

Intellectualism, Experience, and Motor Understanding

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1. Introduction

Intellectualism is by definition a vice—the vice of overstating the role of intellect in experience and action, of seeing reason (or inferences, or concepts) where they are not. In what follows I find some justification for Dreyfus' charge that McDowell's views are intellectualist in this sense. But my reasons leave me room to agree with McDowell: our rational capacities also do, in a way, “pervasively shape” our experience, and this can make it misguided to look for some “core” of experience we share with sentient creatures that lack them.

My criticism is rooted in a recognition that our experience is also “pervasively shaped” by something we certainly *do* share with other animals—namely, a capacity for *movement*. Such movement, I will argue, makes for changes in how things appear to us that cannot be completely captured in concepts of those things that the appearances afford. So, in this sense, concepts do *not* completely “pervade” our experience; experience by nature “runs ahead” of the thought that it makes possible. Further, this dynamic structure of appearance, shaped by motor activity, makes objects apparent to us; it is sufficient to yield “object directedness”—to give us experience *of space*—even absent the powers of “self-critical rationality” that McDowell deems essential. So we can share this spatial *form* of experience with animals that lack our intellectual self-consciousness, even if things never look to them quite as they do to us.

Explaining these ideas will occupy roughly the first two-thirds of this essay. In the remainder, I will further develop these themes of self-consciousness and sensorimotor activity by considering how Merleau-Ponty figures in the Dreyfus/McDowell dispute. I will absolve him of McDowell's charge that he subscribes to some risible “myth of the disembodied intellect.” My interpretation of the “impersonal existence” Merleau-Ponty says we lead as perceivers will credit him with a more interesting view. It will find him engaged in a serious effort to meet the challenge that animates much of McDowell's own work, that of how best to integrate a conception of ourselves as “active thinkers” with an understanding of our embodied, sentient nature. Altogether, my remarks here will, I hope, contribute to an understanding of just where intellectualist pitfalls lie, and of where alternatives to them may be sought.

2. Dreyfus versus McDowell

Let me start by sketching some features of the disagreement between Dreyfus and McDowell. Consider this gloss on two central ideas found in McDowell.

1. **The Pervasiveness of Concepts.** Our perceptual experience is pervasively shaped or permeated by concepts.¹
2. **The Pervasiveness of Self-Consciousness.** Our experience and actions are both inextricably bound to a kind of critical self-consciousness.²

Dreyfus opposes both these forms of pervasiveness as intellectualist myth (what he calls the “myth of the mental”).³ According to Dreyfus, *neither* the use of concepts nor even an *implicit* self-awareness is much involved in our everyday activity. Against (1) he says, an “as-structure”—and thus concepts—are often absent from our activities. As he puts it, “[M]ost of our activities don’t involve concepts at all...they don’t have a situation-specific “as-structure.” (2007b, 371) This is illustrated with reference to that beloved example of the everyday—going in and out of doors. Dreyfus remarks: “I don’t see the doorknob as a doorknob when I am absorbed in using it.” (ibid., 375) And what goes for doorknobs goes for much of what we skillfully cope with as we go about our lives: we do not perceive it as anything, and thus a conceptualization of what we perceive is not involved. Therefore, contrary to thesis (1), concepts do not pervade our experience.

Against (2), he says that when we are involved or absorbed in activity, typically, he says, no “ego,” no “I” is present. As he puts it, “[I]n fully absorbed coping, there is no immersed ego, not even an implicit one.” (ibid., 374) Perception is a “skilled bodily accomplishment that goes on without an explicit or implicit sense of an “I” who is doing it.” (ibid., 375) In this connection Dreyfus endorses a remark of Sartre’s:

“When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I...I am then plunged into a world of attractive and repellant qualities—but me, I have disappeared.” (cited by Dreyfus, ibid., 373)

Dreyfus also cites (though with some ambivalence) a quotation from Merleau-Ponty—a passage on which, as we shall see, McDowell also seizes. According to Colin Smith’s English translation, quoted by Dreyfus (2007a, 355) and McDowell (2007a, 350), Merleau-Ponty says:

“In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge with this body

which is better informed than we are about the world..." (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, 238/277/275)⁴

In line with his criticisms of McDowell, Dreyfus takes Merleau-Ponty to be saying ("albeit poorly") that in perception we allow ourselves to be "drawn into" an "absorbed coping" and "involvement" with things, which is a fundamentally non-conceptual response to environmental "solicitations," one in which there is "no 'I' present," and no experience of *this body* "as mine." (Dreyfus, "2005, ?, 2007a, 355-6)

McDowell counters partly by emphasizing the modesty of his claims. He offers us the example of catching a frisbee—something either humans (who are rational agents), or dogs (who are not) might do. McDowell asks: "[W]hat difference does it make, according to me, for activity to be permeated with rationality...?" (2007b, 368) "The point of saying that the rational agent, unlike the dog, is realizing a concept in doing what she does is that what she is doing...comes within the scope of her practical rationality—even if only in that, if asked why she caught the frisbee, she would answer, 'No particular reason; I just felt like it.'" (ibid., 369)

Thus conceptual pervasiveness is exhibited in such unexceptionable facts as these: a human agent is prepared to give some such rationalization of her behavior, as a dog, for instance, is not. And insofar as a readiness to rationalize what one is doing in this way constitutes a readiness *to think of oneself as an agent*, open to evaluation in the light of norms of rationality, this observation brings along with it the idea that there *is* a practical self-awareness involved in ordinary activity—whatever Sartre may have had to say about chasing streetcars.

McDowell also shifts to the offensive by hurling the 'myth' talk back at Dreyfus. and his "hero" Merleau-Ponty. They are allegedly under the spell of a mythological "dualism of embodiment and mindedness." They think that in absorbed coping there is no experience of an "I" doing anything, but only *this body* responding to solicitations. This, McDowell says, makes the body into a second "person-like" thing, distinct from (intellectual) me. And here McDowell objects:

"I am the only person-like thing (person actually) that is needed in a description of my bodily activity. If you distinguish me from my body, and give my body that person-like character, you have too many person-like things in the picture when you try to describe my bodily doings." (2007b, 369)

And, with reference to the just quoted passage from Merleau-Ponty, McDowell chides:

“Once I have separated *me*—the thinking thing I am—from *this body*, it is too late to try to fix things by talking about the former merging into the latter. No one but a philosopher would take seriously the thought that in perception, or in action for that matter, I merge into my body. The fact is that there is nothing for me to mean by ‘I’ ...except the very thing I would be referring to (a bit strangely) if I said ‘this body’). If I give ‘this body’ the reference it must have in Merleau-Ponty’s context, it is wrong to say I merge into that; I simply *am* that. This is mere sanity.” 2007a, 350)

For McDowell the attempt to isolate in human experience a non-conceptual “ground floor” of embodied coping, quite distinct from the rational, conceptual activity of the intellect, promotes an absurd alienation of body and mind. Better then to recognize from the start that human experience is inextricably pervaded by concepts.

3. How concepts shape our experience: the modest thesis

Let’s have a closer look at McDowellian thesis (1). It seems to me that talk of the “pervasiveness” of concepts is importantly ambiguous; right away I want to distinguish two claims. One of these seems more suitably put by saying that our concepts pervasively “shape” our experience: how we experience things—i.e., how they *appear* to us—*depends on* what conceptual capacities we have, or are exercising, and on what sorts of reasons we do or would give for what we’re doing. That is: things would have (for example) *looked* differently to me than they actually do, if I hadn’t had certain conceptual capacities I actually do, or hadn’t been acting (as I was) in ways contingent on my being disposed to offer or accept certain reasons for what I was doing.

Now this seems to me quite correct, for reasons I will explain shortly. But there is another thesis (for which the “pervasiveness” talk is perhaps better suited) that I take to be distinct from this, and stronger. This is the claim McDowell puts by saying that “all content” of “world-disclosing” experience (“every aspect” of it) is “present in a form in which it is suitable to constitute the content of conceptual capacities.” (2007a, 346-8) This strikes me as much more questionable.

So: the two “Pervasiveness of Concepts” theses I want to distinguish are these:

(1a) Conceptual Shaping. Our experience is conceptually shaped—that is, often or almost always, how we (normal adult human beings) experience things (e.g., how they look to us—and broadly speaking, how they *appear* to us) depends on what conceptual capacities we have, or are exercising.

(1b) Conceptual Readiness. All experiential content is present in a form in which it can be the content of a process in which corresponding conceptual (i.e., inferential) capacities are exercised. Every aspect of experiential content is “conceptually ready”—i.e., ready to figure distinctly in conceptual thought.

Now first, what are we to make of (1a) the “Shaping” claim? Whatever its merits, it does not seem that examples like McDowell’s Frisbee-catching adequately support it. Granted, I am typically ready, if asked, to offer some reason for what I’m doing. But it is not clear how that is supposed to show that the concepts expressed in my answer were somehow previously shaping the content of my experience. Nevertheless, we can make it clear, in various ways, that things typically would not appear to us as they do, were we not exercising some conceptual understanding at the time. If this modest thesis is what is meant by saying that concepts are “shaping” our experience, then I think it will be hard to deny.

Here is one way of making the point. It is not unusual for me to be looking for something. I don’t just mean that I am often *searching for something I’ve lost*—although sadly that is common enough too. I just mean that as part of what I am doing when I go about my mundane activities (e.g., sorting the laundry, retrieving my suitcase from the baggage carousel, getting ready to leave the apartment, waiting at the intersection, preparing to exit the freeway), I am looking for something: the matching sock, the suitcase, my keys, a change of the light, the University Ave exit. This needn’t involve a reaction to some failure in my normal ways of getting things done. In such circumstances, I’m coping about as skillfully as I ever do. But still, how things look to me depends on what I am looking for and how I am looking for it. And *that* I am looking for what I am looking for depends on my being disposed to give and consider reasons for what I am doing—e.g., reasons involving the concepts of sock, suitcase, keys, traffic light, and so on. Thus things would not have looked to me as they did, had I not been doing something that involved my grasp of concepts.

We may put the idea more generally (and without talk of “looking for” something). What I look *at* varies with the *task* in which I am engaged. Since *how things look to me* depends on what I look at, it follows that my tasks shape how things look to me. And typically I would not be engaged in these tasks, if I were not inclined to give or accept various *reasons* for what I am doing. But that involves dispositions to employ *concepts* in various ways. So it follows that how I am disposed to deploy concepts shapes my experience.

But even if this upholds a modest version of McDowell’s Pervasiveness of Concepts thesis (1a), does it support (2)—the Pervasiveness of Self-Consciousness? Here again I think it’s important to distinguish (at least) two theses.

(2a) Rational-Pragmatic Self-Consciousness. Normal human beings, when awake and active, are typically disposed to cite some reason for what they are doing that involves referring to themselves, and absent such dispositions, would not be doing what they are doing.

(2b) No Spatial Experience without Self-Criticism. Perceptual experience has content at all and constitutes “outer experience,” “awareness of aspects of the world,” only if subjects of perceptual experience can think about whether conditions are suitable for judging how things are by how they appear to them.⁵

I think (2a) is fairly unobjectionable, for reasons similar to those already mentioned. It seems to me that, typically, I wouldn't be looking for what I am looking for (in the sense earlier invoked) if I did not take myself to have reasons to do this, and that involves a readiness *think thoughts about myself*. Though we have to qualify such claims by recognizing there are cases in which people merely confabulate reasons for what they're doing, I don't think a broad skepticism here will get very far. (Usually, when I *think* I'm looking for my keys so I can use the car, *I really am*.) So I do not contest (2a). However, again, (2b) seems to me much more worrisome. Later I will return to this, and to the issue of self-consciousness. But first, I want to examine the Pervasiveness of *Concepts* theses a little more.

4. But do concepts *constitutively* shape experience?

One may be willing to go along with my rationale for accepting the modest sort of “conceptual shaping” asserted in (1a), but fear that this fails to address an important part of what is at issue. To get clearer about this, we should turn to some of Dreyfus' criticisms—in which he denies that concepts are ordinarily involved in experience, because it commonly has no “as-structure.” This will help us to recognize further distinctions needed to navigate the controversy.

Just what might I mean by saying I perceive (or see, or experience) something as something, or that it appears to me as something? Here's one way of interpreting this. Usually, awake, eyes open, I am looking at things before and around me. That is not to say that I am always *examining* or *scrutinizing* them—just that I am generally looking at something or other as long as I am seeing. In the ordinary course of events, I am often looking (even if only glancingly) at things in my environment (say) a doorknob (or a glass, a pen, a spoon), and they look somehow to me. So, for example, commonly enough I look (at least briefly) at what I reach for. Further, were I asked, about one of these things, what *that* was, then (unless I had reason to think otherwise) I would have said ‘a doorknob’ (‘a glass,’ ‘a pen,’ and so on)—without much further ado, that is, without any need to examine the thing in question, or get a much *better* or *closer* look at it.

(Though in order to grasp the reference of ‘that’ I would likely *continue* to look at, or *look back at* the thing in question.) But it seems that my ability to *identify in thought* what I was looking at is secured by how it had *already* looked to me. Where I do identify, or am merely able (and ready) to identify something as Φ from how it looks to me, without needing to do anything to make *more* of it apparent to me, I see no objection to saying that it has *appeared to me as Φ* , or that I have *seen it as Φ* . Is it unusual for me to be able to visually identify things I have looked at? It seems fairly common. And insofar as many of the thoughts that actually spontaneously occur to me in the course of my day—spoken aloud or kept to myself—involve thinking something *about what I then happen to be looking at*, and these thoughts only manifest abilities of visual identification that were already there, this sort of “appearing-as” will not be unusual. This is not to say that, for every period during which things appeared somehow to you, there is some definite and numerous list of values of ‘ Φ ’ answering to the question, “As *what* did things appear to you, during this time?” Still, it is common for us to have at least some such dispositions to classify what appears to us from how it appears.

Here is a second way to take “appearing as” talk. The way I look at things as I go about my business, how my gaze “locks onto” them or “travels over” them, plays a part in how they look to me, and *thereby* in how I am *treating* them—what I am treating them as. So the way I look at a door in front of me as I approach my apartment, or the way I look at what lies on the table where I’m sitting before I reach for things there, or how I look at what’s in the kitchen drawer as I prepare breakfast, or at the traffic light as I approach the intersection, will make the doorknob, the glass, the pen, the spoon, or the light, appear somehow to me—and in such a way that I am able *treat* them as a doorknob, as a glass, and so on. (For instance, in each of these cases the appearance to some extent facilitates my reaching for the items in question and handling them in a manner suitable to things of its type.) And when something *appears to me in such a way as to facilitate my treating it as Φ* , it seems to me we might also speak of something’s being seen as, or appearing as Φ .⁶

Now we can admit this second, *practical* sort of “appearing as Φ ” does not entail the first, (let’s say) “*doxic*” sort of “appearing as Φ ,” which is involved in visual identification. (The doorknob could appear to you in such a way as to enable you to treat it as a doorknob, though you are at a loss to classify it as such.) But *radical* dissociations are unusual in this sense: a person who regularly had practical appearing-as- Φ with *little or no* doxic appearing-as- Φ would be suffering from visual agnosia, which is uncommon.

So I would propose we recognize and distinguish these sorts of “appearing as”:

Something ***doxically* appears to me as Φ** just when I am disposed (should the question arise, and absent a reason for doubt) to identify it in

thought as Φ from how it appears to me, without needing to make it *more* apparent to me (e.g., without needing to “look harder at it”).

Something ***practically appears to me as Φ*** just when the manner in which it appears to me (e.g., how it looks to me) facilitates my treating it as Φ .

The distinction is rough and invites many further questions.⁷ But the idea seems defensible that *some* sort of “as-structures,” understood along these lines, are pretty common in our experience. So I can’t entirely join with Dreyfus’ criticisms of McDowell, since—to focus on Dreyfus’ example—it seems to me I do, in some sense, ordinarily see doorknobs as doorknobs. For how they appear to me commonly prepares me to identify them as doorknobs without further ado, and helps me in other ways to treat them in a manner befitting doorknobs.

Still it’s not clear how deeply this sets me at odds with Dreyfus. I will come back to this. But first, the claim that “doxic appearing-as” is common contains a further ambiguity that needs to be flagged. One might agree that doxic appearances are commonplace, but think also that there’s a sense in which it is at least conceptually possible that things might look to someone just as they do to me as I do my laundry, drive to work, and so on, even though he is *entirely without my conceptual capacities*. You might think this, because you think that what I’ve labeled doxic appearing-as can ultimately be cleanly factored into two components: a “purely sensory” manner of appearance independent of all conceptual capacities, and an intellectual component, conceptual in nature.

Now I certainly want to distinguish between something’s *visually appearing as Φ* to me, and my *judging it to be Φ* (a distinction manifest, for instance, in the phenomena of blindsight and visual illusion). And I do want to allow that things can visually (more broadly: sensorily) appear somehow to creatures who lack conceptual capacities in any demanding sense. But it is not clear to me that the sort of “factoring” view just sketched is correct. However, this is not because I am convinced by the McDowellian criticism that such a view must leave unaccountable how sensory appearances could serve to warrant belief. Admittedly, I can (for example) justify my belief that *this is a nail* (and that *this one’s longer than that one*), only if I can make judgments about (and thus exercise some concept of) how it looks to me—a justification I might give by saying something like, “I think this is a nail (and this one’s longer than that one), since *that is how it looks to me*.” But it is left unclear just why such remarks can succeed as justifications of belief, only if the manner in which the nails appear, from which I judge them to be a certain way, could not have been experienced by those whose lack of inferential abilities would deprive them of any *concepts* of nail or length. Why, for example, can’t something appear constant in size and shape, in a manner typical of nails, to someone without the relevant inferential capacities? And why not suppose it is *that* very manner of appearance of which someone speaks, when using the phrase ‘how it looks to me’ in the context of the

sort of justification just illustrated? For I may say something looks to me “like a nail” when it appears to me (visually) constant in size and shape in a manner typical of nails—i.e., it looks to me the way nails look.

Nevertheless, I do doubt that the “factoring” view of doxic appearance is correct. It is not correct, I believe, if the following is true. First, there is often a difference between how something appears to you when you *recognize it as Φ* and when you don’t (think of the experience of recognizing—as momentarily you did not—a face, a partly occluded object, the Gestalt in a drawing). And for something to appear to you as *recognizably Φ* in a given context is more than for it to appear to you shaped and situated in a manner that a Φ typically would. Second, the manner of appearance on which judging something to be Φ is based is just such a “recognitional” appearance. And finally, at least some capacities for such sensory recognition require the possession of concepts, because they can arise only through acquiring abilities to make judgments that deploy these concepts. (Consider, e.g.: “That tone of voice sounds *sarcastic*”; “This looks like an *antique*”; “This tastes *metallic*”; “That looks like a *chess set*.” The idea would be that these may rightly be considered reports of *recognitional appearances* whose *range* (the variety of instances thus recognizable) depends on having acquired a grasp of the concepts expressed in the judgments they afford.

These matters are not straightforwardly resolved. But what we’ve said allows us to distinguish two “Conceptual Shaping” claims, of different strengths.

(1a (i)) Modest Shaping. Commonly, if we did not have or were not exercising certain conceptual capacities, things would not have appeared to us as they do.

(1a (ii)) Constitutive Shaping. Necessarily, if some creatures lack our conceptual capacities, things do not appear to them in just the manner things commonly do appear to us, and on the basis of which we classify them.

I endorse the first, modest thesis because of what I said about the common connections among: *how things look to us*; *what we’re looking at*; *what we take ourselves to be doing*. And since I accept that doxic appearances are widespread, I would also endorse even the stronger, constitutive thesis, provided that a thorough-going “factoring” view of them is shown to be mistaken. (However, I do not claim to have shown that here; it needs more investigation.) In any case, I am disinclined to contest (1a)—“Shaping” Claims—of either strength. And I have already indicated I have no quarrel with (2a)—“Rational-Pragmatic Self-Consciousness.” So my suspicions will instead be trained on McDowell’s Pervasiveness (1b)—the “Conceptual Readiness” thesis and (2b) “No Spatial Experience without Self-Criticism.”

5. Is all experience “conceptually ready”?

According to Pervasiveness (1b) every distinct content of normal, adult human perceptual experience is present in a form in which it is ready to figure distinctly in the exercise of conceptual capacities. For all such content is presumably the content of a “world-disclosing” experience, as McDowell understands this notion. And (1b) says all such content (“every aspect” of it) is “conceptually ready.” There is a question about how to interpret talk of ‘content’ here. One might think: the *content* of experience is, in some sense, *what you experience*, but is not simply to be identified with all that the things you experience *in fact are*; rather it somehow has to do with *how you experience them*. (The things you experience can have features or aspects that don’t figure in the content of your experience of them.) The content of perceptual experience would then in some sense be a *manner* in which what perceptually appears to you does appear to you. Now ways of appearing (thus the “contents”) I mean to discuss in connection with (1b) are not mere sense impressions, uninterpreted sensations, or the like, but something sufficient for a kind of perceptual intentionality, understood as “object directedness,” an experience of things in space. (The notion of *representation* I will leave to the side.) What I will argue is that there are varying manners of visual appearance we commonly enjoy, accessible in reflection, in virtue of which experience is directed at spatial objects, but which are not ready to serve as the diverse contents of the exercise of correlatively distinct conceptual capacities.

I have already appealed to the notions of “looking at” and of “how things look.” Let me recall and expand a little on the phenomenology I have presented. How things look to you (e.g., your surroundings as you stand on the street corner) almost always depends on what you’re looking *at* (say, the on-coming cars) which often depends on what you’re looking *for* (say, a break in the traffic, so you can cross). What you’re looking at (hence how things look) is undergoing frequent change. But to the extent we can speak (if only roughly) of what you’re looking at during a given time, *more* appears to you (looks somehow to you) than just what you’re looking *at*. When you look at that car coming towards you, you’re not looking at anything *right around it*. And you’re also not looking at the driver’s door, or the right headlight. But both are in an area that looks somehow to you. And (obviously) what you are not looking at does not appear to you *in nearly as much detail* as what you are looking at (not as much of what appears is apparent to you). We may speak of the area apparent to you over a given time as your “visual field,” as long as we do not pretend that this entitles us to assume that area has precisely delineated boundaries, and as long as we do not forget that this “field” is typically in flux with the direction of your gaze, and that what you are looking at within it appears very differently than what you are not looking at.

Some will want to mark this difference in appearance by speaking of “visual focus” and “periphery.” But I find this misleading. For “periphery” suggests

something at or near an *edge*, located as far away as one can get from what you are looking at without venturing into the realm of what is *hidden, non-apparent*. However, the apparent-but-not-now-being-looked-at area is not confined to some “border region.” The so-called “periphery” is found *throughout* the visual field—*within* what one is looking at, as well as *right around it*. (Similarly, it could be misleading to speak of the non-focally apparent as “background,” inasmuch as it sounds odd to say the apparent area *within* the seen “figure” lies in the “background.”) So instead of speaking of what appears “peripherally” (or in the “background”), I will just speak of what “non-focally” appears, and the way it appears.

So: during a given time, some of what appears to you is *focally* and some is *non-focally* apparent, and what *had been* non-focal *is becoming* focal, and *vice-versa*. That is, I want to say, a fact about the *structure* of visual appearance, in the following sense. First, your experience is characterized by this feature even as how things appear to you *otherwise* differs enormously, and that variation consists in different ways of being a changing focal/non-focal appearance—different determinates of that determinable, different ways of “filling out the structure,” so to speak. (So, e.g., the specific focal/non-focal change in appearance involved in looking at a fork will differ from that involved in looking at a spoon.) Second, episodes of experience *not* possessed of this character—either because the appearance is too homogeneous to offer anything to look at (a Ganzfeld), or because one holds one’s gaze fixed (or nearly so) for several seconds or more—are *atypical*, and *functionally inferior* to ordinary vision. (That is to say: to do much with vision you need variety in what you look at, and you need to look around a bit.)

Now the fact that visual appearance exhibits this structural character can be sufficient to give it *intentionality* on a reasonable construal of what that requires. For one central (if vague) understanding of intentionality takes it to involve a *directedness to objects*—a particular way in which an experience may be said to be *of an object*. And the notion of intentionality is also connected with a certain family of contrasts in terms of which what has intentionality is assessable: truth and falsity (for judgments or beliefs); satisfaction and frustration (for desires or intentions); accuracy/correctness and inaccuracy/incorrectness/illusoriness (for perceptual experience). Visual experience can count as intentional by these standards just in virtue of being a determination of the kind of dynamic structure I’ve described (the movement to-and-fro from non-focal to focal appearance). For when something non-focally apparent is looked at and becomes focally apparent, and when it again recedes into non-focal appearance as one’s gaze then shifts elsewhere (only to become focally apparent once more when looked at again), there is a kind of perceptual *object constancy*. That is, the way something appears to you changes, but because of the *manner* of change in appearance, what appears itself appears to remain the same. There is some sort of stability in what appears to you (or can appear to you) through change in appearance that is sufficient for you to enjoy an

appearance “of an object,” for you to have experience “directed at” it, in the sense labeled “intentional.” Moreover, as something’s appearance thus changes from non-focal to focal and back, it is better apparent to you, or appears to you not as well (you see it better or more poorly). And for something to be better apparent to you, when you get a better look at it, is for it to appear to you accurately or correctly (in some respect, to some extent). And sometimes when it better appears to you, the way it now appears is incompatible with the way it had appeared to you (when you had not as good a look at it), so that this prior manner of appearance is revealed to have been somehow inaccurate, incorrect or illusory.

The overall point is this. Object constancy is inherent to typical ways of filling out the structure of appearance I have identified, which are also inseparable from certain kinds of normative assessability—“better” and “worse” appearances. It follows that having appearance with this structure is commonly sufficient for having experience that is object directed and assessable for accuracy in a sense reasonably deemed adequate for talk of “intentionality” to be apt. We are thus concerned here with a manner of appearance, with a kind of experiential “content,” which is enough to give experience intentionality, so that the content in question is “intentional” on a reasonable construal, and the experience is *of things in space*—“outer” experience.

The question I now want to ask first is: are the variations in manner of appearance to which I have just drawn attention always *present in a form in which they can variously figure in distinct exercises of my conceptual capacities*? For this I will assume the following condition must be met.

For every such variation in manner of appearance I enjoy, I must be able to identify in thought a difference in “*as what*” something appears to me; that is, I must be able to distinguish the ways of appearing so as to show them to be different *doxic* appearances. (For only then is the specific content of experience always present in a form in which it can be the content of my exercise of a correlative *conceptual* capacity.)

Now, I can distinguish in thought all manners of appearance doxically only if I can do this for variations in *non-focal* appearance. But how will I accomplish this feat? I will take one of three courses. (A) I will *look at* what had non-focally appeared, and identify *as what* it *then focally* appears to me, assuming that this is also *as what* it had *non-focally* appeared. (B) I will keep my gaze steadily fixed on something that focally appears, and try to identify *as what* something then *non-focally appears* to me. (C) I will let my gaze roam normally and try to identify *as what* things non-focally appear *while the way what is before me appears rapidly alters*.

If I take route (A), then the target manner of appearance has been altered, and the doxic appearance I thus identify is not the *original non-focal* appearance,

but a *new focal* appearance brought into being by the direction of my gaze. The assumption will often be unwarranted that the target (non-focal) manner of appearance was the same (doxic) appearance as that which ensued on looking at what had appeared non-focally. For it's often that case that, for some values of ' Φ ,' you will need to look *at* something (and thereby change its appearance) if you are to identify it as Φ , from its appearance.

If we shift to option (B), we also run into problems. First, it's *unusual* to stare truly fixedly at something before us. And if I do this, in an effort to identify *as what* things *non-focally* appear to me, the resultant non-focal appearance will typically not be identical to some appearance more briefly experienced, when I let my gaze pursue its normal, restless course. (Let us assume here that, as is typically the case, the appearance of the non-focal area is far from homogeneous (in the way a uniformly lit and colored flat surface would be).) So, I might consider say, the appearance of what I'm not looking at when faced with a page full of text. The word I now *stare* at does not present an appearance that matches the interior non-focal appearance of that word when I read it normally, as I scanned across the line. It inevitably now becomes more apparent to me than it did then; it appears in more detail somehow. Nor is it clear to me that the appearance of what *surrounds* what I'm looking at matches some normal fleeting non-focal appearance. So I should not trust attempts to identify *as what* things non-focally appeared to me before in normal vision, by resort to some non-focal appearance later experienced while *staring* at some bit of the same scene.

Second, when I stare at a word on the page and struggle to keep my *gaze* from illicitly straying where I cast my *thoughts*, I am scarcely able to identify *as what* anything variously *non-focally* appears to me. I may, of course, say to myself something like, "That (entire) area appears to me as containing *these* distinct shapes in *these* distinct locations." But I really have no idea just *which* distinct shapes and locations would be specified by these 'these's.' This is clear, when, with my gaze still rigidly fixed, I try to break up this identification, saying, ostensibly about the variously non-focally apparent: "*That* appears to me *this* shape *there*, *that* appears to me *this* shape *there*, *that* appears...etc." This would be a sham identification; I find I literally do not know what I'm talking about, in mouthing those words. In vain would I pretend to identify in such manner, for use in thought, some set of distinct shapes and locations, matching the heterogeneity of non-focal appearance, as I fixedly stare at some word on the page. I am aware of differences in how some area non-focally appears to me. But I cannot in thought identify *what those differences are*, by means of predicates whose interpretationa reflect the variation in appearance, so as to express correspondingly various thoughts that may distinctly figure, at least briefly, in my inferential capacities.

Well, why don't I *stop staring*, and take option (C)? Why don't I try, as I am reading a page of text, to identify *as what* things non-focally appear to me *as this changes*? This is hopeless. There is such rapid change in this non-focal field of

appearance that any attempt to quickly fix in thought constantly altering sets of identifications specifying *as what* things non-focally appear, supposedly covering the entire heterogeneous flux of this appearance, is plainly futile. If I couldn't perform such an identification even when staring—freezing change in non-focal appearance as much as possible—how in the world am I supposed to do it when change in appearance is enormously *speeded up*?

If these remarks stand, they yield an argument that manners of appearance that structure vision, sufficient for intentionality, are not “conceptually ready.” To see this, first note also: there is no definite boundary between the focally and non-focally apparent that would allow us to isolate the one from the other in a course of actual experience, without any change in the character of appearance. In natural vision, the two aspects of appearance are inseparable parts of a dynamic whole: something's becoming better apparent to you. Thus the non-focal appearance is inseparable from a *structure* of appearance that (if my earlier remarks are correct) brings intentionality along with it. However (as we have just seen), the very character of differences in non-focal appearance means that these are not *in a form* suitable for functioning in conceptual capacities. Non-focal appearances need to be *transformed*: they must give way to (and form a temporal whole with) appearance of a *different* character. Often, only as one looks at what had been apparent-but-not-looked-at can a different manner of appearance arise that would allow one to identify in thought what appears as Φ —and thus deploy a concept of Φ . The conclusion is that there are non-focal variations in appearance, which (because they cannot occur but in the context of a structure sufficient for intentionality) are sufficient for a kind of “intentional content” (spatial experience), but which are *not “conceptually ready”*; they are not in a form in which they can serve as the contents of distinct conceptual capacities.⁸

Now this will count against McDowell's (2b), if we assume (as seems reasonable) that that spatial experience that we have, to which my argument applies, is also what he calls “world-disclosing.” For then it will be false that every aspect of the content of world-disclosing experience is conceptually ready, as (2b) claims. One might try to deflect my objection by recalling that, according to McDowell, “world-disclosing” experience is necessarily “categorially unified” in some Kantian sense, and proposing that only what I have called “doxic appearings as Φ ” are to count as “categorially unified experiences.” But this wouldn't really help, even if some sort of *constitutive* shaping holds. For assuming the manner of doxic visual appearance requires the sort of structure I said makes object constancy possible, and that necessarily includes varying *non-focal* appearance, still the doxic appearance will always include *some* manner of appearance, essential to its intentionality, which *isn't* conceptually ready. So again, it's not true that *every aspect* of the content of experience is conceptually ready.

The basic point I'm making here concerns a structural (and thus "pervasive") fact about appearance, and locates a difficulty in McDowell's position just where it was supposed to draw its strength. McDowell argues that we must recognize the pervasiveness of concepts in experience, or else we will not be able to make sense of the epistemic role of experience in supporting beliefs about the things experienced. But now it emerges that, on the contrary, to make sense of this we must recognize an important way in which concepts do *not* pervade experience. For it is precisely through this movement back-and-forth between non-focal appearance and focal appearance, involved in looking at things and in thereby making them *better apparent* to us, that we are able to identify them in thought, and so make use of appearances in our conceptual capacities. And yet it is essential to this very structure of appearance that it always contain manners of appearance that are not concept-ready. Further, this same structure of appearance is required for the *justification* of perceptual judgments. For it is through making things better apparent to us, by getting a better look at them, that we *confirm and correct* our judgments about it. Thus, the epistemic function of experience can be fulfilled only if, in a sense, experience always *outruns* the application of our concepts and the operations of intellect, *transforming* itself in such a way as to make that application and those operations possible.

Now that I have, in this section, turned from indicating where I can agree with McDowell (on (1a) and (2a)), to arguing for my divergence from him (on (1b)—"Conceptual Readiness"), it may seem that I am also beginning to sidle up to Dreyfus. My reasons for opposing that thesis differ from his. But I believe they could be extended so as to make closer contact with his concerns, by appeal to my distinction between doxic and practical "appearing-as." (Though doing this will require we agree not to confine the use of "as" talk to doxic appearances (as it seems Dreyfus wants to do).)

First recall that appearing *practically* as Φ does not entail appearing *doxically* as Φ . And we can find the two coming apart when we consider what non-focally appears. Here is a simple example. Remember: *how things look* to me depends on what I'm *looking at*, which often depends on what I'm *looking for*, which depends on *what reason* I take myself to have for what I am doing. Suppose what I'm looking *at* is the kitchen drawer—and then, what's *in* the drawer. And what I'm looking for is a fork, and the reason I take myself to have for doing this (and other things I'm doing) is: *I'm setting the table*. How do things then appear to me? Well, when I open the kitchen drawer what appears to me does not right away *doxically* appear to me as a fork. (My kitchen drawer is a mess, and I am not, as yet, disposed to identify as a fork what appears to me there, from how it looks). And yet my gaze is drawn to where, in an area *non-focally apparent* to me, a fork lies awaiting discovery. We may say that here something non-focally apparent *practically* appeared to me as a fork, since it appeared to me in a manner that facilitated my treating it as a fork, by, in the first instance, enabling me to look at it so as to recognize it as a fork. (For looking at

something *is* a way of treating it.) We may say generally that whenever the non-focally apparent “attracts” our gaze so as to make it look to us recognizable as Φ , this will count among what was practically, but not (yet) doxically, apparent as Φ . (The practical appearance as Φ may *culminate* in a doxic appearance as Φ .) In terms more congenial to Dreyfus, I might say that the non-focally apparent appears to me so as to “solicit” my gaze. This sort of response to the “solicitations” of what I see, when engaged in some everyday task, is commonplace; it is pervasive.

Thus there is a way in which my earlier argument against the Conceptual Readiness thesis can be extended to support Dreyfus’ claim against it, which (as I understand it) holds that *what we perceive* typically includes things *soliciting the exercise of our skills*, as this is appropriate to our tasks. For the highly specific manner of solicitations perceived that arise in the context of our activity is not in a form suited to be the content of our conceptual capacities—contrary to McDowell’s claim. To put things a bit more in my terms, the apparent *aspect* under which things attract my gaze and facilitate other activities (i.e., specifically *as what* they are practically apparent to me)—this is often nothing I am disposed to *identify in thought*. To further join my argument to Dreyfus’, I would need to add that often enough, for some values of ‘ Φ ,’ even when something is *focally* apparent to me as Φ (I am looking at it, and it appears to me as Φ), it is only practically, not doxically, thus apparent to me. For example, something may focally—but (merely) practically—appear to me *as an obstacle*, or *an opening*, or *reachable*, or *out of reach*. For I may just happen to have no inclination to *think* of what thus appears to me *in these terms*. But that doesn’t matter to the appearance.

It may be that Dreyfus will decline my overtures, since he wants to avoid “as” talk in connection with perceiving “solicitations.” However, I am not convinced this is more than a terminological problem. But here I will mention a qualm I have (which maybe Dreyfus doesn’t share). Notice that I do not oppose McDowell over Conceptual Readiness by affirming that vision has “*non-conceptual* content.” For, as I understand it, the same manner of appearance that enables me to identify something in thought as Φ may also enable me *otherwise* to *treat* it as Φ . I do not claim to discern within this manner of appearance some special distinct *component* (and some “layer of content”) which, in isolation, is insufficient for conceptual identification, but adequate for other jobs. I would not be interested in defending (and would be suspicious of) the idea that the way something looks to me when it doxically appears to me as Φ includes *as a proper part*, a merely practical appearance as Φ . If anything, I would want to say that doxic appearances are just a special case of practical appearances that generally involve a certain use of language. In any case, I do not base my objections to McDowell on the notion that the content of sensory experience is either wholly non-conceptual or can be analyzed into conceptual and non-conceptual parts.

6. Is self-critical rationality required for spatial experience?

I now turn to the “Pervasiveness of Self-Consciousness” claim (2b). Again, I have no beef with (2a): I do agree that we are generally disposed to offer some reason for what we are doing, which involves a propensity to think first-person thoughts, and otherwise, we wouldn’t be doing what we actually do. So I accept the idea that there is *some* sort of practical self-consciousness implicit in our ordinary activities. But I am much less sanguine about (2b), the claim that “outer experience” requires self-critical rationality. Here too (as with (1b)) I think there is a genuine problem of intellectualism.

Recall that McDowell points out that something more than mere “receptivity” is needed for sensory or perceptual content. Merely to register “impressions”—whether we think of these as subjectively discernible *sensations* or as causal impacts on our sensory receptors—is not to perceive or to experience things in any sense that makes talk of (intentional) *content* in order. I would certainly agree with that. And I would agree that it’s still not enough for intentionality if we just add to the sensory stimuli some regular discriminatory response to them. But it’s far from clear that (as McDowell holds) nothing but self-critical rationality will do to fill this gap—that one won’t have genuine visual *content*, until one has a concept of (e.g.) what constitute “suitable conditions” for seeing the color, shape, size, or position of things, a capacity to consider whether these conditions obtain, and to withhold judgment that things are as they appear, when one believes suitable conditions are absent. Unless McDowell has shown that nothing short of this will give one perceptual intentionality, or experiential content, then we lack reason to accept (2b). And I do not see how the gap would be filled by consideration of the ways in which concepts “pervade” our (normal, human, adult) experience. So there is inadequate support for the notion that outer experience requires self-critical rationality. Actually, the previous discussion helps us to see that we can go further: we have reason to think this (2b) thesis is mistaken.

To show this, we need only make clear there is something less than self-critical rationality that is enough to make sense experience intentional (and to make it “outer”) in some recognizable sense. If what I said earlier was on the right track, we may speak of a kind of perceptual content and intentionality where we find certain forms of *object constancy* in experience.⁹ Through changes in how things appear to one, an unchanging shape, or position, or size, or distance is apparent. Where there is such object constancy, we may say (in the case of vision) that one sees something’s shape, position or size *well* or *poorly*, its shape (etc.) is *better apparent* in some conditions than others, and that it appears to us *accurately* or *inaccurately*, *correctly* or *incorrectly*. And so we have, in some sense, “outer experience,” “an awareness of aspects of the world.” The question then is whether there is something *more* than mere “impressions” or “sensations,” but *short of* McDowellian self-critical rationality, which will make a

creature's experience exhibit such constancies and be suitable for such assessment.

I propose that the right ability for *movement* is sufficient to get us beyond mere impressions to object directedness. The idea is already latent in my discussion. I have emphasized that how things look to us depends on how we look at things, and that the continual upheaval in appearances wrought by this activity of looking—of making the non-focal focal and losing the focal to the non-focal as the gaze shifts—renders the appearance of objects and their identification in thought possible. It now may be explicitly pointed out that this activity consists partly in *bodily movement*. An ability to move (one's eyes, head, whole body) is part of the ability to "get a better look" at something—to move in such a way as to make its shape, movement, size, or location *better apparent* to one. Thus we have a kind of activity (not mere "receptivity"), which is sufficient for sensory intentionality, but which doesn't require self-critical rationality. So my claim is, first, that there is such a capacity for generating sense-experience by movement, which is sufficient for making things appear to one in a way fairly regarded as an experience of space. And second, the exercise of such sensorimotor skills does not require one be disposed to endorse, consider, or reconsider *reasons* for acting this way or that, or for judging that something is the case. *Sensorimotor* skills sufficient to make shape, location, motion etc. apparent to you thus do not require self-critical rationality in McDowell's sense. So (2b) is false.¹⁰

Likely McDowellian concerns seem to me answerable. Suppose someone objects that we can identify no "common core" of *content* shared between beings who are and those who are not possessed of active self-critical rationality. This can simply be granted. We can say that while both sets of beings are capable of making the shape, size, position, movement, and distance of things apparent to themselves through their own movement, the way things appear to the two may never be just the same. For the way things appear to the self-conscious reasoners will inevitably be shaped by interests and activities not available to the other group, in the manner suggested when I argued for Pervasiveness (1a). So if talk of the "content of our experience" is meant to get at the way things appear to us, there will inevitably be a difference in content. But this is quite compatible with the alternative I have proposed to McDowell's (2b).

Will someone here raise the specter of a "recoil into the Myth of the Given"? Just what alleged errors go by the label, and which really *are* errors, needs more explicit, detailed consideration. I have already indicated some of doubts on this score. But here I will just add that there is no incoherence in maintaining that we who have the capacity to make assertions about how things appear to us in justifying our claims about how things are, and creatures who *don't* have the wherewithal to engage in justification, can all share a capacity to make our spatial environments better apparent to us through our movements.

This conception of “outer experience” I propose allows us to preserve a distinction between the sensory and intellectual, but without depriving the sensory of intentionality or degrading it to the status of mere sensation. We can say that what suffices for *sensory* intentionality are sensorimotor abilities, and what is necessary and sufficient for *intellectual* intentionality are classificatory, analogical, and inferential abilities—and a creature can have the first, without the second. To have the second is (in McDowell’s words) “to know your way around the space of reasons.” To have the first is just to know your way around the space in which you *literally live*.

This way of keeping the distinction between the sensory and the intellectual seems to me to have certain advantages over McDowell’s picture. First, it does without the dubious notion of “raw” sense impressions, and obviates the problem of how to get sensory intentionality—an experience of space—by somehow adding distinctively conceptual abilities to “uninterpreted” sensory what-nots. Second, it better allows us to honor our kinship and continuity with (while respecting our difference from) other animals, and our own younger selves. We can all have “outer experience” on a sensorimotor basis, even if only relatively mature humans are active self-critical thinkers.¹¹

However, a doubt may loom. We might maintain the conviction (perhaps at work in McDowell) that it makes sense to hold some creature to *norms*—even to speak of its seeing *correctly* or *accurately* or getting a *better* or *worse* look at things—only if that creature *also* itself has *some* appreciation of the norms by which it is assessed. (Unless of course those norms are simply imposed on it by other normatively assessable creatures, as humans impose standards that determine, e.g., what makes a “good racehorse.”) But how could normative “appreciation” be found in anything but a capacity for self-critical thought, alive to the demand for justification? Now I don’t think it goes without question that normative assessability requires normative self-consciousness. But we also should not too quickly conclude that the criticism of McDowell I have just aired leaves one no way to hold onto this idea in some form, if indeed we should. How this might be so will emerge in the course of the next section.

7. Self-Consciousness and the “Anonymity” of Motor understanding

I now want to return to Merleau-Ponty, and offer an interpretation of the passage (earlier quoted) that figures in the Dreyfus/McDowell dispute. I do this partly because I don’t want to see interest in Merleau-Ponty’s views dimmed by disfigurement, but also because I believe their judicious interpretation can enrich the dialogue in ways that do not emerge in the Dreyfus/McDowell exchange. I wish to show not only that Merleau-Ponty does *not* subscribe (as McDowell thinks) to an embarrassing dualism of “person” and “lived body”—a form of the “myth of the disembodied intellect.” I will also argue that Merleau-Ponty is, in a way, more Kantian than either McDowell or Dreyfus recognize—though Merleau-Ponty’s “Kantianism” (if you can call it that) is determinedly non-intellectualist. To

explain why I say this will add another twist to my discussion of the Pervasiveness of Self-Consciousness theme. To anticipate: for Merleau-Ponty there *is* a form of (what we might call) self-consciousness generally bound up with perceptual experience—though not the sort of *intellectual* self-consciousness involved in McDowell’s “self-critical rationality.” To see how this is so we will need to grasp an expanded sense of ‘understanding.’

A thorough defense of my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty would require many more words than I could reasonably ask for here. So I will have to be somewhat schematic, leaving more detail to another occasion. But I hope that what I can say now will be enough to make my interpretation plausible and enhance its philosophical interest.

Readers familiar with *Phenomenology of Perception* may be puzzled that McDowell finds Merleau-Ponty’s crucial error in some doctrine that sunders the person I am from some “person-like” thing that is my body. One might have thought him passionately concerned to *contest* just such dualist notions. Doesn’t he famously assert “I am my body”? (198/231/231, 206/239/239) Of course, Merleau-Ponty’s view *may* be profoundly inconsistent, or even—as McDowell hints—insane. But before reaching such dire conclusions we should see if we can find some more coherent position in his book.

McDowell’s view that Merleau-Ponty subscribes to a dualism of (intellectual) person and (bodily) person-like thing derives from the passage cited in translation, where Merleau-Ponty is made to say that “in perception, we *merge* into our body.” The picture here seems to be that two previously *distinct* entities occasionally *fuse* into one—and (since this is “in perception”) either one *perceives* the “merger” transpiring, or it’s somehow arranged *by means of* perception. That is a peculiar view, to say the least. But another translation (and interpretation) are possible and preferable. Let’s re-examine that passage (238/277/275) quoted a bit more fully, with an alternate translation, set beside the original.

“Dans la perception nous ne pensons pas l’objet et nous ne nous pensons pas le pensant, nous sommes à l’objet et nous nous confondons avec ce corps qui en sait plus que nous sur le monde, sur les motifs et les moyens qu’on a d’en faire la synthèse... Dans cette couche originaire du sentir que l’on retrouve à condition de coïncider vraiment avec l’acte de perception et de quitter l’attitude critique, je vis l’unité du sujet...”

“In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we are one with this body that knows more than we do about the world, and about the motives and the means we have for its synthesis... In this primary layer of sense experience that one discovers only if one really coincides with the act of

perception and leaves the critical attitude, I experience the unity of the subject...”

Three points I wish to make about this—let’s call it the “unity” passage—straight off. First, the fact that Merleau-Ponty says “I experience the unity of the subject” should keep us from supposing that he banishes self-consciousness entirely from ordinary perceptual experience. On the contrary, he is saying (rightly or wrongly) that I have “lived” experience of myself as a perceptual subject. To be sure, this does not mean that in perception I am, either explicitly or implicitly, *thinking about myself*—it’s not *that kind* of self-consciousness. For (as he asserts in the passage) perception is distinct from thinking, and does not include some self-regarding thought: “In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it.” Thus if (like Dreyfus) we wish to attribute to Merleau-Ponty the view that there is “no ego present” in ordinary experience, I think this had better just mean that often I entertain no “I-thought” as I engage in my activities—chasing street cars, or whatever.

Second, notice that my translation dispenses with the worrisome implication of Smith’s, that we have here two distinct items somehow blending (“merging”) together. Rather the idea is simply that we (perceptually) experience our unity or oneness with our bodies. This does not mean, bizarrely, that sometimes I am something distinct from my body, with which I then mysteriously *minge*, when I start *perceiving*. No, it just means that the sort of self-consciousness I have that is specific to *thought* may not be an experience of my oneness with my body—but *in perception* I *do* have such experience.

Third, while my translation does not excise the troublesome phrase “the body that knows more than we do”—which may be taken to imply that we are distinct from our bodies—there is a way to fix this problem too. (And this route is again preferred on the grounds that it preserves Merleau-Ponty’s coherence and sanity.) When he speaks of “this body that knows more than we do about the world and the motives and means we have for its synthesis,” he is being (not uncharacteristically) elliptical, sacrificing precision and explicitness for rhetorical flow. To be more explicit, he could have said something like: “this body that knows more (in a bodily, i.e., *sensorimotor way*) than we know (in an *intellectual way*) about the world and the motives and means we have for its synthesis...”. The point is not that we are not our bodies (again that would go dead against other passages). The point is rather that our bodies, through their activity, exhibit a kind of (bodily) knowledge or understanding distinct from that which we exhibit (and more commonly recognize) in our *thought*. Merleau-Ponty would admit that the truth of this claim is not obvious, and runs counter to traditional philosophical assumptions. But he thinks he has made the case for it in the couple of hundred pages preceding.

I believe the translation I suggest is preferable to Smith's on both linguistic and hermeneutic grounds. I leave discussion of the linguistic points to an endnote.¹² But here I will say something about the hermeneutic point—why my take on the unity passage makes better sense of its place in the argument of Merleau-Ponty's book. This will help elucidate its philosophical interest.

We need first to remind ourselves of where the passage occurs. It comes about a quarter of the way into Part Two of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*—"The World as Perceived"). Building on the results of Part One ("The Body"), he has just been arguing for and applying a way of understanding the distinction between the senses and the intellect—between, as he puts it (using Kantian and Husserlian language) sensory "consciousness" and "synthesis" on the one hand, and intellectual "consciousness" and "synthesis" on the other. (216/250/249ff) This is in partial fulfillment of the general project of Part Two, which is to bring the lessons of Part One, and its view of the "habit body" and the experience of one's own body, to bear on the broad ambition (in some sense shared with Kant and Husserl) of explaining *how consciousness of objects is possible for us*—or, as he puts it, heightening its problematic character—how there is "for us" an "in itself." (72/83/86) As applied to the visual case, for example, this challenge is, in part: "[to] try to understand how vision can be brought into being from somewhere without being enclosed in its perspective." (68/78/82)—how vision can be *constrained by perspective* without being *confined within it*; how it can make apparent to us things that "transcend" their perspectively shifting appearances. Thus, much of Part Two is concerned with how to make sense of the phenomenon of perceptual constancy, in light of Part One. But before he gets very far into this, he wishes to deal with an objection he sees arising for his way of understanding sense-experience. (237/275-6/274-5) And the unity passage occurs in the context of trying to meet the challenge. Thus, to understand that passage, we need to understand what way of viewing sensory consciousness/synthesis he has proposed, and what challenge he's trying to meet.

Part of what Merleau-Ponty finds distinctive of the sensory is its "anonymity." He also speaks, relatedly, of what is "pre-personal," "impersonal," or (mysteriously hedging) "almost impersonal." Now one might guess that by saying sense perception is somehow "anonymous" or "impersonal" he is asserting a sort of "no ownership" view: perceptual experience is *no one's*, i.e., *no person's*. And this would suggest the sort of person/body dualism that McDowell finds absurd. But if we go back to where Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of this anonymity/impersonality in Part One, we will find that what's put in play is the notion that perception commonly functions in a way that doesn't involve *personal choice*—that is, in a way that doesn't involve an agent's *reasoned or rationalizable choice of a means to a goal*.

The personal/impersonal contrast first rears its head when Merleau-Ponty argues that even fairly primitive animals exhibit a kind of adaptiveness in their

behavior that is to be understood in teleological terms, though the types of movements they make are not chosen by them as means to an end. He gives the example of a beetle that substitutes the activity of a second limb for that of an amputated one, in a manner that preserves functional equivalence (78/90/93). It is assumed the beetle did not deliberate about how to achieve the same end by different means—it was thus not a matter of “personal choice.”¹³ And Merleau-Ponty proceeds to argue that a similar mode of behavior can be observed in beings such as ourselves that *are* capable of personal choice. He claims that human amputees experiencing phantom limbs sometimes attempt to use their phantoms (to walk for example), even though they clearly believe that they *literally have no leg to stand on*. (81/93/96) And he argues (81-2/93-5/96-8) that this is best understood, if we do not suppose that the patient has *chosen* to move a (non-existent) leg as a means of accomplishing some task. For then we couldn’t satisfactorily account for why his belief that he lacked a limb didn’t impede such practical reasoning. So we should say he acts “impersonally” (or “in the light of an impersonal being”), from *habit*—and with the kind of generality that comes with habit. Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that actually we *ordinarily* exercise just such capacities for “impersonal” (or at least, not fully personal) movements at the service of our tasks. That is, our movements are for the sake of those aims but we cannot correctly rationalize our actions by appeal to choices of these specific movements as means to those ends. “[M]y life is made up of rhythms which have not their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but their *condition* in my ordinary surroundings. Thus there appears round our personal existence a margin of *almost* impersonal existence, which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on...” (83-4/96/99)¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty further reinforces his view by appeal to cases of *selective deficits* in motor abilities. He notes that brain damage can severely impair one’s ability to undertake “movements to order,” even when one can quite readily perform similar movements in familiar situations, as the task at hand requires. This, he thinks, is best understood if we recognize that ordinary goal-directed motion does not depend on the *representation* and *choice* of one’s movements as means. (103-4/118-9/119-20)¹⁵

I cannot now try to reconstruct and evaluate this argument in more detail. For now I simply want to emphasize Merleau-Ponty’s use of “anonymous” or “impersonal” to mark a mode of activity that can exhibit the hallmarks of *teleology*, even though it is *not rationally chosen* by one, and so is not something that, in the fullest sense, *one did*, that is, something for which one took *responsibility* by one’s deliberative choice. Now Merleau-Ponty argues (and this gets us closer to the challenge that motivates the unity passage): one’s capacities for such “anonymous” unreasoned bodily movement—one’s motor “habits”—are organized—they form a kind of *system*. One can experience one’s own body in terms of a *system* of postures and movements functionally equivalent relative to one’s tasks (e.g., answering the telephone)—one has what he calls a “body schema.”¹⁶ Further he says, (acknowledging this will be controversial) that moving in these functionally equivalent task-oriented ways

constitutes a form of *understanding*. Understanding then, is not to be confined *behind* movement in some inferential engine (be it soul or brain) that issues orders to the body. It is to be found *in the very movements of our eyes and hands*. This movement *is* understanding in action, no less fundamentally than the classifications and inferences we make in thought. And such understanding he takes to include the sort of movements alluded to in the previous section, whereby objects are made apparent to us: the sensorimotor basis of spatial perception.

Now—as I interpret him, Merleau-Ponty believes it is right to say our movement *is* understanding for (at least) the following three reasons.

(i) It exhibits a general *spontaneous adaptiveness relative to our goals*, which is characteristic of understanding.

(ii) In ordinary perception we *experience the “harmony” of our performance with our goals*. (145/167/169) (As I read this: we sense when we’re moving as we should (relative to our goals)—and when we’re not—so it involves a kind of *normative sensitivity*, characteristic of understanding.¹⁷

(iii) The truth of (i) and (ii) is not to be accounted for by postulating *some more basic activity of mind* in which these movements are represented, chosen and commanded, and the results monitored—so that understanding could then be said only truly to reside in that separate “inner” mental activity). So the movement is not to be construed merely as the *effect* or *product* of understanding.¹⁸

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, one’s own bodily movements constitute a genuine (but non-intellectual) form of understanding.

It would be desirable to reconstruct in more detail, and so to assess, this (complex, if underdeveloped) case for what we might call “motor understanding.” That is impossible here. But we can now more fully comprehend Merleau-Ponty’s claim near the beginning of Part Two, that part of what distinguishes sensory (as opposed to intellectual) “synthesis” and consciousness is their “anonymity/impersonality.” What this comes to is the idea that sensory consciousness and synthesis are effected by the operation of a fundamentally *motor* form of understanding whose specific adaptive modulations are not properly regarded as governed by *reasons* commensurate with them. And now we can also see what sort of objection to this Merleau-Ponty saw coming from the philosophical tradition. Early on he considers the worry that this proposed enlarged sense of ‘understanding,’ which (in a certain way) detaches it from reason, may seem absurd. On traditional assumptions, how can this be genuine *understanding* at all? And how can *one’s own body* intelligibly be said to *understand* anything? (145/167/169) Much later he elaborates on a similar

concern, by invoking the idea that genuine consciousness must be intelligible to itself in self-consciousness of its own unifying activity, or else it would not be consciousness at all. But (according to the objector) to speak of *perceiving* with one's eyes and hands, to make the *body* the subject of consciousness, or to attribute to it some kind of *knowledge*, is therefore incoherent. The body can be no more than a "material instrument" of knowledge, the site of its causal pre-conditions. (218-9/253-4/252-3, 237/275-6/274-5)

To such concerns Merleau-Ponty responds partly by arguing (219/254/253ff, 237/276/275ff) that we are not entitled just to assume that all consciousness is epistemically in "possession of itself" in the way some have argued rational *thought* must be. And we should not *expect* the sort of reflective self-consciousness that may be bound up with thought should reveal to us the body-subject of perception, and its motor understanding ways. For, as he has been arguing, *perception is not thought*, and *perceptual synthesis is not intellectual synthesis*. However, what we might still find, *in perception*, is an experience of one's own body engaged in a kind of motor understanding, including an experience of the "harmony" of performance with aim, which would constitute a form of consciousness of oneself *as subject*. And (as I interpret him) that is just what he believes we do find. For this brings out the point of the unity passage: "In perception, we are one with this body...In sense experience, I experience the unity of the subject." Thus for Merleau-Ponty, ultimately something like a Kantian connection between consciousness and self-consciousness is preserved, but transposed in a sensorimotor key.¹⁹

This also gives us a glimpse of how we might see the experience of space as due to the exercise of nonintellectual motor skills (in something like the way suggested above, in section 6), while still paying respect to the thought that some kind of normative self-consciousness is required if one's performances are to be genuinely normatively assessable. The idea is that the experience of one's own body in motor understanding can involve an experience of the suitability of one's movement to one's aims, even absent a responsiveness to the demand for justifying reasons. We can also here see the Merleau-Pontyan account responding to McDowellian Kant-inspired concerns in this general way. Where McDowell (1994, 110-1) tries to preserve a Kantian picture of ourselves as enjoying the "spontaneity" of thought, even as we also belong to the natural world—not with Kantian appeal to a noumenal realm, but by resort to an (Aristotelian) "*second nature*"—so also, with a rather similar end in view (but greater wariness of intellectualism), Merleau-Ponty employs his notion of *motor habits and understanding*.

To bring all this back now to the worry about "merging" with our bodies: we should see Merleau-Ponty as here distinguishing—not *two subjects* (an "I" and a "habit body") that may merge and separate—but *two ways of being a subject*. He writes, "The one who, in sensory exploration, gives a past to the present and directs it to a future, is not myself as an autonomous subject, but myself insofar

as I have a body and am able to look.” (240/279/277) But this is not to say that there are two numerically distinct “myselfs”—one who is a body (with motor understanding) and one who is an intellect (with rational autonomy). Rather, the point is: *being a sensorimotor subject* is distinct from *being an autonomous subject*. But this does not preclude my being *both* a “body-subject” (who understands things through movement) and a person (who by considering reasons, decides what to do and believe, and takes responsibility for this). And—even more importantly—*the kind of body-subject I am may be deeply enmeshed with the kind of person I am*. That they are (and how they are), would be partly recognized in the truth of Conceptual Pervasiveness (1a). And as I read Merleau-Ponty, he would not reject as intellectualist *this* sort of “conceptual shaping” of experience. Rather, he could (and should) recognize that this belongs to how one perceives the world as “polarized” by one’s “projects,” so as to motivate the responses these require (as he describes at 111-2/128-9/129-30 and 135-6/156-7/157-8). And, if one’s *personal choices* in this way structure the experience of one’s situation so as to engage one’s motor skills, we arrive at an idea of how to connect rational deliberation with motor understanding.²⁰

Still, this does not preclude some creatures’ being body-subjects (of a sort) without making “personal choices”—without being *persons*—at all. Presumably many nonhuman animals are like this. This, again, is why Pervasiveness of Self-Consciousness (2b) should be rejected. However, again, there *is* a durable insight in the tradition linking consciousness with self-consciousness. But to preserve it, we must be careful to distinguish sensory from intellectual consciousness properly. Then we will not say (with McDowell) that the sensory experience of things requires intellectual self-consciousness. Rather we will say (with Merleau-Ponty) that much as there is, arguably, a kind self-critical rationality bound to the intellectual form of consciousness, so there is a kind of *bodily self-experience*²¹ bound to its sensory form.

Much more would need to be done to explain and defend the view I am here attributing to Merleau-Ponty. Of course, it may be mistaken. But, though it is certainly something “only a philosopher” would say, it is hardly crazy.

8. Summary

What I find amiss in McDowell’s view is not the claim that our status as self-critical reasoners pervasively shapes our perceptual experience, and is implicit in much of our activity. That, I believe, is basically correct. Where things go wrong, I have argued, is with the idea that the intentionality of perceptual experience requires some sort of permeation by concepts whose presence in experiential content distinguishes every manner of “outer” appearance, and whose possession is presumed to require a capacity for self-critical reflection.

To further our understanding of these issues (while saving Merleau-Ponty from undeserved ridicule), I have reconstructed in outline his view that there is, in

sensory life, a non-intellectual form of understanding at work. He puts this by saying there is something “anonymous” or “impersonal” in our existence as perceivers. But he supposes this is true, not because ordinarily perception and sensorimotor activity are *no one’s*, still less because a person is a disembodied intellect that occasionally “merges” into a merely “person-like” body. He speaks of “impersonality” here because he assumes rational choice is part of what it is to be a person, and holds that the specific ways we move in our everyday activities and in making things apparent to ourselves are—though intelligently adaptive to the demands of our tasks—often not *chosen for reasons*.

But, according to Merleau-Ponty, we persons are not just rational agents who can correct our judgments and decisions by citing norms aimed at truth and rightness. And we are not just this, *plus* a locus of causal mechanisms. We are also, in a way that *joins* our rationality to our participation in nature: embodied subjects who understand our world and ourselves through situation-sensitive, goal-oriented movement which, while governed by our intentions, eludes reconstitution in reasoned choices of thought. *This*, at least, is a view worth taking seriously as an attempt to achieve what McDowell himself strives for: a conception of ourselves that *integrates*—and does not just awkwardly juxtapose—our rational capacity to make up our minds with our unchosen, embodied existence.²²

NOTES

¹ Some characteristic statements of this theme in McDowell: “Our perceptual experience is permeated with rationality.” (2007a, 339) “[O]ur relation to the world, including our perceptual relation to it, is pervasively shaped by our conceptual mindedness...[I]f a perceptual experience is world-disclosing...any aspect of its content is present in a form in which it is suitable to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity.” (ibid., 346)

² On McDowell’s view, perception has content at all and constitutes “outer experience,” “awareness of aspects of the world,” and is distinguishable from the mere “receptivity” of “sense-impressions,” only if it is “permeated with concepts” in a way that implies self-critical rationality is “operative” in it. For example, to perceive things as colored—to have experience with that content—it would not be enough to produce color words correctly in response to a sensory stimulus. One needs in addition a “self-conscious conception of how [one’s] experience relates to the world”—e.g., “the concept of visible surfaces of objects and the concept of suitable conditions for telling what color something is by looking at it.” (McDowell 1994, pp. 10-12, 46-47, 50). McDowell’s claim that a kind of practical self-consciousness is also ubiquitous in human experience is explained at McDowell 2007b, 368-9.

³ Dreyfus 2005. In my usage ‘mind’ and ‘mental’ do not connote ‘intellectual’ or ‘conceptual’ as they apparently do in Dreyfus’. So I will frame the issue here as one of a potentially worrisome aggrandizement of *intellect* rather than of *mind*. But I regard this as a terminological matter.

⁴ All Merleau-Ponty quotations are from *Phenomenology of Perception*. Page citations (e.g., 238/277/275) follow this format: the first number refers to where the passage is found in pre-2002 editions of the Routledge English translation, the second refers to its 2002 edition, and the third to the pre-2005 French Gallimard edition.

⁵ Passages cited in note 2 divide between these theses.

⁶ Some might worry that my idea (that appearances facilitate our treatment of what appears) conflicts with the theory, influentially advanced by Goodale and Milner (2005) of “two visual systems”—one for visual identification (they say “perception”), the other for visual guidance of action—assuming we say (as they do) the second sort of vision is *unconscious* (and we take this to entail it does not involve visual *appearance*). Now I do not intend to deny here that there are fine differences in visual stimuli to which we quickly adjust movements (of, e.g., our hands) even where these are not differences in how the stimuli *look* to us. But it does not follow (and I am not persuaded the research shows) that visually apparent differences make *no* significant difference to the initiation and direction of visually guided movement. And only this second claim would be in conflict with what I am maintaining here.

⁷ Among these questions are: What do I mean by: (i) ‘you identify something in thought as Φ ’? (ii) ‘you identify something as Φ from how it looks?’ (iii) ‘you treat something as Φ ’? As a start, I would say this. For (i) it would be sufficient that you verbally judge that something is Φ , or that verbalizing your thought would involve a reference of the form ‘the Φ ’ or ‘that Φ .’ For (ii), it would be enough that (i) is true, because of how something looks to you—and *not* because you are disposed to *infer* something is Φ from its being Ψ . As for (iii), it would be sufficient for *your treating something as Φ that*, because of how it appears to you, what you did to it or with it is *what Φ ’s are for* (e.g., you opened the door with the doorknob because of how it looked to you). More broadly, we might say you treat something as Φ , when you do something to or with it for the sake of some goal, and being Φ is explanatorily relevant to your doing that for this end. And a common way for it to be relevant is via the manner of appearance something Φ presents to you. And that warrants our speaking of its (practically) appearing to you as Φ .

⁸ This is to be distinguished from the “fineness of grain” argument for “non-conceptual content,” which McDowell contests. (1994, 46-60, 160-6) McDowell’s appeal to “type demonstratives” to answer this argument won’t help here. The problem I’m raising is not that the appearances are somehow too finely specific to be captured conceptually (as if some level of visually discernable “fineness” in determinables like color and shape inherently elude conceptualization). The problem is that reflection reveals that efforts to match the heterogeneity of non-focal appearance with distinct demonstrative thoughts simply fail to provide one with intelligible distinctions that may function, even briefly, in one’s conceptual capacities in a distinct fashion. This is compatible with allowing that type demonstratives afford us thoughts as finely discriminating as any focal appearance of color or shape.

⁹ To some extent my concerns parallel Tyler Burge’s criticism of McDowell’s (and many others’) intellectualism in his (2005) Carus lecture: contrary to what some would-be followers of Kant suppose, object constancy is enough for experience of objects; you

don't also need self-conscious reflection. But Burge's criticisms, as I understand them, arise against the backdrop of a conception of object constancy different from that I invoke, and accord no special role to sensorimotor activity.

¹⁰ Why do I confine myself to saying the exercise of these sensorimotor capacities is sufficient for experience of space? Why not: sufficient *and necessary*? To evaluate this stronger claim we need to consider whether there is something else, short of such motor capacities, whose exercise would be sufficient for sensory intentionality (of the sort that comes with focal/non-focal dynamic structure)—even without self-critical rationality.

¹¹ It's true that McDowell acknowledges something *in between* mere sense-impressions and reason-permeated experiential content: we share with non-rational animals a "perceptual sensitivity" to features (1994, 50, 64), and certain perceptual "competences", relating to the perception of "affordances" (e.g., experiencing a space as big enough to get through). (2007a, 343-5) But I think one needs to say more than this. One needs somehow to link such shared competences to *object perception*, and to the *experience of space* in something like the manner I propose. If one takes this step it will at least seem highly misleading to say, like McDowell in *Mind and World*, that "outer experience" is confined to creatures possessed of rational self-consciousness.

¹² One may say (for instance) that two tributaries of a river "se confondent"—and so say that they *merge into* one another. But to say we (nous) "confondons" something "avec" (with) something is not to speak of *merger*, but standardly, of *confusing or mistaking* one thing for another. And in fact, Colin Smith translates the phrase "nous confondre avec" in that very way at the start of the same chapter (208/241/241). In that passage, Merleau-Ponty says intellectualists will find it absurd to say we see "with our eyes," but he suggests that, given their views, they will have a hard time accounting for how we should ever have been so confused as to think we did. He asks there: "How can we ever confuse ourselves with our bodies? (*Comment pouvons nous jamais nous confondre avec notre corps?*) His implicit suggestion is that the intellectualist's assumption that really we see with our *mind and not our body* is wrong: we are *not* mistaken in thinking we see with our eyes, and so we have not *confused* ourselves with (i.e., mistaken ourselves for) our bodies—in some way indeed, we *are* our bodies. We can thus see why Smith didn't employ a similar ('confuse') translation of 'confondre' a few pages later, for the unity passage. We don't want to have Merleau-Ponty assert there, in his own voice, that we *mistake ourselves for (or confuse ourselves with) our bodies*.

But there *are* alternatives to both 'merge' and 'confuse.' Smith adopts one in *another* passage in which "se confondre avec" occurs, where he translates it as "identify oneself with." (82/94/97) It may seem to bring us somewhat closer to what Merleau-Ponty means in the unity passage to say: *in perceiving I identify myself with my body*. But then we might hear 'identify' as involving a form of *thought*, so that the point would be that in perception I *think of myself and my body as one and the same*—which is clearly *not* the point at all. Thus it seems the best solution would be to take Merleau-Ponty to be saying, as I do: in perception, *I am one with my body*. (I owe this suggested translation to Béatrice Longuenesse, to whom I am also indebted for discussion of the French Kantianism in which Merleau-Ponty was steeped during his philosophical formation.)

¹³ Mark Okrent (2007) has recently developed in detail an account of goal-directed animal behavior partly inspired by Merleau-Ponty's (more prominent in his *Structure of Behavior*), and partly similar in its aims.

¹⁴ It may be implicit in Merleau-Ponty's hedging that he wants to distinguish a fully *impersonal* mode of existence (such as nonhuman animals have) from the *prepersonal* ("almost impersonal") mode we humans have. We act rarely, if ever, *totally impersonally*, since even our unchosen adjustments in motor activity occur in the service of *some* personal choice, some governing intention, and against the background of a *world* structured by our projects, not a mere *environment* (Umwelt) shaped by biological needs. (See 87/100/103, 327/381/379). (I am grateful to Clinton Tolley for discussion of this issue.)

¹⁵ From this it should be clear just how dissimilar Merleau-Ponty's view is from that which McDowell attributes to him at 2007b, 368.

¹⁶ See Merleau-Ponty's general (but unfortunately mistranslated) characterization of "body schema" at 141/163/164.

¹⁷ I do not take Merleau-Ponty to mean that one commonly *focuses one's attention on one's movements* (as one might, for example, in doing yoga, or in certain forms of dance), so as to *monitor* how well they accord ("harmonize") with one's aims. It is rather a question of experiencing the "fittingness" of one's movements *in the situation*. For this, attention is not *withdrawn* from one's surroundings. Perhaps here someone will object: "There is no experience of harmony when things are going *well*, only an experience of *disharmony* when things go awry." But would we say the same about hearing literal, musical harmony? That we never hear the harmony of the singers' voices—*only* their discord?

¹⁸ A standard move would be to resist Merleau-Ponty here by insisting that there really are representations, selections, and monitoring lying behind all skilled bodily movements—but this is all done 'unconsciously' at the "subpersonal" level (which is not the same as Merleau-Ponty's "*impersonal*" level). However, we should not be too quick to assume that burying intellection in subpersonal modules answers all reasonable concerns. We should ask, for example: if certain practical reasoning is "too intellectual" to credit to an animal as a whole, just why would it be less problematic to attribute this to its *subsystems*? And if we conclude goal-directed *animal* movements don't need such intellectual guidance, why suppose ours always do? Further, notice that in our own case we would not want to make the subpersonal planning allegedly controlling our movements *impenetrable* to personal level belief and planning (on pain of denying effective personal choice altogether). Now, as Merleau-Ponty's cases somewhat exotically illustrate: we are persistently moved by habit sometimes (but not always) in defiance of what's obvious to belief. And often (but not always) we are worse at executing our movements when we *think* about them than when we do not. Just how are we to account for these phenomena, in the way Merleau-Ponty's cognitivist opponent wants, as *peculiarly selective failures of communication among internal planners*? We could (and maybe should) remove this sort of difficulty by rejecting the premise on which it is based: there is no puzzling *failure* of internal communication to account for, because there is really no subpersonal inner planner with which to "communicate." It is no surprise that one's belief doesn't impede the practical reasonings that it should rationally

undermine, because the postulated reasonings *simply don't occur in the first place*. And it is no wonder that one's motor competence can still thrive even when the power to generate "abstract" movement to order is hobbled—if the latter is not (even unconsciously) a normal part of the former to begin with.

¹⁹ In an illuminating discussion of a Kantian distinction between awareness of oneself "as object" and "as subject," which compares Kant's own views with Cassam's, Longuenesse (2006) notes similarities between Cassam and Merleau-Ponty that set them apart from Kant on this matter. But noting certain *dissimilarities* is also crucial to appreciating Merleau-Ponty's position. For Merleau-Ponty (unlike Cassam), what makes my experience of my body a consciousness of myself "as subject" is not that it involves "ascribing" perceptual or other mental states to myself. Nor is this at bottom explained as a matter of an "immunity to error through misidentification" (at a time and through time). As I read Merleau-Ponty, what's crucial (and basic) here is rather: how one's perceptual experience of one's own bodily activity makes it at once both *definitive of one's own perceptual perspective* on the world and *constitutive of a form of understanding*. That is why such experience is a consciousness of oneself "as subject."

²⁰ This only hints at how to elaborate Merleau-Ponty's account of perception and motor skills into a satisfactory philosophy of action. What needs elucidation: how do one's tasks (given in part by one's choices) configure appearances in terms of what is *to be done* (requirements) and *what can be done* (opportunities), so as to translate reasoned decision into action? And how is our freedom reflected in the extent to which our actual circumstances constrain the possibilities we can see in our situation? Romdehn-Romluc's (2007) piece challenging Dreyfus, together with Dreyfus' response (2007c) help illuminate the difficulties in this area, and possible modes of resolution.

²¹ I borrow this expression from Thompson 2007.

²² For questions and comments in response to earlier versions of this paper, I would like to thank participants at the 2008 Asilomar conference of the International Society for Phenomenological Studies, and the 2008 conference of the California Phenomenology Circle. I would also particularly like to express gratitude for discussions with David Cerbone, Steve Crowell, Hubert Dreyfus, William Hasselberger, Paul Hoffman, Béatrice Longuenesse, Wayne Martin, Samantha Matherne, Mark Okrent, David Pitt, Komarine Romdehn-Romluc, Joseph Shear, Clinton Tolley, and Mark Wrathall.

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