

“VIRTUE AND REASON” AND *BEING AND TIME* ON THE MCDOWELL
DREYFUS DEBATE

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

AS

36

2018

PHIL

- V355

Master of Arts

In

Philosophy

by

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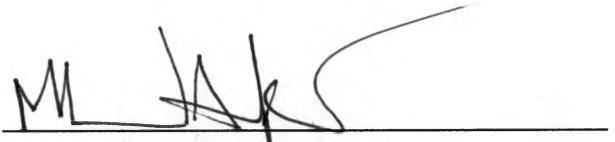
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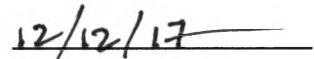
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In this paper I address the role of mind and conceptuality in absorbed and expert coping as brought forth in the McDowell/ Dreyfus debate. I aim to support McDowell's view of practical rationality and situation specific conceptual understanding by providing evidence through examples of the role that conceptuality and mind play in virtue, as presented in McDowell's work "Virtue and Reason". I also draw from Heidegger's *Being and Time* to present evidence, via his characterization of the sui-generis nature of significance and Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of being, that suggest that Dasein's everyday engagement with the world relies on a fundamental conceptual understanding of the world and is pervaded with a practical rationality that aligns with McDowell's account of minded absorbed coping.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

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In “Virtue and Reason”, McDowell presents a view of virtue that is inconsistent with codifiable and detached views of rationality. He takes the presence of concepts and reason in virtuous living as resistant to codification, thus rendering virtuous living as irreducible to a logically deductive and predictable rational process of rule following. In this paper, I will apply McDowell’s views on virtue to the McDowell/ Dreyfus debate in an attempt to shed light on the debate’s concern over the role of conceptuality and mindedness in expert and absorbed coping. I will argue that McDowell’s characterization of virtue is capable of addressing Dreyfus’ concerns over the role of mindedness in expert coping, thus strengthening McDowell’s approach on the matter. I will then present my interpretation of Heidegger’s views in *Being and Time*, a philosopher whose views both Dreyfus and McDowell invoke in the debate to support their perspective, to suggest that he too tends to endorse a view of practical rationality similar to that of McDowell’s. The first part of this paper will begin with a synopsis of the relevant parts of the McDowell/Dreyfus debate, followed by a summary of McDowell’s characterization of virtue and how it provides valuable insights into the concerns of the debate. The second half of this paper will present Heidegger’s characterization of Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being, and its understanding of the significance of the world.

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, takes as his focus Dasein, the being for whom its being is an issue, as the primary means by which to approach his main project of understanding the meaning of being. In the process of examining being by means of dissecting Dasein’s relation to being, Heidegger presents some insight into the fundamentally minded and conceptual nature of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. I will draw on Heidegger in an effort to

provide evidence to suggest that his understanding of Dasein's being-in-the-world is one which he takes to be pervaded with the kind of practical rationality articulated by McDowell.

The McDowell Dreyfus Debate

Phronesis: Important to the debate is an understanding of phronesis, or practical wisdom. Phronesis is cultivated through ethical upbringing, which teaches us ethical concepts that make the world intelligible and shape our reasons for action. In the beginning of the debate Dreyfus presumed a disagreement over the characterization of phronesis between himself and McDowell; however, this was early on revealed to be a misinterpretation. Dreyfus quotes Aristotle as saying that "Phronesis...involves knowledge of the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be attained by systematic knowledge but only by 'perception'." (OMM, 51). ¹The type of ethical expertise required for phronesis cannot be conceptually articulated, but rather phronesis shows that "socialization can produce a kind of master whose actions do not rely on habits based on reasons to guide him" (Ibid). Likewise, McDowell describes phronesis as dependent on contextual factors, and not on independent general prescriptions to act; it is precisely situation specific discernment (WM, 341). For Aristotle, the function of the phronimos or virtuous person is that their virtue properly identify the "mean", or intermediate

¹ Within this ethical upbringing comes our initiation into a particular world view and a novel conceptualization of the world, albeit one that is not fully articulable independently of the situation, which yields the adoption of a distinct or modified attitude or perspective towards the world which also directly affects our behavior in response to the world. This is an instantiation of phronesis. This perspective is one which I will support further on in the paper.

condition, which is the precise and correct behavior and response in all situations, and for all the right reasons (NE, 1108b10-1109b25). Dreyfus takes phronesis to be instantiated in expert coping where eventually you can act in new situations without appealing to rules or reasons, it is natural, you just see and you do. Rules give you competence, yet expertise goes beyond rules and just is embodied in the act. Expertise, requires a rich perceptual repertoire, not a rich conceptual one (OMM, 51). However, although McDowell's and Dreyfus' understanding of phronesis seems to be in agreement, there did remain a disagreement over Heidegger's understanding of the rationality present in phronesis. Dreyfus interprets Heidegger's view of phronesis as one which produces an expert which does not rely on habits or reason for action, much less any that can be conceptually articulated (Ibid). McDowell, rather, takes Heidegger to be suggesting that the conceptual rationality involved in phronesis excludes the requirement of needing to be articulated in language in a manner that may be understood independently of the situation, but rather that conceptual articulation can include the articulation of the situation specific conceptual rationality within the situation itself (WM, 342).

The Myth of the Given: Also relevant to the debate is a basic understanding of Willfred Sellars' Myth of the Given. Simply put, Sellars' argument denounces the belief in a bare given, or bare experiential knowledge, that can be counted upon to be a fundamental justification for our beliefs. For Sellars, knowledge resides in the "logical space of reasons" wherein to know requires the ability to justify one's beliefs by means of faculties of reason (AMG, 256). Perceptual knowledge involves the faculty of sensibility which is not rational as such, and thus not an adequate source of justification

for our beliefs. To know, according to Sellars, requires the involvement of our reason with sensibility. The Given, however, is supplied by sensibility alone as it were and yet purports to justify our beliefs; a purported non-epistemic process is given unwarranted epistemic privileges in being the foundation of our knowledge. As McDowell interprets Sellars, to suppose that our sensibility alone can provide knowledge of the sort that can be used to warrant judgements is to fall into a naturalistic fallacy (MW, xiv). According to Sellars, experiential content cannot cross over into the space of reasons miraculously. McDowell, in *Mind and World*, presents a solution to the myth with his view that experience is conceptual and involves our mental spontaneity and reason. We avoid the myth because all our experiences are already infused with understanding and rationality, and thus are already within the logical space of reasons and legitimate sources of justification for our judgments.

Prior to the debate, In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given”, McDowell retracts a previous claim made in *Mind and World*, that experience contains the same propositional content as our beliefs and judgments about it, to say a more radical claim, that in fact a large part of our experiential content is non-propositional intuitional content, which, although non-propositional, unlike discursive content, is nonetheless still conceptual; conceptuality is present immediately in experience, to include intuitions with non-propositional content (AMG, 262). Likewise, he describes that what we intuit in the situation need not have come entirely from the present experience; it could be a combination of prior conceptual understanding and recognition which allows us to intuitively recognize concepts that seem not to be present in the current experience (Ibid,

260)². The content of experience remains the same, yet over time and through our learning, we grow to develop and extract more precise and articulable propositional content from experience. It is McDowell's reiteration of his views, and their application to non-propositional content in "Avoiding the Myth of the Given", that seem to have triggered the debate.

Within the debate, Dreyfus takes issue with McDowell's approach that all human experience and coping is conceptual all the way down; he claims this ignores our embodied coping for which we do not have forms of articulation in language. He alludes to Brandom's claim that to grasp a concept is to master the use of a word. He claims that with embodied coping, as seen with expert coping, the behavior is non-conceptual; what is being done is inarticulable and non-conceptual (OMM, 55). He claims that in our everyday coping we are concerned with intentional content, not conceptual; there is an aboutness to our everyday engagement in the world, however, such a process is not one which is necessarily minded and rational, much less in a deliberate manner. Dreyfus' main complaint is that mindedness is the enemy to embodied coping; mind disrupts our coping, not allowing for expertise, and at best allowing for competence (RMM, 352).

Dreyfus writes,

Following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I claim that affordances can indeed be

² McDowell illustrates this with the example of him intuitively, and non-inferentially, recognizing that what he sees is a cardinal when he comes across a bird, when someone else may have simply recognized it as a bird (AMG, 259). This suggests that our intuitions, albeit non-inferential, can reflect concepts that were at one point previously learned, and that this previously acquired recognitional capacity can manifest itself instantaneously in non-inferential intuitions. Likewise, it demonstrates that the content of experience may remain the same, yet the richness of the propositional content that our experiences reveal can develop as our thoughts develop.

experienced as data or features in a world of facts permeated by mindedness but that this objective world and its conceptual order presupposes a pre-objective/pre-subjective world. That world is opened up by our body's responses to solicitations drawing it to maintain and improve its grip on what, on reflection, we take to be the determinate, unified, namable, and thinkable, objective world (RMM, 360).

In other words, we are not directly open to affordances that draw on our rationality as subjects open to the world, but rather to the solicitations of different objects, which directly call us to act (RMM, 357). Solicitudes, in Dreyfus' view, are the non-rational attractions and repulsions that elicit the bulk of our responses in our practical living and everyday coping, which precede and permit the theoretical engagement with affordances which follows from our rational and conceptual perception of the world. Dreyfus interprets Merleau-Ponty as saying that at our most basic level of being in the world, what does the coping is not our minds, but our bodies with their non-conceptual coping skills responding to non-conceptual solicitations (RMM, 359). Dreyfus views the phenomenon of absorbed coping as non-rational, non-propositional, and non-conceptual.

McDowell responds by saying that all experiential content, whether linguistically articulated or not, is always present in some form as content which is world disclosing, which, if not yet conceptualized, is content that has the capacity to be appropriated by a conceptual capacity (WM, 348). Coping content is not converted to conceptual content, it already is so. He claims that his notion of conceptual capacities at work in experience is

not the one Brandom credits to Sellars. According to McDowell, words need not be available or present for all of the content that is conceptually available in experience (Ibid). The content of our experience is far too complex and rich to be fully articulated independent of experience, yet it is seen and understood in experience in a conceptual manner.

Furthermore, conceptuality, for McDowell, is not necessarily situation independent. McDowell accuses Dreyfus of misreading his conception of mindedness as detached conceptual intentionality, something he says is a mythological conception of the mental, and not in line with his views (RtD, 366). His form of practical rationality is not of the detached form of adding an “I think”, to representations of one’s actions, which would be theoretical, but rather of a practical self-awareness that adds an “I do” (RtD, 367). He writes that “realizing such a concept is doing the thing in question, not thinking about doing it” (Ibid). The concept of the thing to do draws the perceiver to act immediately (RtD, 368) This view explains how, in our minded coping, one is never detached because one never pauses to think about it; one perceives the actualization of the conceptual capacities and acts.³

It may seem like absorbed coping is non-conceptual and non-rational because its reactions are instantaneous, and not appealing to situation independent concepts and reasons, however, in such coping, concepts are drawn in instantaneously although our

³ This view is one which will be made more intuitively clear with the discussion of virtue, which incorporates conceptual knowledge of the thing to do, the immediate recognition of which gets us to act.

recognitional capacity for such concepts may have been acquired at a prior time.

Furthermore, in order for our coping acts to be conceptual, they must be in response to a holistic conceptual understanding that we possess by being initiated into a language. Our intuitive responses represent instantiations of responsiveness to concepts, and appealing to the concept of the thing to do is rational in that it implies access to a prior holistic conceptual network. The idea of a prior conceptual network is corroborated by Heidegger and will be further articulated later in the paper.

McDowell seems to suggest that our perceptions draw upon a complex of concepts that includes descriptive and practical concepts. Our preoccupation with descriptive concepts tends to involve our rationality with the world in a detached theoretical manner which is distinct from our engaged involvement with practical concepts as the situation presents them. However, neither approach, theoretical or practical, is any less rational or concept involving. McDowell claims that Dreyfus's distinction between affordance and solicitations do not amount to much; to the engaged rational agent, an affordance can be a solicitation. (RtD, 369). A solicitation can also be a fact, and something to which agents can be open to with their conceptual capacities (Ibid). To the absorbed agent, the type of concepts which their rationality responds to is irrelevant so long as they are engaged with the situation in a practical manner. In practical rationality, the skill or ability accounts for the intermediate actions and presuppositions that are necessary for the act at hand to be completed in a way that the agent's theoretical rationality cannot (RtD, 368). The intermediate conceptual solicitations, or steps, appear to be tacitly addressed, and conscious awareness is relegated to the primary task at hand

or conceptual solicitation. McDowell illustrates the conceptuality of a solicitation with the example of someone impulsively catching a frisbee that is thrown to them. McDowell takes this example as a response to a solicitation from the frisbee as the concept of the thing to do (RtD, 368-369). The agent merely sees the frisbee and understands that he is supposed to catch it; the concern is with an understanding of the concept of catching the frisbee with an implicit ancillary understanding of the concepts of the dimensions of the frisbee, how to catch it, and the contextual factors that warrant catching a frisbee. This conceptual understanding is entirely agent and situation dependent. This interpretation responds to Dreyfus' assumptions that conceptuality in coping implies situation independent conceptuality, whereas here McDowell has indicated that the concept is totally enclosed and involved in the situation; it is the concept of the thing to do that arises from within the situation.⁴ Furthermore, McDowell responds that a minded agent is the only thing that is needed to describe bodily activity, if person-like character is given to the body, it makes for a troubling separation that separates the agent from his body (RtD, 369).

By the end of the debate, McDowell and Dreyfus remain in disagreement over the role of mindedness and conceptuality in absorbed and expert coping. Dreyfus insists that McDowell's perspective fails to apply to absorption, where the agent is totally absorbed in their activity and ceases to be a subject (RtM, 373). He concedes that there is always

⁴ The ancillary concepts may be situation independent and the result of prior experience and upbringing, however, the concepts that are revealed to an agent who is involved in absorbed coping are revealed and understood only within the situation (in the form of the concept of the thing to do).

an “I” who initiates and plans, yet in the execution and act of completing the basic action, or in absorbed coping, there is no ego (RtM, 374). Dreyfus concludes with an unwillingness to accept that the mindedness of the attendant ego is always operative in our engagement with the world. (RtM, 376). The fact that Dreyfus associates to McDowell a conventional detached view of mindedness and concepts suggests that, in thinking of these terms, Dreyfus views them in the traditional way in which mindedness and rationality must be detached from coping, and conceptuality must be of the sort that it is fully grasped and articulable independently of the situation in a determinate way. Likewise, Dreyfus assumes that with expert coping we lack a full conceptual understanding of the situation at hand. He tends to assume that phronesis is non-conceptual embodied expert coping, whereas McDowell claims that phronesis is conceptual and rational, yet not in the conventional sense. McDowell attempts to demonstrate, in “Virtue and Reason”, that for virtue, as a form of skillful coping, the action is conceptual and rational although it is not so in the conventional way. This discussion can provide a sound explanation to Dreyfus’ concern of how, what may be spontaneous and non-deliberative, is nevertheless rational and conceptual.

McDowell’s characterization of virtue as the exercise of practical rationality

In “Virtue and Reason”, McDowell attempts to argue for a unique view of virtue that is in alignment with Aristotle’s ethics. Virtue, as McDowell describes it, takes the form of possessing a reliable sensitivity, perceptual capacity, or knowledge. It is being able to identify when certain situations call for certain moral behaviors. A virtuous person

need not even possess the concept of the particular virtues which his actions represent, he need only to think of what he does and see the virtuous act as the thing to do (V&R, 51). Likewise, other requirements include that the sensitivity and recognition of the right thing to do must exhaust his reasons for acting as he does. In addition, since virtue amounts to knowing what the right conduct is, a virtuous person must possess a sensitivity to all forms of salient moral features relative to all forms of virtuous knowledge; by the nature of situations, no one virtue can be possessed without possessing them all (Ibid, 53). This suggests that a full conceptual repertoire of morally relevant features of the world must be available for the virtuous agent to act. Learning a new language introduces you into a holistic conceptual network, and this network also includes moral concepts (that draw us into action). Becoming virtuous is the acquisition of the ability to heed the morally salient requirement without hesitation and struggle with contrary inclinations. Furthermore, the virtuous agent must not even be tempted by an inclination that runs contrary to what the relevant perception prescribes (Ibid, 55). To be virtuous, the agent cannot act out of continence or strength of will, nor can he act out of a weighing of the options, nor fail to act out of incontinence (Ibid, 55). The virtuous sensitivity reveals the virtuous act as the thing to, and not as one reason among many for actions, but as the only reason which silences all others. The knowledge of the virtuous agent is unclouded by contrary urges and desires, for virtue aims at the mean, which is the correct response for the right reasons, thus a virtuous person must be very astute in being able to act spontaneously on what the situation demands. Such an account of virtue identifies the importance of its sensitivity to the conceptual solicitations of the environment.

An important part of his paper involves the argument against the perspective that one can codify a moral outlook and reduce knowledge of virtue to a volition that responds to a set of objective cognitions, in an effort to form practical syllogisms that attempt to reach deductive conclusions about future conduct and what conduct is appropriate (V&R, 57). As McDowell puts it, virtue is “an ability to recognize requirements that situations impose on one’s behavior (Ibid, 53). A virtuous agent recognizes what the appropriate course of action is through the drawing of the pre-existent conceptual capacities in perceptual experience. Furthermore, the imperatives to action are resistant to codification independent of experience. Possessing virtue provides an agent with a sensitivity in the form of a perceptual capacity that recognizes what the right thing to do is in the situation, making such understanding completely situation dependent, yet relative to the agents conceptual capacity, and thus resistant to codification outside of the situation. He also writes that what the virtuous agent perceives in the situation is enough to elicit action on its own, no other universal application of a rule is necessary (ibid, 57). McDowell elaborates more on this view with his interpretation of Aristotle as suggesting that if an attempt is made to codify one’s conception of virtue into a set of rules, regardless of how careful one may be in the codification, eventually the application of these rules would strike us as wrong, not because we changed our mind, but because “one’s mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula (Ibid, 58).⁵ He is suggesting that the richness of our conceptual understanding as elicited by the situation is much too fine-grained to be

⁵ McDowell further elaborates on the non-codifiability of moral concepts with his application of Wittgenstein’s concept of rule following (V&R, 58).

reduced down into a set of rules in a way that could fully capture the complexity of that understanding in order to reliably produce the same type of behavior. Such non-codifiability is made clear within a view that considers all experience as conceptual, and behavior resulting thereafter as responding to conceptual affordances and solicitations, and the complexity and richness of experience cannot be fully captured outside of the situation.

McDowell explains that our coming to agreement about virtue lies in neither of two extremes, neither in the shared possession of objective moral rules, nor in a congruence of subjectivities that result from the involvement of our shared forms of life in the “whirl of organisms” (V&R, 63). There are no universal and codifiable rules that determine our action, rather it is our conceptualized perceptual experience of an objective world (V&R, 62). Nor is our doing the right thing a mere alignment with the other members of our community, spinning freely from the world we inhabit. For McDowell, it is our initiation into a language which allows our relevant concepts to be available at the site of our perceptual encounter with the world. As a result of this, moral judgment is still a case of particular experience and can’t therefore be a case of deductive rule following. Our virtue or our moral outlook is a product of our ethical upbringing, which largely manifests itself in our acquired ability to heed the salient moral requirements in a situation. This explanation gives credibility to the understanding that the conceptuality present in expert coping cannot be adequately articulated, at least not in a universal and objective way; the understanding is in response to a particular situation, and ultimately uncodifiable.

So, consistent with McDowell's previous explanation of conceptuality, although one may struggle to articulate the concepts one is responding to, it is nonetheless conceptual and present solely within the situation, and largely present merely as the thing to be done. Thus, when we perceive something as the right thing to do, we don't articulate all the details of its concept; in fact, McDowell would say it is impossible, no one can reduce it in such a way, or at least not in an explicitly articulable way. The concepts that pervade our experience and allow for its affordances and the solicitations that call us to act are ultimately *sui-generis*; the richness of the conceptualized experience is such that it is largely non-propositional and non-codifiable, yet it is rationally understood and reacted to within the situation by the individual because of her ability to think and act based on the very same conceptual repertoire (which is a product of her moral and social upbringing). Thus, for McDowell, our coming to agreement about virtue lies in the middle of the two extremes, wherein an agent is responding to the solicitations of an objective world, yet her response is influenced or enriched due to her ethical upbringing. Therefore, in being rational virtuous agents, we don't have to be aware of all the aspects of what gets us to act, we just need to recognize it as the thing to do. This contests Dreyfus' presupposition that for an act to be rational the agent needs to have a detached conceptual understanding of all the processes involved in the completion of that action.

McDowell seems to suggest that the recognition of the salient fact, although not a necessarily universal perception, is nonetheless a cognitive state that the agent responds to (V&R, 70). Our cognitive states, though dependent on our subjective dispositions,

constitute our conceptualization of the situation. These solicitations give off the impression that they are non-conceptual because they arise from the subjective, and often attitudinal and affective, dispositions of the agent whose status is in question; nonetheless, to the agent, they are cognitive conceptualizations about the situation and reasons for action. Therefore, the responding to these solicitations is still a rational and minded process, albeit perhaps only in the form of “I do”, rather than “I think”. This process is still minded even if it is non-articulable or even conceptualized beforehand, or independent of the situation.

McDowell concludes his paper by saying that “the rationality of virtue, then, is not demonstrable from an external standpoint. But to suppose that it ought to be is only a version of prejudice. It is only an illusion that our paradigm of reason, deductive argument, has its rationality discernible from a standpoint that is not necessarily located within the practice itself” (V&R, 71). McDowell thus seems to have demonstrated that a view of conceptuality as universally articulable, and of rationality as detached from coping, very much like the one Dreyfus seems to hold, is not applicable to the forms of rationality and conceptuality present in virtue. McDowell has demonstrated clearly that the phronesis that is virtue is a conceptual and rational process, although not in the conventional sense. Practical rationality, present within absorbed coping, takes the form of “I do” to engage with concepts that take the form of “the thing to do”. He has established that to be rational does not necessarily involve applying a codifiable rule to an objective set of concepts; neither the rule nor the concept is reducible or capable of being fully described independent of the situation. The task of the virtuous person is thus one of

almost precisely the absorbed or expert coping that Dreyfus has in mind. The agent is not being rational in the deductive paradigmatic understanding of the phenomenon, wherein he is deliberating and responding to objective independent concepts within the situation in a fully deliberate and self-aware manner. As McDowell describes, the virtuous person doesn't weigh responding virtuously against other alternatives as one of the many alternatives of action, he is just responding to the solicitation of the situation itself as the concept of the thing to do. McDowell thus far seems to have provided a plausible explanation that renders intelligible the seeing and doing of absorbed coping that Dreyfus considers non-rational, non-conceptual, and non-propositional.

Conceptuality and mindedness in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

Heidegger's phenomenology is alluded to by both McDowell and Dreyfus in the debate to support their views of the nature of phronesis (OMM, 51, WM, 341). I will now introduce my own interpretation of Heidegger's views in *Being and Time* in an attempt to suggest that his account of the nature of human engagement with the world is such that it tends to align with McDowell's views of the role of conceptuality and mindedness in our absorbed coping.

Dreyfus makes clear that his reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* is one that suggests the non-conceptual and mindlessness of Dasein's fundamental understanding of Being, which is at the core of all understanding, to include its own being, that of the world, and of entities within it. In the introduction to his book *Being-in-the-World*, Dreyfus claims that "At the foundation of Heidegger's new approach is a phenomenology

of “mindless” everyday coping skills as the basis of all intelligibility” (BITW, 3). He claims Heidegger tries to clear away traditional assumptions about this fundamental understanding, which can be distinguished into five categories: explicitness, mental representation, theoretical holism, detachment and objectivity, and methodological individualism. Regarding explicitness, he interprets Heidegger to be saying that the nature of our pre-ontological understanding of being is as a non-explicable background, such that it cannot be definitively articulated outside of the context in which it used, and thus inaccessible to critical reflection (Ibid, 4). Likewise, Dreyfus suggests that Heidegger’s views denounce the cognitivist view that requires that formal internal representations of the objects one is engaging with be made in order for one to have rational engagement with them (Ibid, 5). With regard to theoretical holism, he suggests that, for Heidegger, there is no prior theoretical holism, or rather no tacit belief network that underlies our human activity (Ibid, 6). Regarding detachment and objectivity, Dreyfus claims that Heidegger denounces the traditional western view of discovering reality via a detached theoretical contemplation of the world in favor of discovery through every day pragmatic encounters (Ibid, 5). In regards to methodological individualism, he claims Heidegger holds society and culture, rather than the individual, to be the foundation of intelligibility, and that this social background of common sense tends to be inarticulable (Ibid, 7).

I find myself in agreement with Dreyfus’ description of the five traditional assumptions Heidegger is attempting to undermine in *Being and Time*, however, where Dreyfus seems to err is in the implications he suggests Heidegger’s approach has in

regards to the role of mind and concepts in everyday being-in-the-world and absorbed coping. A nod in the direction of practical rationality and conceptualized empirical content, as McDowell describes, can save Heidegger's views from endorsing the view of mindless everyday coping which Dreyfus credits to them. This is an approach that Heidegger seems to take to the type of rationality involved in the understanding of Being. To do proper ontology and philosophy, he suggests, is to engage with what is lived and encountered day to day. It is in the day to day being-in-the-world, and its preoccupation with Being that Dasein's essence is revealed. Dasein is referred to by Heidegger as the Being of humans (Ibid, 7). Dasein's Being is unlike the Being that belongs to entities and equipment, but rather Dasein is a being whose Being is an issue for itself and whose essence is existence with no definitive form of Being⁶. To show the Being of Dasein, Heidegger engages with Dasein as it is proximately and for the most part in its average everydayness (B&T, 16). Likewise, Heidegger describes the Dasein analytic as hermeneutic, not apophantic, thus not a matter of deliberating of concepts, but of revealing the situation as it appears to be, relative to the perspective and state of Dasein (Ibid, 25).

Towards the beginning of *Being and Time*, as Heidegger is expressing the importance of the question of Being, he hints at the inherent conceptuality of the understanding of Being by mentioning:

⁶ Throughout the section on Heidegger I will capitalize 'Being' that is of the ontological sense to distinguish it from all other usages of the term.

Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in reality; in presence-at-hand in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein in the 'there is' (Ibid, 7).

All concerns and understanding is being of a particular sort for Dasein. All things are understood as something, as a being of some sort, as having a certain nature and potentiality. At face value, Heidegger can be seen to be suggesting that our involvement in the world is surrounded by an understanding of being that, at the very least, could be interpreted as immediate intuitive conceptualizations of all aspects of the world. Such a view would be one which is consistent with the view of intuitions that McDowell presents in "Avoiding the Myth of the Given", as non-propositional, yet conceptual.

Dasein has an implicit understanding of Being from which he is capable of comprehending the different beings that show themselves in disclosive existence. Dasein is a being whose Being is an issue for it, its essence is existence, which is defined as a self-interpreting way of being; it is one that understands itself in terms of its own potentiality for being (Ibid, 13). Dasein's Being as existent is ecstatic, it is beyond what it is currently. As existent and ecstatic, Dasein must have a pre-ontological understanding of Being that enables it to inquire into its Being. As Dreyfus mentions, the prior understanding of Being is the non-explicable background that allows us to make sense of things (Dreyfus, 4). However, although non-explicable, this understanding is not rendered

mindless, as Dreyfus would like to suggest. Rather, in a situation dependent manner, it seems Dasein must have, although prior and non-articulable, a *conceptual* understanding of Being from where it can then understand its own Being and the Being of others. This understanding of Being is what is fundamental for its interpretative nature, of which its essence as existence consists of. Likewise, this understanding is essential to Dasein's understanding of the world and the entities that exist within it (B&T, 13). This essential understanding of Being appears to be of the practical sort and essential to Dasein's everyday Being-in-the-world; it is a foundational understanding that must be conceptual if it is to play such a fundamental disclosive role for Dasein. To understand something as something (its being), you must have a prior conceptual understanding of some sort to be able to comprehend or understand that form of Being.

Sui-generis Nature of Significance

Heidegger's explanation of significance highlights the inherent underlying conceptuality of the understanding of the world which is for-the-sake-of Dasein. "Significance" is used by Heidegger to refer to structure of the world and the totality of signifying, which is the network of reference and meaning wherein all things which have being are bound together (B&T, 87). Dasein's Being is existence, existence is understood as Being-in-the-world, and this Being-in-the-world involves primarily concern for entities in our dealings. The fundamental mode of Being of these entities is as equipment, or as ready-at-hand, which always has an assignment or reference that constitute the in-order-to of this equipment (B&T, 69). There is no such thing as a single equipment, rather, the

Being of any equipment is to be understood as belonging to a totality of equipment (Ibid). Dasein, prior to recognizing a singular tool, has previously understood the totality of equipment. The readiness-at-hand of equipment cannot be discovered merely by looking at the outward appearance of an entity and attempting to understand it theoretically, it is rather seen through our manipulation and dealings with them through the practical sight of circumspection (Ibid).

Heidegger also mentions that “that with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tool themselves...on the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work – that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too.” (Ibid). This work he mentions also bears part in the “referential totality within which the equipment is encountered” (Ibid). These passages seem to suggest that Dasein not only has, albeit implicit and non-theoretical, a holistic understanding of the totality of equipment prior to its dealings with them, but also that its everyday concerned dealings in the world are conceptual and minded in a way that resembles McDowell’s characterization of practical rationality. Just as the virtuous person must possess a holistic network of virtues that are drawn upon in perception, Dasein must have a prior conceptual understanding of the holistic network of equipment and of the work they are aimed at producing if he is to be able to become engaged in his concerned dealings with equipment. Likewise, Dasein, too, does not possess a detached theoretical understanding of the affordances or solicitude of the readiness-at-hand of the equipment, rather, this conceptual understanding is revealed through its practical day to day concerned dealings. Dasein seems to recognize the conceptual solicitude of

equipment through the practical sight of circumspection, and to recognize its equipmentality within a holistic network of equipment. Heidegger makes this more explicit when he describes the difference between practical and theoretical behavior. For Heidegger,

Practical behavior is not 'atheoretical' in the sense of "sightlessness". The way it differs from theoretical behavior does not lie simply in the fact that in theoretical behavior one observes, while in practical behavior one acts, and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind; for the fact that observation is a kind of concern is just as primordial as the fact that action has *its own* kind of sight. (Ibid).

Heidegger can be understood as suggesting that there is a unique form of conceptual understanding present in practical behavior that renders the behavior rational, although in a matter that differs from the detached or formal internal representations that comprise the conceptuality present in theoretically rational behavior.

Heidegger also mentions that our concerned absorption in the world has the function of discovery, and that it is essential to this function that the entities which are brought about in our concerned dealings "remain discoverable in varying degrees of explicitness and with a varying circumspective penetration" (Ibid, 71). Likewise, the varying modes of concern used in our everyday Being-in-the-world, permit us to encounter the entities of our concern in such a way that brings forth the worldly character of what is within-the-world (Ibid, 73). Once more, in agreement with McDowell, he is

suggesting that the entities and equipment within the world be accessible in a conceptualizable manner that renders them accessible to our conceptual capacities utilized in the disclosing and understanding of the world. An example of the conceptuality and understanding present in experience may be seen in cases where agents oftentimes need to see a picture or perform an action in order to understand the process in a way that is inaccessible to theoretical explanation. After added focus and repeated action in and observation of the situation, the agent is often able to express in a discursive manner the understanding that was present implicitly all along in their practical understanding of the situation.

Dasein's primary engagement with entities in the world is as equipment ready-at-hand, rather than as entities merely present-at-hand. Entities tend to be revealed as merely present-at-hand when there is an obstruction, an absence, or un-usability of something as ready-at-hand (Ibid). Furthermore, in this disturbance, the previously hidden assignment, or towards-which of the equipment is made explicit; the context of equipment is lit up, and, within this totality, the world announce itself (Ibid, 75). This tends to confirm that we operate with an implicit conceptual understanding of both equipment and the world, which is made explicit when there is a lapse in our concerned dealings or coping. It also confirms that in our absorbed coping in the world we are responding to solitudes of the situation which are conceptual and rational, albeit perhaps only in the practical sense of responding to concepts as "the things to do" rather than in the theoretical sense of responding to independently articulable concepts. In addition, this view tends to be one that supports Dreyfus', that our background understanding of the world is largely implicit

and not articulable in a detached theoretical sense, yet, ultimately, it supports McDowell's understanding that holds it as fundamentally conceptual and rational in a situation specific practical manner.

In addition to the holistic network of equipment, Dasein's understanding of its own Being, and its ownmost potentiality, is also integral to the referential totality that is necessary for the ready-to-hand-ness of equipment. Heidegger mentions that the worldhood of the world, its structure and significance, are anchored in the being of Dasein; Dasein's understanding of Being is the for-the-sake-of-which of the worldhood of the world (Ibid, 84). Whenever an entity has the being of ready-at-hand, it implies that it has been assigned or referred, and discovered, and done so by something (Ibid). Dasein is the primary towards-which of the involvements of equipment; for it to discover and encounter them as ready-to-hand, it must have previously allowed them to be involved in this ready-to-hand matter (Ibid, 85). Dasein must have a primordial familiarity with the world into which it lets these entities be. Within Dasein's familiarity with significance resides the ontical possibility of it discovering the being of entities as they are in themselves (Ibid, 87). This seems to suggest that significance is sui-generis to Dasein, in that it reveals a unique, Dasein dependent, understanding of worldhood and the being of the entities within the world. Dasein's being is existence and is thus devoid of any determinate characterization, thus rendering the whole network that is the significance of the world, which is for the sake of Dasein, sui-generis in that it stems from a being with no fixed essence. This is made clear when Heidegger writes: "Because the kind of Being

that is essential to truth is of the character of Dasein, all truth is relative to Dasein's Being" (Ibid, 227).

Although the significance of the world is Dasein dependent, Dasein's own understanding of the world is rarely its own. Heidegger mentions that the self of Dasein is the they-self, which is defined by publicness, and that such social and public influence alters Dasein's understanding of Being (Ibid, 127). In its everydayness, the Self of Dasein is its they-self, which is an inauthentic form of Being. "Dasein is for the sake of the "they" in an everyday manner, and the "they" itself articulates the referential context of significance" (Ibid, 129). The inauthentic form of Being influenced by the they leads to untruth and not seeing things as they are in themselves (Ibid, 222). However, the authentic form of Dasein, as being Its-Self, allows it to be in truth and understand the significance of the world and the being of the entities within it as they are in themselves (Ibid). This once more suggests that significance and the conceptuality of the world is ultimately a matter of the individual Dasein's understanding, although with the possibility of varying degrees of accountability and ownedness over the significance and conceptuality of this understanding. The they-self of Dasein tends to be in agreement in its understanding with the rest of society due to the comfort and peace of mind that comes with being in agreement with it. However, in being enveloped in the norms and manner of the they, Dasein's understanding of the world is not genuinely its own. Nonetheless, the understanding and the experience of which is ultimately subjective and its own. Likewise, Heidegger mentions that when Dasein is caught up in the idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity of the they, (in its fallenness) its understanding is constantly going wrong

in its dealings with the world and in its own possibilities for being (Ibid, 174). Heidegger suggests that the supposed objective and universal understanding is not the appropriate one, rather it is that which is found in the agent specific, practical, understanding of the authentic Dasein being Its-Self.

The significance of the world is relative to Dasein's Being, and the essence of Dasein's Being is existence, an existence with no fixed essence or being, but rather one which is characterized as constantly getting ahead of itself in its preoccupation with its ownmost potentiality for being. Such significance, which is relative to Dasein's Being, can be revealed to be truly *sui-generis* in that it does not have a fixed nature, much less an articulable and codifiable significance independently of Dasein's experience. Although the articulation of such conceptuality, by its nature, is nearly impossible to achieve in a situation in a detached manner, especially in its entirety, Dasein, in its everyday being-in-the-world, sees and understands these conceptual solitudes. It is these understandings that allow it to act and have its world disclosed to itself. This account of the *sui-generis* nature of significance is in agreement with a similar account presented by McDowell, wherein he describes the role of our rationality in our practical engagement with the world. In his account, in our practical engagement we become preoccupied with the thing to do, and all the in-between conceptual solicitations are reacted to in a tacit manner, yet nonetheless understood. This is made clear in his Frisbee example, wherein, to put it in a Heideggerian manner, the agent is called upon to have a certain type of being. The situation the agent finds himself in calls upon the agent to have a certain type of being or disposition to the situation. In other words, the situation elicits

the application of specific conceptual capacities, which in turn manifest themselves in the performance of the agent has in the situation as his way of being.

The situation that elicits a peculiar concept-involving response or manner of being from the agent results in the agent identifying what the unique conceptual solicitations within the situation. Although the situation itself awakens the agent's conceptual capacities, it is the particular understanding of the agent which, in the case of virtue, results from their ethical upbringing, which produces the unique perspective and understanding of the situation. The type of being that the agent currently finds himself in is dictated by the relevant conceptual solicitation. This reveals how the significance of the world is for-the-sake-of, or relative to, Dasein's Being, i.e. how significance is relative to Dasein's openness to the demands of the situation without the interference of an essential orientation. If in a situation the solicitations and affordances change then they elicit a different and relevant mode of being from the agent. In other words, the otherwise "objective" solicitations and affordance of the situation are manipulated or adjusted based on the context and situation the agents finds themselves in relative to their conceptual understanding; the world presents itself objectively to the agent by drawing on his conceptual repertoire and the agent perceives and responds to this world accordingly. In the case of the virtuous agent, when certain situations call upon him to be benevolent, others stern, brave, humble, and so forth, this is relative to his holistic virtuous knowledge. Thus, the acquisition of virtue changes his action by eliminating the distractions that intervene in the agent's appropriate response to the solicitations of a situation. The conceptual reality and the conceptual network is the same, and is

understood to be so, but the agent has changed and become more able to respond effectively to the situation at hand. Thus, the virtuous frisbee player, within the park setting, as opposed to a work or church setting, understands intuitively to catch the frisbee because that is what he understands as the conceptual solicitation in that particular context when he sees the frisbee coming his way (and he is not distracted by other concerns).

The sui-generis nature of the conceptual network that pervades our experience thus provides some explanation as to how the conceptuality of virtue, and in general all conceptual solicitations and affordances that get us to act, resist codification and situation independent articulation and conceptualization. Our conceptual understandings are much too situation dependent and complex to be adequately and fully conceptualized outside of experience. An individual, particularly one with some form of relevant expertise, simply understands how to act relative to his prior training and his understanding of how he is situated in the context and situation. However, this conceptual understanding is largely non-propositional, and the richness of the experience largely inarticulable, yet it is still something the agent sees and understands, even if they cannot fully articulate and codify the full complexity of their conceptual understanding of the situation which accounts for their actions. The richness of experience far exceeds our ability to articulate it in words although we understand it and respond to it. The inarticulability of such concepts ought not to lead us to consider views of a non-minded coping and engagement with the world, as Dreyfus proposes, but rather to consider an alternative view of practical rationality and conceptuality, as McDowell, Heidegger, and Aristotle seem to possess.

Conclusion

Dasein's Being, which is grounded in an understanding of Being, whether it be authentic or inauthentic, is a subjective understanding which is implicitly present in experience. The conceptuality of Dasein's own being, that of the world, and the entities within it, which follows from its understanding of Being, tends to be agent specific and inarticulable. This understanding of Being is present as a prior and implicit holistic understanding of the nature of the world. Therefore, the implicit understanding present in our fundamental intelligibility, for Heidegger appears to be of the phronesis sort, wherein it cannot be deliberated or articulated independently of the situation. The agent, when he sees, just knows and understands; it is an inherent conceptual understanding of Being which allows us to cope in the world in the way we do.

The debate over the role of mind and conceptuality in our fundamental coping, which extends far beyond the debate between Dreyfus and McDowell, is a debate that is by no means settled in this paper. Here I have merely aimed at presenting arguments in favor of alternative explanations which regard our basic coping and being-in-the-world, which both McDowell and Dreyfus agree is non-theoretical, as a conceptual and minded process. I hope that sufficient evidence and explanation has been given to consider the plausibility of the alternative perspective of our engagement with concepts in a practical, situation specific, manner, as opposed to the, traditionally purported, exclusively theoretical manner of engagement with concepts. The plausibility of such an approach, as I attempted to present in my explanation of McDowell's and Heidegger's accounts,

supports the view that our absorbed coping can be upheld to be a truly rational and minded process, albeit one that is not so in the conventional detached theoretical sense.

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