruits perceptual/practical abilities and would be impossible without them. (Consider how the separation of meaning from sound – of semantics from phonemics – is a theoretical abstraction not found in actual linguistic practice.) Thirdly, Rouse affirms, with McDowell, that the full maturation of symbolic displacement is fundamentally transformative for every aspect of human life, including not just our capacity for discussion and argument, but also culture, art, religion, literature, music, dance, and in short, everything that Margolis (2012) calls Intentionality.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Intentionality (in an enlanguaged world) ranges over a great deal more than mental states: it ranges over everything that is a cultural artifact or to which we rightly attribute meaning or significance or signification (as expressive or representational or symbolic or *geistlich*: language, traditions, institutions, practices, products, and actions most particularly, all of which are actual and objective ... I name this sort of intentionality, 'Intentionality'" (143).

### 3. Sentient Intentionality and Sapient Intentionality

Throughout I have suggested that Dreyfus was basically right about sentience and that McDowell was basically right about sapience. I now want to vindicate this suggestion by building on Rouse's account in order to develop a contrast between sentient intentionality and sapient intentionality. While Dreyfus is right about the primordial role of perceptual-practical skills in mindedness, he is mistaken in thinking both that rationality consists of detached reflection and that rationality is the enemy of absorbed coping.

A preliminary contrast between Rouse and Michael Tomasello (2014; 2015) is highly instructive. Though not a philosopher – Tomasello's work consists largely of comparing the cognitive activities of chimpanzees and human children – he frequently alludes to the normative pragmatist tradition that roughly includes the late Wittgenstein, Dewey, Mead, Sellars, and Brandom.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on both this philosophical tradition and extensive psychological experiments, Tomasello posits what he calls “shared intentionality” as the key cognitive innovation in human evolution: that we can understand both ourselves and each other in terms of a shared conceptual framework that we understand both ourselves and each other as having. Shared intentionality includes both the “I-You” structure of “joint intentionality” and the “I-We” structure of “collective intentionality”. Thus, I understand both myself as an “I” and you as a “you”, and I understand also both of us as belonging to a “we”, and you also share this understanding from your own perspective.

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<sup>9</sup> His most recent work (2014; 2015) advances over earlier work (1999; 2004) in two important ways. First, Sellars and Brandom are part of the theoretical structure of the more recent books, though they were absent from the earlier ones. Second, Tomasello now recognizes that great apes are much more cognitively sophisticated than he previously realized.

For Tomasello the question is, how we can explain the evolution of shared intentionality from the merely individual intentionality that characterizes all non-sapient animals, including all extant great apes and presumably also our last common ancestor with them? In contrast to Rouse, who insists that intentionality as such is specific to human beings, Tomasello argues that what is evolutionarily distinctive about human beings is not intentionality *per se* but the *kind of* intentionality that we have: shared intentionality. And whereas Rouse gives little attention to the specific selective forces that led to hominid specialization, Tomasello (2015) emphasizes that it is *obligate cooperative foraging* that must be considered a uniquely hominid ecological niche. Understanding how hominoid competitive-and-individualistic foraging evolved into hominid obligate cooperative foraging is a significantly smaller conceptual gap than that posed by Rouse. In short, the construction of obligate cooperative foraging as a uniquely hominid ecological niche functioned as a selective pressure for the emergence of discursive practices as a distinct kind of embodied coping, and hence of reasons as a distinct kind of motivations.

I now want to introduce three criticisms and three revisions to Rouse's general account in order to further weaken Dreyfus's dichotomy between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of motivations. As for the criticisms: first, Rouse's Gibsonian anti-representationalism (which he shares with Dreyfus and McDowell) leads him to conceive of nonhuman animals as being so closely coupled to their affordances that it is unclear if they enjoy even the modicum of rupture from their immediate environment necessary for problem solving. A more nuanced picture of animal cognition will be required that makes the emergence of rationality less mysterious. Second, Rouse tends to describe nonhuman animals as more or less undifferentiated from each other; the cognitive differences between a house-cat and a chimpanzee are mere differences of degree, and only the difference between a chimpanzee and a human being is a

difference in kind. Here too we will need a far more nuanced picture of differences across kinds of sentient animals, and in particular, of the cognitive and affective richness of the lives of great apes. Third, Rouse insulates discursive articulation as a constructed niche from the selective pressures that led to the formation of that niche, thereby leading him to exaggerate the cognitive differences between nonhuman and human animals. Accepting all these points would further soften the contrast between the embodied coping of nonhuman animals and the discursive practices of human animals, which even in Rouse remains overly sharply posed in the contrast between close coupling and symbolic displacement.

These three criticisms lead directly to the following suggested revisions. Firstly, if discursive practices are themselves modifications of more primitive embodied coping, we should expect that the affordances and solicitations distinctive of embodied coping should also be present in discursive practices. By this I mean not just one's attunement to the ebb and flow of conversation – the timing of when it is appropriate to ask a question, to listen, to raise an objection – but also the very content of what is to be said depends on attunement to what others are saying. To use Brandom's terms, the pragmatic statuses of commitments and entitlements whereby we track propositional contents are themselves affordances and solicitations – they are affordances and solicitations for the rational animals that we are. We recognize when a point raised by someone solicits an objection, or when a criticism affords reconsideration of what we thought we were saying.

Secondly, if discursive practices are a kind of embodied coping, then what is detached reflection *per se*? The answer should be relatively clear: detached reflection is a response to 'breakdown' in discursive practices. We adopt an attitude of detached reflection when our discursive practices have ceased to work, or ceased to work smoothly and transparently. Likewise

our smoothly functioning discursive practices become ‘present at hand’ when they cease to function: when we confront someone from a different culture whose norms and conventions are different from ours, when new technologies are out of step with old cognitive habits, or when we become aware of contradictions in our ideology. *Contra* Dreyfus, detached reflection as such is not response to breakdown in bodily absorbed coping; detached reflection is a response to breakdown in the absorbed coping *of the giving and asking for reasons*. If so, we can understand precisely why, as McDowell asserts (in line with pragmatism generally), detached reflection makes an extremely bad model for discursive practices as such.

Thirdly, by understanding detached reflection as a response to breakdown in smoothly functioning norms of giving and asking for reasons, we can make common cause with Dewey’s conception of ‘inquiry’ as the resolution of a problematic situation (Dewey 1986). In Dewey’s account, even detached reflection or criticism is always aimed at the restoration of a situation in which smooth functioning is possible. It is not an end in itself; the *vita contemplativa* is for the sake of improving the *vita activa*, *theoria* for the sake of *praxis*. The pragmatist view of inquiry has two important features. Firstly, it makes our capacity to engage in reflection and science less mysterious by grounding those capacities in skills that we share with other animals. Secondly, it further develops the crucial distinction between the kinds of reasoning appropriate for formal domains and the kinds of reasoning appropriate for non-formal domains. Apodictic certainty derived from first principles is a good model for the former, but not for the latter, and the conflation between the two is one of the long-standing errors of both Cartesianism and analytic philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Pragmatism, by contrast, builds on Hegel’s fallibilistic alternative and grounds it more adequately in a Darwinian conception of human beings as differing in degree rather than in

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<sup>10</sup> Westphal (2010) develops this claim in substantial detail, though he does not develop the suggestion that phenomenology shares this problem with analytic philosophy.

kind from other animals. Hence a pragmatist view of discursivity and inquiry reveals why it is a mistake to conflate the sapience/sentience distinction with the *theoria/praxis* distinction. But it is precisely that conflation that sustains the Dreyfus/Todes contrast between the upper story of detached reflection and the ground-floor of absorbed coping.

Drawing on these criticisms of Dreyfus, McDowell, and Rouse allows me to suggest that our thinking about sentience and sapience requires distinguishing between sentient intentionality and sapient intentionality. A minded animal has sentient intentionality if it is an embodied copier with conscious intentions that guide purposive action in response to affordances and solicitations. A rational minded animal has sapient intentionality if it has internalized the syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic structures of a natural language such that it can share its conceptual contents with those of other similarly ‘enlanguaged’ animal such that individual purposive action can be integrated into various forms of cooperative action.

To clarify the similarities and differences, I distinguish between two different dimensions of conceptual meaning: a perceptuo-practical dimension and a socio-linguistic dimension. Though non-linguistic animals have no socio-linguistic dimension, their “simple concepts” are nevertheless inferentially structured.<sup>11</sup> Suppose an animal’s situation makes it ambiguous or indeterminate what the relevant affordances and solicitations are. Under circumstances that make affordances difficult to detect, an inference is an action that increases the detectability of affordances. Tomasello (2014) shows that great apes do carry out causal inferences, and in some cases, can even know what inferences other chimps have made. Yet they are not genuinely rational animals – they have sentient intentionality, not sapient intentionality.

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<sup>11</sup> For a promising account of ‘simple concepts’, see Camp (2009).

What is missing from the mindedness of great apes is the ability to share their inferences, and so the ability to correct each other's inferences. The socio-linguistic dimension of conceptual meaning functions primarily to make possible collective or cooperative intentional actions, or (if one prefers) collective embodied coping. The socio-linguistic norms of inferring with discursively articulable concepts are those necessary for successful cooperation between animals carrying out joint or collective perceptual-practical activities. The need to 'collectivize' conceptual contents with the emergence of natural languages transforms embodied coping into objective correctness, motivations into reasons.

One of the most pernicious implications of idealism – whether transcendental or phenomenological – is that we are somehow 'imprisoned' within our subjectivity, consciousness, or language. The pragmatist alternative, in the long arc that runs from Peirce and Dewey through Sellars to Rouse and Tomasello, begins with the thought that we are organisms of a certain kind.<sup>12</sup> We are bound up with our environments, having a contingent natural history, and neither more nor less 'imprisoned' than sentient animals like ducks or raccoons. The difference made by that exceedingly rare and fascinating form of sapience called "science," is that we can – with diligence and care and often a good deal of luck – catch glimpses of the phenomenologically hidden causal structures that comprise the world's real contribution to the affordances and solicitations that constitute our perceptual-practical awareness of the world. Furthermore, we can manipulate those structure to generate novel affordances and solicitations – though, it must be added, whether we do so ethically, wisely, and humanely is a question of culture, values, and political economy.

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<sup>12</sup> A different way of putting this point is that whereas phenomenology (on a standard interpretation of Husserl) only explicates the first-person standpoint, pragmatism takes the third-person standpoint as well the first-person standpoint from the very beginning; see the illuminating contrast between Wittgenstein and Heidegger on the one hand, and Dewey on the other, in Godfrey-Smith's (2015) review of Dreyfus and Taylor (2015). I am skeptical that any philosophical method restricted to the first-person standpoint can successfully avoid idealism; for a criticism of phenomenology on precisely these lines, see Sparrow (2014).

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