

THE SPACE OF MOTIVATIONS

A Dissertation  
Submitted to  
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Diploma Date: May 2015

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## ABSTRACT

In the Sellarsian idiom, the space of reasons distinguishes rational beings as those invested in the game of giving and asking for reasons as set apart from beings merely susceptible to the space of causes, i.e. the realm of law. In this work I open a path toward perceiving and thinking that human beings characteristically live their lives in the space of motivations, an intelligible realm of perception, thought, and action whereby non-rational, non-causal descriptions and explanations of behavior serve as the primary and legitimating backdrop of those lives. The idea of motivations stems from the underdeveloped notion within the corpus of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In preparing a path toward the space of motivations, I argue for three claims. First, in the philosophy of mind, I argue for what I call the attentionality thesis (chapter 1), which states that the mind is primarily structured by attention in two senses: that consciousness has the capacity for re-direction toward different and multiple intentional objects, and that remaining directed toward an intentional object reveals different qualitative features of that object or mode of comportment. The attentionality thesis, which I draw from Merleau-Ponty's work, broadens the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis. I further argue that the attentionality thesis undercuts the distinction in kind between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality (chapter 2), reveals shared problematic presuppositions of qualia theorists and functionalists (chapter 3), and challenges key concepts in Alva Noë's enactive theory of mind. Second, in light of the attentionality thesis, I diagnose concerns about whether perception is conceptual or nonconceptual, particularly with respect to John McDowell's conceptualism and Hubert Dreyfus's and Sean Kelly's nonconceptualism. I show that considerations of these

arguments suggest an impasse between the claims that perception is conceptual, even in motor intentional compartments (chapter 2), and nonconceptual, in light of the fineness of grain argument (chapter 4). This leads to the final claim that the primary way to understand human perception, thought, and action is not via conceptual or nonconceptual considerations, but rather via motivations in the significance they lend (chapter 5).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following people – and others I’ve surely forgotten – have supported me in innumerable ways throughout this project: Dan Pasquarello, John Dyck, Eric Fleming, Oz Blaker, Danielle LaSusa, Phil Honenberger, Roger Wolgemuth, Tal Correm, Travis Perry, Austin Rooney, Andrea Baldini, Oscar Barragan, Erum Naqvi, Jeremy Millington, Mara Gordon, various friends I have been lucky enough to meet in Philadelphia, other graduate students inside and outside the Philosophy Departments of both Temple University and Villanova University, my parents, Tom and Debbie Denehy, my brother Tim Denehy, his partner, Zara Mirmalek, and many others.

Special thanks to the faculty members at Temple – some who have moved on to other parts of this world, one no longer a part of this world – who have guided me in my studies and provided new ways to think and perceive. Thanks to Joe Margolis and Miriam Solomon for serving on my committee and providing thoughtful criticisms and concerns, especially in the early stages, and to Georg Theiner for serving on my examination committee.

Finally, a very special thanks to Espen Hammer, my advisor and mentor throughout this work. The inspiration for these ideas grew from his courses in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the life-world. This work would not exist were it not for his incredible patience, keen insights, well-placed criticisms, and overall guidance. Looking back, I can say with some amount of confidence that I would have pursued a different life and a different profession had Espen not been around.

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## INTRODUCTION

Investigations in the philosophy of mind and consciousness in the early twenty-first century may be as complex as they have ever been in human history, at least insofar as the mind and consciousness have become thematic as distinct philosophical areas of inquiry. Rather than offering a theory intended to fit squarely within one approach rather than another, my investigations into the mind and consciousness draw from the insights offered by two particular movements: the phenomenological movement inaugurated by Edmund Husserl and the “Pittsburgh Pragmatist” movement commenced by Wilfrid Sellars. But more specifically, a particular set of interactions between two contemporary philosophers in these traditions spurred my thinking on the nature of mind, consciousness, the body, and the world.

Hubert Dreyfus’s 2005 Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association targeted analytic philosophers and, specifically, John McDowell, claiming that his work falls into the Myth of the Mental in the sense of working within a paradigm of disembodied and disengaged rationality. This accusation, along with the general pronouncement that philosophy as a whole would be better off by drawing upon existential phenomenology, stirred a short dialogue between the two men in what has become known as the Dreyfus-McDowell debate.<sup>1</sup>

The core of the debate began as an argument concerning conceptual and nonconceptual content in perceptual experience, but viewed in its entirety, both men

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<sup>1</sup> See Hubert Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79, no. 2 (2005): 47-65; John McDowell, “What Myth?,” *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 338-351; Hubert Dreyfus, “The Return of the Myth of the Mental,” *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 352-365; John McDowell, “Response to Dreyfus,” *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 366-370; and Hubert Dreyfus, “Response to McDowell,” *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 371-377.

explore several themes, such as having a world versus having merely an environment; the relation between percepts and concepts; the nature of subjectivity; and mastery in intellectual and embodied pursuits in the world, to name only a few. With the debate ranging over many topics, and with each interlocutor digging in to defend his stance, it became clearer to me that *something* was at stake in order for such concerns over conceptual engagement and nonconceptual engagement to be such a hinge-point. In other words, whether perception was perhaps completely conceptual, or saturated with a kind of conceptuality, as McDowell would have it, or whether at least some perceptual episodes were completely nonconceptual, as Dreyfus would have it, seemed to suggest something deep about the nature of the mind and its relation to the world.

My initial and ongoing sympathies are with Dreyfus's side of the debate. However, as I delved further into some of the issues above, my position began to develop in a different direction. In lieu of defending the claim that there are some perceptual episodes in which our bodily engagements in the world are not conceptually mediated, I became dissatisfied with Dreyfus's interpretations of some of his philosophical heroes, namely Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In other words, the range of issues between Dreyfus and McDowell needed to be problematized further rather than simply finding the arguments to defend one side over the other.

This work challenges what appears to be a shared assumption from both sides of the debate: that perception is either conceptual or nonconceptual. But in challenging this basic premise, I step back from the conceptuality thesis to examine a more fundamental approach to the structure of the mind and consciousness. In doing so, I offer three major

claims in the work to develop a different approach to perception, thought, and action that does not easily fall into either McDowell's or Dreyfus's camp.

The first claim is what I call the attentionality thesis. The attentionality thesis claims both that consciousness has the capacity for re-direction toward different and multiple intentional objects, and that remaining directed toward an intentional object reveals different qualitative features of that object or mode of comportment.

The second claim is that there are countervailing reasons to believe that perception is conceptual or that perception is nonconceptual. By countering both sides of the Dreyfus-McDowell debate, I intend to show the *aporia* between the positions and open space for a new direction to approach the mind and consciousness.

The third claim is that this new space of intelligibility is the space of motivations, in which a motivation can be defined as a capacity of P to be moved by X to Y, in which P, stipulatively, is a person or part of a person existing through a lived body; X is an intentional object, either perceptual or conceptual; and Y is one of three things: a perceptual expectation involving passive synthesis, a concept, or a course of action.

In chapter 1, I find support for the attentionality thesis in the work of Merleau-Ponty and argue that attention is a structural feature of consciousness. In this sense, the attentionality thesis is not meant to compete with the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis that consciousness is always consciousness of something, or that consciousness is directed toward intentional objects. Rather, the attentionality thesis broadens and complements the intentionality thesis. I propose and defend the attentionality thesis alongside some of the history of attention in psychology and philosophy. In a Merleau-Pontian vein, I defend the thesis against some current psychological theories of the causal

mechanism of attention on the empiricist side and trace some of Merleau-Ponty's arguments against attention as treated by the intellectualist side. Moreover, I argue that the importance of attention in Merleau-Ponty's thought has been neglected by some of his interpreters, particularly Dreyfus and Taylor Carman. The final section of the chapter indicates why the neglect of attention weakens Dreyfus's side of the debate with McDowell concerning conceptuality in perception. This opens up space for the rest of the work to explore what an embodied consciousness looks like under the guise of the attentionality thesis, and how else the conceptual-nonconceptual debate can proceed if the phenomenological side is considered differently.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 attempt to further substantiate the attentionality thesis by identifying some of its implications.

In chapter 2, I take up the discussion of motor intentionality as defended by Dreyfus and his student, Sean Kelly. Motor intentionality has been framed as the directedness of a person's body or limbs toward motor-intentional objects. On the view defended by Dreyfus and Kelly, motor intentionality reveals our ways of being-in-the-world such that our bodies are attuned to the affordances offered by the world around us, whether in mundane everyday behavior, like reaching for doorknobs, or high-level abilities exhibited by masters of particular practices, like a carpenter working with a particular type of wood in his workshop and its suitability for the project at hand. Two key ideas follow from their discussion of motor intentionality. First, it is claimed that cognitive intentionality of the sort usually identified by philosophers of mind, i.e. the aboutness or directedness of mental states toward intentional objects, is different in kind from motor intentionality, i.e. the aboutness or directedness of the body or its limbs

toward motor intentional objects. Second, motor intentionality is cast as a nonconceptual engagement in the world.

I argue against both of these claims. While I do not deny that motor intentionality exists, I attempt to undercut the claim that it differs in kind from cognitive intentionality. Rather, motor intentionality and its objects offer different modes of comportment of a more integrated intentionality as it follows from the attentionality thesis. Likewise, I reveal reasons to believe that motor intentional comportments are at least partially conceptual in nature, though not fully conceptual. In arguing against the view espoused by Dreyfus and Kelly, I substantiate the claims in two ways. First, I suggest that they misinterpret key passages in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, especially passages describing the condition of the famous case of Schneider. Second, and relatedly, I take up two central studies from empirical psychology dealing with the patient DF, a sufferer of visual agnosia, and reinterpret those studies phenomenologically. These two avenues of criticism further the discussions of the relevance of the attentionality thesis, motor intentionality, and its conceptual or nonconceptual nature, thereby suggesting limitations in a major piece of the interpretive effort of Merleau-Ponty's work by Dreyfus and Kelly.

In chapter 3, I take up a central dispute in the analytic philosophy of mind literature as it occurs between qualia theorists and functionalists. The former offer compelling arguments supporting features of consciousness from the first-person stance while the latter offer equally compelling arguments supporting features of the mind from the third-person stance. In the first half of this chapter, I support the idea that this dispute is unresolvable because of a shared commitment to the given fact of consciousness or the

given fact of the objective world. I investigate these thoughts through an unlikely pairing: Ned Block's thought experiment of the Inverted Earth, and Jorge Luis Borges' short story, "The Aleph."

In the second half of the chapter, I argue that a switch to phenomenology can begin resolving these first- and third-person stances by revealing the nature of attentionality encompassing intentionality. In this way, I deepen the attentionality thesis from chapter 1. In lieu of the already criticized distinction between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality, I introduce the idea of attention as focal intentionality. Focal intentionality posits that an attentional embodied consciousness perceives items (objects, events, etc.) within a phenomenal field. I support the idea that this field itself is composed of a four-fold structure, comprised of what I call the focal, the non-focal, the focalizable, and the non-focalizable. This phenomenological account of perception is contrasted with Alva Noë's enactive theory of the embodied mind. In particular, I challenge his account of the problem of perceptual presence and his actual-virtual distinction within perception.

In chapter 4, I return directly to the issue of whether perception is conceptual through and through by analyzing some of McDowell's supporting arguments. One argument that perception is nonconceptual is called the fineness of grain argument. I examine McDowell's responses to the fineness of grain argument in some detail in order to combat both his old conceptualist thesis in *Mind and World* that relies upon the function of demonstratives to capture conceptual content in perceptual experience, as well as his contemporary conceptualism that relies heavily on the Sellarsian and Kantian notion of the categorial form of an intuition. Using Merleau-Pontian resources, I argue

that the fineness of grain argument supports nonconceptual content in perceptual experience in virtue of intersensory perception, a fact often neglected in the specifically sight-oriented treatment of fineness of grain in the literature. Likewise, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty challenges the conceptualism of the Kantian heritage by challenging the unity of an intuition. I offer a contrast between a Merleau-Pontian notion of the meaning of attentionality bringing an object into view with the McDowellian gloss on an intuition, namely (and merely) having an object in view. Finally, I defend the view from potential objections of falling into the Myth of the Given.

It is with the completion of chapter 4 that I have substantiated the first and second major claims of the work. I have attempted to defend the attentionality thesis and show its relevance for motor intentionality in an embodied consciousness, the stalemate between qualia theorists and functionalists, Noë's enactive theory of mind, and the fineness of grain argument as it relates to McDowell's rationalism. Likewise, I have attempted to show the relevance of the attentionality thesis for the driving impetus in the Dreyfus-McDowell debate, i.e. whether perception is conceptually mediated or not. This second point deserves clarification. By suggesting that I eschewed simply defending one side of the debate over the other, my attempt was to further complicate the stakes of the debate. In this sense, chapters 2 and 4 form a dialectic with the following structure. Chapter 2 attempts to rebut the claim that perception is nonconceptual in the paradigmatic case of motor intentionality as proposed by Dreyfus and Kelly. In this sense, I offer some claims that even motor intentional activity is at least partially conceptual. This argument is from the point of view that the burden of proof is on the *nonconceptualist* to show that at least some content in perception is nonconceptual.

Chapter 4 attempts the opposite, namely to rebut the claim that perception is conceptual in the paradigmatic case of McDowell's defense of demonstratives and Kantian intuitions against the fineness of grain argument. In that sense, I offer some claims that perception is at least partially nonconceptual. This argument is from the point of view that the burden of proof is on the *conceptualist* to show that all perceptual content is conceptual. The second major claim of the work, then, is not to defend either the claim that perception is conceptual through and through or that perception is nonconceptual. Rather, the dialectic of chapters 2 and 4 provides reasons to believe each claim in virtue of both sides of the debate, thereby leaving open at least two options. The first would suggest that perception is both conceptual and nonconceptual without contradiction, or what might be called a mixed position. I have not defended this position. The second option would suggest that the countervailing reasons reveal an *aporia* between the two positions. It is under this second option that I moved on to the third major claim of the work, a different view of perception that jettisons worries over its conceptuality.

The third major claim, then, is that the Merleau-Pontian idea of motivations, nascent though it is in his work, offers a new way of approaching the mind and consciousness in its interactions in the world. In the Sellarsian idiom, the space of reasons distinguishes rational beings as those invested in the game of giving and asking for reasons as set apart from beings merely susceptible to the space of causes, i.e. the realm of law. I open a path toward perceiving and thinking that human beings characteristically live their lives in the space of motivations, an intelligible realm of perception, thought, and action whereby non-rational, non-causal descriptions and explanations of behavior serve as the primary and legitimating backdrop of those lives.

In chapter 5, I suggest that motivations provide an opportunity to view perception and action alongside explanations by way of reasons and causes. I also suggest that motivations help account for the passivity of perception without the rationalist's overemphasis on conceptual engagement and the empiricist's overemphasis on sub-personal processes. My formulation of motivations is indebted to the work of Donnchadh O'Conaill, who claims that "an agent, A, is motivated by X to Y. When A is motivated, we can speak of a three-way relation of motivation between A, understood as a conscious individual capable of action; an object, x, of which A is conscious; and a course of action, y."<sup>2</sup> After working through the details of O'Conaill's view, I criticize some portions of his account and offer an alternative. While retaining the general formulation that a motivation is a three-way relation, I suggest that a motivation is a capacity of P to be moved by X to Y, in which P, stipulatively, is a person or part of a person existing through a lived body; X is an intentional object, either perceptual or conceptual; and Y is one of three things: a perceptual expectation involving passive synthesis (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the immediate perceptual expectation of thunder); a concept (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the thought that thunder will be heard soon); or a course of action (e.g. from the sight of lightning to being drawn to shelter). Three key differences emerge between O'Conaill's definition and mine, corresponding to each term in the relation. Where O'Conaill speaks of a conscious individual agent, A, I reference a person or part of a person existing through a lived body, P. Where O'Conaill discusses A's conscious relation to intentional object X, I suggest that X can be conscious or unconscious to P. And where O'Conaill primarily sees motivations drawing courses of

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<sup>2</sup> Donnchadh O'Conaill, "On Being Motivated," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12 (2013), 580-581.

action, Y, I argue that motivations lend themselves to further percepts, concepts, or courses of action. Importantly, I argue that the relation between X and Y can include rational motivations without being inferential. I defend the claim that these rational motivations are homologous to but structurally different from material inferences in the Sellarsian and Brandomian sense.

While the claims throughout the work are far-reaching, this was at least partially driven by the variety of topics that emerged in the Dreyfus-McDowell debate. The hope is that this work helps move parts of that debate, along with areas of philosophy of mind and consciousness, into deeper discussions of the nature of attention and an embodied consciousness, and to explore the topography of the space of motivations.

## CHAPTER 1 ATTENTION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Endeavoring to bring the nature of attention before our attention is like interrogating the nature of temporality while undergoing that very temporal rhythm. We find ourselves, afterward, implicated in the task as temporality and attention keep sliding between our fingers. I intend to clarify the nature of attention, as much clarity as the topic affords, that should be of interest to cognitive scientists investigating it, philosophers of mind interested in intentionality, and scholars of the French existential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A full theory of attention is not in the offing; rather, my goal is to elucidate some basic facts about attention in light of Merleau-Ponty's work, particularly the third chapter of his seminal *Phenomenology of Perception*, "'Attention' and 'Judgment.'"<sup>1</sup> Along the way I'll argue that Merleau-Ponty's style of thinking holds valuable lessons for cognitive scientists and philosophers, including their mutual interests in the relations between percepts and concepts, but that recent interpreters of his work have neglected these lessons, including Taylor Carman and Hubert Dreyfus.

Initial skepticism may linger concerning the fruitfulness of the relation between the phenomenological movement and the cognitive sciences. Do the two belong in the same conversation? I cannot answer that large methodological question here, but to give a direction for this endeavor, I would like to contrast my proposal for an answer with one provided by Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi. In *The Phenomenological Mind*, Gallagher and Zahavi argue that cognitive science needs phenomenology for the

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1945), chapter 3.

following reason: the proper goal of the cognitive sciences is to provide an explanatory framework for the mind and consciousness, but these explanations either fail or suffer from vacuity without a prior and deeper understanding of the nature of the mind and consciousness. In other words, we can't provide an effective *explanans* without a methodological inquiry into the *explanandum*. Now, that answer makes it sound as if the role of phenomenology is to provide deep descriptions of that which is to be explained in the future by the cognitive sciences.<sup>2</sup> It is plausible as far as it goes – but it doesn't go far enough. Not only should phenomenology provide a better understanding of the mind and consciousness, it should have the resources – as a philosophical methodology – to challenge the very explanatory models proposed by the cognitive sciences instead of merely submitting to them.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the intelligibility of those explanatory models can still be worthwhile and I believe this is true with respect to the nature of attention. Nonetheless, I also intend to illustrate that a phenomenological approach to attention challenges the cognitive sciences and provides for an alternative mode of understanding to address the topic.

Philosophers tend to accentuate Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations of embodiment and its influence upon the nature of perception and consciousness. Indeed, he is commonly referenced as *the* phenomenologist of the body. While this is accurate, I think that tethered to his analysis of the body is an even more original idea concerning the nature of attention. If the Brentano-Husserl thesis is that

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<sup>2</sup> Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2012). See chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> More cognitive scientists are accepting the idea that phenomenology can serve some role within their research. However, given the orientation of the ensuing arguments, I do not suspect certain philosophers of mind who deny the importance of the first-person stance will be persuaded: Daniel Dennett and eliminativists, in general, come to mind.

consciousness is *intentional*, it is Merleau-Ponty's thesis that consciousness is *attentional*. Like intentionality, attention is not just one feature of consciousness amongst others; rather, it is a structural feature of consciousness. Or so I'll argue.

One caveat: I would like to distance myself from the claim that all consciousness is attentional only slightly. Put in different terms, the assertion that all consciousness is attentional resonates with the complementary declarations that attention is a necessary condition for consciousness and consciousness is a sufficient condition for attention.

Arguing for one of those claims may depend on the phenomenon under investigation, and I suspect (but won't argue) that, in some cases of boredom, especially when considered as a phenomenological mood, attention is not a necessary condition for consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

And yet boredom is surely characteristic of either some first-person conscious experience or ascriptions of conscious experience to others. Regardless of how the arguments concerning the necessity or sufficiency of attention for consciousness proceed, I will lay those notions aside to focus on attention itself. In doing so I'll explore the thought that consciousness is, for the most part, attentional.

What, then, is attention? There is a consensus in the cognitive science community that there is no consensus on the term. The psychologist Elizabeth Styles writes,

[L]et us accept that to try and define attention as a unitary concept is not possible and to do so would be misleading. Perhaps the best approach is to look at experimental situations that we all agree involve one or another application of some sort of "attention" and from the data obtained, together with what we now know about the organisation of the underlying neurophysiology and the breakdown of normal function following brain

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<sup>4</sup> One might also be concerned about other cases challenging the necessity claim: dreams, comas, and whether animals exhibit an attentional consciousness, amongst others. Thanks to Roger Wolgemuth for these thoughts.

damage, *try to infer something* [PD emphasis] about the psychological processes or mechanisms underlying the observed behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

The philosopher Gary Hatfield, commenting on the history of the study of attention, adds,

As many authors have observed, “attention” now defines a complex field of research that may or may not be unified by a single underlying process or set of phenomena. It is less common now for a single author to attempt a systematic taxonomy of all the phenomena of attention. There is richness of results and of microtheory, but theoretical unification remains elusive.<sup>6</sup>

I’ll discuss further below some historical concerns about defining attention and the difficulty in accounting for its unity as a concept. Nonetheless, though my aim is not to hoist myself as that single author providing a systematic taxonomy, I think we can do better. In other words, we can delay the attempt to infer underlying mechanisms and take up the phenomenologist’s task of providing descriptions for the phenomenon or phenomena of attention.

Given the contrast between the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis and the Merleau-Ponty attentionality thesis, let me suggest two operative definitions. First, while intentionality concerns the directedness of consciousness, let attention concern the capacity for re-direction of an intentional consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Or from another angle: the moments between different intentional objects (*noemata*) for a given consciousness reveal the nature of attention. Second, attention also characterizes “sticking with” an intentional object. That is, when one pays attention to something, the directedness of an intentional consciousness intensifies (i.e. functions) to reveal different features of the

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth A. Styles, *The Psychology of Attention*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Psychology Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Hatfield, “Attention in Early Scientific Psychology” in *Visual Attention*, edited by Richard D. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>7</sup> I am not claiming that the capacity for re-direction is equivalent to a sensorimotor understanding, as in Alva Noë’s enactive view of the mind. See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

intentional object (*noema*). These operative definitions will play a role in the arguments below, so I'll briefly indicate why I have phrased them this way. I think they capture two basic facts already relevant to intentionality, namely that an intentional consciousness can be directed toward multiple objects in the world (note: I am not claiming simultaneously), and that an intentional consciousness can remain directed toward one object in the world (note: possibly more, but I'm not claiming so). These basic facts are embedded in everyday behavior and expectations we have of one another when, for example, we ask someone in the second-personal voice to "please direct your attention to X" or demand that someone "pay more attention to X." They are also consistent with Merleau-Ponty's goal to remain persistent with perception itself. He writes,

We shall have only an abstract essence of consciousness as long as we refrain from following the actual movement by which it resumes its own operations at every instant, focusing and concentrating them on an identifiable object, gradually passing from 'seeing' to 'knowing' and achieving the unity of its own life.<sup>8</sup>

With these two ideas on the table, we can see that the Brentano-Husserl thesis and what I'm calling Merleau-Ponty's thesis are not at all mutually exclusive. Rather, the attentional thesis broadens the intentional thesis to elaborate the structure of consciousness.

At the outset, the notion of attention cuts across traditional dichotomies by which we think of ourselves and our relation to the world, specifically dichotomies in the form of dualisms. Consider, for instance, whether attention is voluntary or involuntary. On some occasions, it seems from my first-person stance as though I can voluntarily direct my attention by fixing upon an object, event, or person, or redirecting toward another

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<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 44.

object, event, or person. When a stranger in a coffee shop asks me to look after her belongings while she runs to the washroom, I can surely direct my attention toward her possessions or keep them within my purview without much concern. While drifting through an art gallery, I can direct my attention toward various paintings, taking them in from a proper distance. On the other hand, it seems as though my attention can be involuntarily drawn from outside me by objects, events, and persons. The stranger's "Excuse me" prompting the request may have redirected my intentional consciousness away from my book and toward her face, or a painting's depiction of a landscape may catch my eye from afar, beckoning me to move closer. The sound of a car accident or a flash of lightning redirects every local person's attention toward that sudden event. And even when we want to, we may not be able to redirect our attention away from these sounds or sights for considerable time. With respect to redirecting consciousness and remaining with an intentional object, it seems as though attention is voluntary at times and involuntary at others. This is one reason for Styles' claim that attention lacks unity as a concept.

Other typical dichotomies characterize the study of the nature of attention throughout the history of philosophy and psychology. Following the historical evidence provided by Hatfield, the psychologists Richard D. Wright and Lawrence M. Ward observe that attention has been divided in the following ways: voluntary versus involuntary attention; cognitive versus sensory attention; active versus passive attention; and high-level versus low-level attention.<sup>9</sup> It is worthwhile to note that the first and second terms in each dichotomy form respective series broadly resembling gender

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<sup>9</sup> Hatfield, "Attention in Early Scientific Psychology;" Richard D. Wright and Lawrence M. Ward, *Orienting of Attention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 1.

categories filtered through Cartesian dualism, i.e. the active, rational male mind versus the passive, sensory (and perhaps emotional) female body.

Equally noteworthy is a further historical point from Hatfield, who writes,

In the seventeenth century, Descartes (1596-1650) described more fully the *Tätigkeitsaspekt* [active directing, Hatfield's translation] of attention by clearly distinguishing between the voluntary fixation of attention and involuntary shifts. [...] He described cases in which attention is drawn to what is novel, a phenomenon he attributed to the emotion of wonder: 'Wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual and extraordinary.' In such cases, attention is not under voluntary control, but is simply drawn to the novel thing.<sup>10</sup>

But Hatfield's suggestion that "attention is not under voluntary control" for Descartes is misleading. Descartes does not assert that one's attention is redirected involuntarily toward a novel object; he claims that one's soul, i.e. the rational mind with the capacity to intellectually perceive objects in their unity, is brought to consider the novel object with its attention (i.e. the *soul's* attention) because the soul has been filled with the emotion (or truly the passion) of wonder. In one way or another, as an attribute or property, it appears that attention belongs to the soul – not to the body. This is further confirmed by Descartes' belief that passions such as wonder arise due to physiological processes, namely in the representation of objects whose source is the pineal gland. In the rest of article 70 from *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes,

So it [the passion of wonder] is caused first by the impression in one's brain that represents the object as rare and consequently worthy of being accorded great consideration, and then by the motion of spirits disposed by this impression to advance with great force upon the place in the brain where it is, to strengthen and preserve it there – as they are also disposed by it to flow from there into the muscles for keeping the sense organs in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 11. The quotation cited by Hatfield comes from section 70 of Rene Descartes, *Passions of the Soul* in *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I, 325-404, section 70, trans. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

the same position they are in, so that if it has been formed by them it will still be maintained by them.<sup>11</sup>

On this view, the term “attention” swings toward the voluntary side of the spectrum as it becomes an accomplice in the cognitive search for controlled rational self-certainty, whereas involuntary shifts of “attention” (now a demoted term) reference the “effect” that outside forces have upon impressing a representational object in a subject’s physiology. The key point is that the extension of the term “attention” is narrowed to the active and voluntary attending to the object while the moment of redirection of intentional consciousness is neglected.

While traditional dichotomies plague the analysis of attention throughout the history of philosophy and psychology, the operative definitions offered above make no distinction between any of these features. When investigating attention in light of Merleau-Ponty’s work, it is crucial that dichotomies of this kind, i.e. ones that are or resemble descendants of mind-body dualisms, should be met with skeptical eyes. In fact, Merleau-Ponty goes much further than this. On his view, dedication to perception and its phenomena requires jettisoning a number of dualistic ideas. He explains,

Objective thought, as applied to the universe and not to phenomena, knows only alternative notions; starting from actual experience, it defines pure concepts which are mutually exclusive: the notion of *extension*, which is that of an absolute externality of one part to another, and the notion of *thought* which is that of a being wrapped up in himself; the notion of the vocal *sign* as a physical phenomenon arbitrarily linked to certain thoughts, and that of *meaning* as a thought entirely clear to itself; the notion of *cause* as a determining factor external to its effect, and that of *reason* as a law of intrinsic constitution of the phenomenon.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 57.

He is not the only philosopher to think that dualistic concepts structured as mutually exclusive tend to distort matters rather than clarify their meaning. For example, the “Pittsburgh Pragmatist” Robert Brandom writes, “A distinction becomes a dualism when its components are distinguished in terms that makes their characteristic relations to one another ultimately unintelligible. (Descartes’s dualism is, as always, the paradigm.)”<sup>13</sup> It will be fruitful to work with attention for what it is, an ambiguous term when considered in relation to those features, but a clarified term when broadening the intentionality thesis.

Nonetheless, we should briefly pause over a concern here regarding Merleau-Ponty’s position vis-à-vis objectivity. The reader might reasonably think that Merleau-Ponty argues against any notion of objectivity in virtue of criticizing “objective thought” at the beginning of quoted passage. But no such thing is true. He is surely concerned to uphold *some* notion of objectivity. For example, he writes,

The question is not only how one size or shape, among all apparent sizes or shapes is regarded as an invariant: it is a much more searching one. It is a matter of understanding how a determinate shape or size – true or even apparent – can come to light before me, become crystallized in the flux of my experience and, in short, be given to me. Or, more concisely still, how can there be objectivity?<sup>14</sup>

Merleau-Ponty’s real target is not any notion of objectivity; rather, it is any notion of objectivity taken as a starting point for analysis instead of one achieved through experience. His criticism, then, is rightly seen as challenging a metaphysical dogma concerning the nature of objective reality before paying attention to perceptual experience. The key point is that Merleau-Ponty’s attack on dualistic thinking is of a

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 615.

<sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 349.

piece with problematically thinking of objectivity as reaching a world completely independent of who we are as perceptual beings.

The modern period following Descartes is well known for establishing another dichotomy between empiricism and rationalism, and it is one of Merleau-Ponty's aims to argue that empiricist and rationalist accounts of attention fail. With regard to the empiricists, accounts of attention built on strictly causal laws fail to be explanatory. This may be shocking insofar as it is maintained that the real goal of any psychological theory worth the name is to uncover psychological laws operating within the natural realm, where the natural is tacitly assumed as susceptible to strictly causal laws. But Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations demonstrate that the nature of attention defies strict causal analysis. Note the use of the word "strict" here because I am not claiming that attention does not lend itself to any causal analysis, but only that a causal analysis will be insufficient to fully capture the nature of attention.<sup>15</sup>

Under the supposition that attention is a cause, the cognitive scientist beholden to empiricism is set the task of identifying the mechanisms by which attention causes (or plays a causal role in) representing the relevant items out in the world, say, in conjunction with the agent's perceptual apparatus. As noted by psychologists William A. Johnston and Veronica J. Dark, this supposition suffers from the homunculus fallacy. By suggesting that attention is the causal factor, the explanation "introduces an infinite regress because the same questions that were asked about how individuals pay attention

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<sup>15</sup> This relates to the difficult relation between phenomenology and the cognitive sciences noted at the beginning of the chapter.

now have to be asked about how the attention director pays attention.”<sup>16</sup> As Merleau-Ponty would put it, attempting to identify a mechanism of attention as the cause of attention merely presupposes what is to be explained. Thus, attention is brought in as an auxiliary hypothesis to support the thought that perceptual systems represent items in the world without the hypothesis doing any explanatory work whatsoever.

The same problem arises under the supposition that attention is an effect of causal stimuli, the more widely held view of cognitive scientists today.<sup>17</sup> Since this thought dominates the theoretical landscape, I’ll spend more time demonstrating why attention is not strictly an effect by working through a hypothetical example and considering why various explanations, ones that would seem very natural, fail.

Consider again the example of the sound of a car accident down the street redirecting my intentional consciousness toward the scene (along with others’ intentional minds in the vicinity). Suppose that I was not facing the scene of the accident, but that I heard it first and then turned around to see the aftermath. Under the hypothesis that attention is an effect, the following explanation is possible:

The sound of the car accident caused my attention to register the sound and subsequently turn to see the wreck.

Two problems arise here. First, it would be phenomenologically inaccurate to suggest that there was a sound that my attention then registered *as* the sound of a car accident because I hear it *as* the sound of a car accident from the very moment of its occurring. There is no temporal lapse; attention is already at the scene hearing the sound attempting to be explained. Even if there were a temporal lapse and an auditory mechanism were

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<sup>16</sup> William A. Johnston and Veronica J. Dark, “Selective Attention,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 37 (1986): 68.

<sup>17</sup> See Styles, *The Psychology of Attention* and Wright and Ward, *Orienting of Attention*.

identified, such an interpretation would reinsert part of the causal efficacy back into an attentional mechanism insofar as that mechanism is doing the work of registering the sound as the sound of the car accident, thereby suffering again from the homunculus fallacy. On this view, either attention does nothing as an effect or it is once again presupposed as a cause.

The second problem is that the following explanation is just as valid:

The sound of the car accident caused my perceptual systems to register the sound and subsequently turn to see the wreck. (One might say: to better visually perceive the car accident.)

This second problem divides into two more problems. First, if we consider this explanation at the level of the sentence, attention drops out of the explanation entirely. The sound now causes my perceptual systems to react, not my attention. So attention plays no explanatory role in coming to perceive the car wreck, and attention itself remains unexplained. Consider that the linguistic level of the problem. Second, if we consider this explanation from my first-person stance, the question arises: how could a perceptual system re-orient *my body*? That seems phenomenologically inaccurate because, in this case, *the sound* re-oriented my body in virtue of my body having an auditory perceptual system. It is important to emphasize that the sound re-oriented my body toward the car accident, not that the sound-as-a-cause re-oriented my body. Consistent with the phenomenological point above, when I am walking down the street I don't hear sounds-as-causes. I just hear sounds. Like the first explanation, this explanation presupposes that my attention is already directed toward the sound. Again, attention neither plays an explanatory role in coming to perceive the car wreck nor is itself explained. Now, to be clear, it might seem contradictory to assert that attention

both drops out of the explanation and is presupposed in the explanation simultaneously. To reiterate, attention drops out of the explanation at the linguistic level of analysis, but it is presupposed at the perceptual level of analysis from the first-person stance. So there is no contradiction here. In both cases attention remains mysterious when supposed as an effect.

Nonetheless, both explanations thus far have come from the first person phenomenological stance, which, one might think, is less suited for a causal analysis anyway. I intend to show that the same problems arise from the third person stance.

Consider this explanation:

The sound of the car accident caused person X's attention to register the sound and subsequently caused the person to turn to see the wreck.

This will not suffice either. Once again, at the linguistic level, it is merely presupposed that person X's attention is registering the sound and, likewise, the homunculus fallacy returns. Consider this similar explanation:

The sound of the car accident caused person X's perceptual systems to register the sound and subsequently caused the person to turn to see the wreck.

Here, saying that person X's body turned because (the explanatory-causal "because") of the sound of the car accident implies that person X's perceptual systems were already directed toward the sound of the car accident. At this level of analysis – which is the perceptual level of the third-person observer – attention is again presupposed, but this time, for a more specific reason. Attention is presupposed because of the implicit thought that the nature of attention and the direction of one's perceptual systems are identical. Put differently, the danger lies in treating a person's attentional capacities as identical with a person's perceptual capacities *understood as perceptual systems*.

Now, even under the supposition that this identity claim is intelligible (which I will argue below is misguided), it is nonetheless *empirically* false. Since one of the first experiments on attention by Hermann von Helmholtz, having constructed a tachistoscope and verifying that having one's intentional consciousness directed toward objects in a location variant from the directedness of one's visual systems, it has been established that attentional capacities and perceptual systems can diverge.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the result of the experiment helped confirm that the so-called focal point of one's attention can diverge from the so-called focal point of one's (visual) senses. The primitive apparatus of Helmholtz's experiment has been replicated under contemporary conditions and standards, confirming the results through location-cueing and eye-monitoring technologies.<sup>19</sup> *That* our attentional focus can diverge from our perceptual focus is well-established in the psychological literature, and this is all that is crucial to defeat the implicit thought above. If attentional capacities and perceptual systems can diverge, then it does not necessarily follow that they are identical in any given case, even if there are cases of parallel operation. So the explanation here is inaccurate at the perceptual level from the third-person stance.

Nonetheless, one might wonder *how* this divergence can occur. Regarding only eye movements and shifts of attention, Wright and Ward indicate three proposals: that attention shifts and eye shifts, specifically saccades, are not causally linked and occur via different mechanisms (the independent systems proposal); that they are causally linked and occur via the same system (the common system proposal); or that they are causally linked by different systems sharing some mechanisms (the interdependent systems

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<sup>18</sup> Wright and Ward, *Orienting of Attention*, chapter 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, chapter 2.

proposal).<sup>20</sup> But, if the argument so far is on the right track, the very intelligibility of identifying attentional capacities with perceptual capacities understood as perceptual systems is misguided. What I have in mind here a thought from Charles Taylor regarding the way the mind is too often addressed in contemporary philosophy and psychology, namely as the focal point within the inner/outer picture of the world. It is this picture holding us captive, as Taylor quotes Wittgenstein, keeping us from remaining with our attentional capacities as (partially) perceptual capacities but also exceeding the inner/outer (or if you like, the input/output) picture.<sup>21</sup> It is just this excess that requires developing a different view of attention: one viewing attention as a *capacity* with certain structures and functions and not as a *system* with input/output processes.

The same danger can infect the first-person stance in the similar thought that one's own attentional capacities are identical to one's own perceptual capacities understood as perceptual systems. To see why, consider this explanation:

The sound of the car accident caused me to turn around and see the wreck.

Likewise, from the third-person stance, consider:

The sound of the car accident caused person X to turn around and see the wreck.

Note that these explanations, though now focusing on a person, rely on the two thoughts undermined above: that one understands the word "cause" in the explanatory sense, i.e. in the sound-as-a-cause sense, and that one falls prey to identifying attentional capacities with perceptual capacities understood as perceptual systems. These two thoughts make

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, chapter 6.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Taylor, "Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26-49.

the sentences seem natural, but given the arguments above, neither is accurate. That is surely pertinent to why the explanations are false at the linguistic level.

In some sense, it is even more problematic at the perceptual level. Understanding one's own perceptual capacities as perceptual systems underpins thinking of oneself – including one's body – as if it were perceived from a third-person stance. It is the emphasis on the third-person stance and the constraint of a strictly causal analysis that can force one into the intolerable situation of thinking of oneself from a position that is not one's own. In other words, it is the *thought* of remaining faithful to the third-person stance and its constraints that threatens the *perception* afforded by the first-person stance. The confused result, displayed in the explanations above, is to assume a stance *that is no stance*. It is either to think that all reasonable stances are third-personal, rightly regarded in the extreme as the view from nowhere, or on the problem located here, to allow the third-person stance to infect and slowly disintegrate the first-person stance. The result isn't quite a view from nowhere, but neither is it grounded in a view from somewhere. It is, as Bernard Williams once called it in a different context, a mid-air position – neither committal nor non-committal, incessantly “viewing” oneself from the outside.<sup>22</sup> It is to think of oneself as a *thing* that is caused, and not as a person with attentional and perceptual capacities exceeding the intelligibility underwriting an analysis of perceptual systems.

It should be understood that there is no trick here by focusing on a case devoted to auditory perceptual systems or an event requiring re-orientation of the body. The analyses would be the same if a flash of lightning were striking our visual systems or if

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<sup>22</sup> See Bernard Williams, “Subjectivism: Further Thoughts” in *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

we were facing in the direction of these events in the first place. But there is a minor rhetorical reason for approaching this issue this way, which is that focusing on the nature of attention brings our analysis to a wider field of perception – a wider field in which we also find ourselves. So the example of hearing a sound from behind captures the *depth* of perception as one is part of the landscape composing the street, cars, and other people whose attention has just been redirected by the event of the car accident. More will be said below about how attention relates to this field of perception. For now, the empiricist account of attention fails because, on a strictly causal analysis, attention is neither explained nor explanatory under the hypothesis that it is either a cause or an effect.

### *Interlude*

In his short story “Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,” David Foster Wallace captures this moment of impasse in the causal thinking of empiricists. Amongst a series of interweaving storylines, presented as if haphazardly from the inner dialogue of the narrator, the reader learns that his (i.e. the narrator’s) mother has suffered from two botched cosmetic surgeries (the second intended to remedy the first), leaving her face a “*chronic mask of insane terror*.”<sup>23</sup> He writes,

The only lighthearted interlude was that when they brought her the mirror and the first surgery’s bandages came off then one could at first not ascertain whether the face’s expression was a reaction to what she saw in the mirror or if it itself was what she saw and this was the stimulus causing the noises. Mother herself who is a decent-hearted if vain, bitter and timid female specimen but who is not a colossus of the roads of the human intellect, to put it frankly, could herself not ascertain at first if the look of insane terror was the response or the stimulus and if it was a response then a response to what in the mirror if the response itself was

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<sup>23</sup> David Foster Wallace, “Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,” in *Oblivion: Stories* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005), 182. Emphasis original.

the expression. Causing no end of confusion before they got her sedated. The surgeon was leaning forward against the wall with his face to the wall a behavioral reaction which signaled, *Yes* there was an objective problem in the surgery's results.<sup>24</sup>

Amongst other themes in the story, including the terror involved in the modern world of coming to see but not recognize ourselves, is the theme of identifying the stimulus or effect of an event and the forgotten element of attention in that identification. The mother's confusion illuminates the inadequacy of the first-person account while the surgeon's acknowledgment of the objective problem illuminates the inadequacy of the third-person account. What Wallace has elucidated in a literary flash is Merleau-Ponty's argument that the third-person scientist's account is still an account from somewhere – attention included. It follows that this mode of understanding, i.e. the very intelligibility of a strictly causal analysis of attention, will not suffice for understanding the nature of attention and the nature of expression. And in this case, expression is not limited to the linguistic realm, but is fundamentally perceptual.<sup>25</sup>

Merleau-Ponty notes that intellectualism (or rationalism) has the advantage over empiricism in that it “starts with the fruitfulness of attention”<sup>26</sup> but overemphasizes and misunderstands its constitutive role in perception. Unlike empiricism, rationalists treat attention – again, thinking of attention as the capacity for redirection of an intentional consciousness and functioning to reveal different features of objects by remaining directed toward them – as if it were completely unconditioned on the part of the agent,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 185. Emphasis original.

<sup>25</sup> This should be contrasted with the rationalist approaches of John McDowell and Robert Brandom. They, especially Brandom, have only touched upon the expressive capacities of a language. But linguistic expressive capacities constitute only a sub-type of expressive capacities.

<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 31.

acting as a searchlight to focus and reveal objects in their full light of clarity. By shining the searchlight of attention on the relevant object, rationalism treats the object as if it were already constituted just as it appears before the subject. Now, Merleau-Ponty does claim that attention plays a constitutive role with respect to objects in the world, a claim I will explore further below. It is important to emphasize from the start, however, that his claim is one about the constitution of *meaning* – as an intentional object or *noema* – and not about the very existence of objects or our epistemological access to them. So by way of contrast, we might say that there are two canonical ways intellectualism overemphasizes and misunderstands the role of attention, one following Berkeley's idealism and the other following Kant's transcendental idealism.<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty's claim about attention is not that objects in the world do not exist unless they come within the purview of a perceptual being's attention, *pace* Berkeley. Rather, he is arguing that objects do not exist *in the full clarity of their meaning* before coming within that purview. Similarly, his claim about attention is not that consciousness constitutes the object ontologically or epistemologically as if the object *could not* come within the subject's perceptual experience without satisfying transcendental conditions, *pace* Kant.<sup>28</sup> If Berkeley's idealism places objects into existence in the full light of their clarity, Kant's transcendental idealism restricts our access to a set of objects that could only be revealed within the full light of their clarity. The problem is that we do not find ourselves in a

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<sup>27</sup> Calling Berkeley an intellectualist or rationalist here may sound strange since he is often classified with modern empiricists. But there is a difference between how we come to acquire ideas and how ideas are constituted, the latter of which figures in Berkeley's idealism as perception constitutes the very existence of objects (as ideas). The difference is crucial but underappreciated given criticisms that Merleau-Ponty was an idealist.

<sup>28</sup> I am leaving aside another way one might think about this, namely that the Kantian subject constitutes objects as if producing them. Likewise, I am leaving aside whether the world is mind-dependent or mind-independent on Kant's view, which I take to be a confused issue anyhow.

world that is already fully clarified in terms of its meaning. For Merleau-Ponty, the call for such transcendental conditions neglects actual perception and attention in the search for favoring the objective (or objectivating) conditions for consciousness. Once again, objectivity is presupposed as a starting point instead of something achieved – and specifically achieved through perceptual experience and not only through the alleged pathway of thought thinking itself.<sup>29</sup>

The overall result, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the same as with empiricism. Attention plays no role in coming to perceive the relevant object or in coming to achieve objectivity; rather, empiricists and intellectualists treat the object indifferently as if it were just there, fully infused with objective meaning, in plain sight for anyone to perceive.<sup>30</sup> We might say that, on the empiricist account, attention does not factor in the causal story, and on the rationalist account, attention does not factor in the rational story. Merleau-Ponty writes,

In spite of the intentions of intellectualism, the two doctrines, then, have this idea in common that attention creates nothing, since a world of impressions in itself or a universe of determining thought are equally independent of the action of mind.<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that Merleau-Ponty believes consciousness is, for the most part, attentional. Before turning to a few positive ideas about the nature of attention, I would like to emphasize one more point regarding its importance for him. Consider the following obvious allusion to Plato's *Meno*:

Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again

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<sup>29</sup> This though bears directly on issues relating percepts and concepts to be taken up in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 44-45.

<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 33.

we should not be searching. They are in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness *in the act of learning* (emphasis original), and that neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still ‘empty’ but already determinate intention which *is* (emphasis original) attention itself.<sup>32</sup>

Merleau-Ponty seems to believe that, without appreciating the role of attention for consciousness, we will be stuck in age-old problems concerning a theory of learning. And if that’s the case, then it is reasonable to think that our theories of concepts, including concept acquisition and possession, will also be lacking. If the arguments above concerning the paucity of empiricist and intellectualist accounts of attention are compelling, this should also disquiet our thoughts about the nature of learning and concepts. Understanding attention becomes even more important because it could reorganize the lines by which we approach these related topics.

What, then, is attention? And what positive role does it afford? Merleau-Ponty writes the following:

The first operation of attention is, then, to create for itself a *field*, either perceptual or mental, which can be ‘surveyed’ (überschauen), in which movements of the exploratory organ or elaborations of thought are possible, but in which consciousness does not correspondingly lose what it has gained and, moreover, lose itself in the changes it brings about.<sup>33</sup>

The notion that attention creates a field suggests that items appearing in that space only appear as part of a larger holistic framework. Attention is, importantly, the basis upon which consciousness perceives objects as appearing set against and framed by backgrounds. Merleau-Ponty writes, “The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field’.”<sup>34</sup> It is part of his overall

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 4.

investigative aim to establish that the very notion of perception for us presupposes that we take this field for granted in its figure-ground structure.

Now, it is this figure-ground structure forming the phenomenal field that Merleau-Ponty scholars tend to emphasize, especially when criticizing the empiricist and intellectualist traditions Merleau-Ponty inherits. This emphasis encourages these scholars to turn immediately toward an analysis of embodiment to describe how we come to perceive in virtue of being part of that phenomenal field, thereby rejecting (especially intellectualist) non-embodied accounts of perception. This line of thinking tends to further develop by focusing on the importance of the body and its abilities. As Taylor Carman writes, “The intentionality of perception is thus *anchored* [my emphasis] in what Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘motor intentionality’ of our bodily skills.”<sup>35</sup>

I want to suggest that this picture perpetuates the sin of omission of the empiricist and intellectualist traditions: as Merleau-Ponty puts it above, the thought that attention creates nothing. Overemphasizing the notion of the body, this picture developed by Merleau-Ponty scholars motivates further confusion regarding the nature of attention and the relation between percepts and concepts. We are not anchored to the world in virtue having bodies; we are anchored to the world in virtue of our attentional capacities.

Consider Merleau-Ponty’s first operation of attention again. Attention *creates* a field, either perceptual or mental, in which certain activities are performed. The point about attention is one step deeper than analyses of the phenomenal field (including the body’s motor intentionality) because attention *creates* that field. Merleau-Ponty is

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<sup>35</sup> Taylor Carman, “Sensation, Judgment, and the Phenomenal Field,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69.

arguing that the very notion of a field with a figure-ground structure presupposes a consciousness capable of attending to various parts (figures) of that overall space (background). Attention, indeed, requires multiple possible figures. To see why, consider a scenario in which a perceptual being, per impossible, perceives only one figure – whatever it is – upon a background. It would be as if a man could never take his eyes off one object in the world. The reason this is *perceptually* impossible is because there would be no way for the man to understand that what he perceives is an object at all. The object would appear so fused with the background that the figure and ground would become indistinguishable, thereby destroying the figure-ground relationship inherent for perceptual consciousness. In light of the first operational definition of attention – the capacity for redirection of intentional consciousness – this explains why the notion of a field presupposes the possibility of re-orienting toward multiple possible figures within a given background. And this likewise illustrates that a notion of a field implies that some items in that space appear more transparent or salient than others. We can see here how the attentional thesis broadens the intentional thesis. If the intentional thesis makes a claim about the directedness of consciousness, this implies that, at least perceptually, consciousness is capable of being directed toward multiple items and in multiple ways.

But consider Merleau-Ponty's initial thought again. Attention creates a field, *either perceptual or mental*, in which certain activities are performed. Attention is not simply bound to the perceptual field, a point that Carman (and I'll argue Dreyfus) omits. It is likewise related to a mental field. We should interpret Merleau-Ponty thusly: the field created by attention is either perceptual or mental, but not both simultaneously. In other words, there is a perceptual field with its salient figures upon a background and a

mental field with its salient “figures” or thoughts upon a background, but an intentional consciousness is not directed at the perceptual field and the mental field simultaneously.

Why this interpretation? Merleau-Ponty writes,

Between the self which analyzes perception and the self which perceives, there is always a distance. But in the concrete act of reflection, I abolish this distance, I prove by that very token that I am capable of *knowing* what I was perceiving, I control in practice the discontinuity of the two selves, and it would seem that, in the last resort, the significance of the *cogito* lies not in revealing a universal constituting force or in reducing perception to intellection, but in establishing the *fact* of reflection which both pierces and sustains the opacity of perception.<sup>36</sup>

Separating the perceptual field and the mental field captures the way in which attending to an object perceptually is different from thinking about that object, thinking about one’s looking at that object, thinking about the way in which one might look at that object differently, or even thinking about perception itself. Taking up the object as an object in either the perceptual field (if in its proper vicinity) or in the mental field oscillates; but it is just this oscillation that expresses capacity for redirection of an intentional consciousness that focuses on the object in one way (perceptually) and then in another way (reflectively).

Confusion could arise if the claim that one attends to a figure in either the perceptual field or the mental field, but not both simultaneously, is thought to entail that the perceptual field and the mental field do not exist simultaneously for the subject.

Again, this resonates with the Berkeleian misunderstanding above that objects do not exist unless being perceived. But no such thing is implied. Both fields co-exist for any given attentional consciousness in virtue of being embodied – in virtue of being visible.

An embodied subject exists as a focal point amidst those perceptual and mental fields,

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<sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 49-50.

which is to deny that an embodied subject is outside those fields and constituting them. However, saying that an embodied subject is *a* focal point is not the same as the thought an embodied subject is *the* focal point, the idea underwriting Carman's analysis of the body as an anchor in this world. The realm of the conceptual and the realm of the perceptual overlap at all times for the embodied human subject, but they do not overlap at all points. In this regard, it is important to understand why Merleau-Ponty believes there is always a distance between the self who is perceiving and the self who is analyzing perception, as well as how that distance can be contracted or protracted.

In Dreyfus's interpretations of Merleau-Ponty, the omission of the mental field surfaces, for one example, in his descriptions of engaged experts and the idea of their "full absorption" or "total involvement" in their activities. Consider the following instance:

A chess Grandmaster facing a position, for example, experiences a compelling sense of the issue and the best move. In a popular kind of chess called lightning chess, the whole game has to be played in two minutes. Under such time pressure, Grandmasters must make some of their moves as quickly as they can move their arms – less than a second a move – and yet they can still play Master level games. When the Grandmaster is playing lightning chess, as far as he can tell, he is simply responding to the patterns on the board. At this speed he must depend entirely on perception and not at all on analysis and comparison of alternatives.<sup>37</sup>

Elsewhere, Dreyfus writes,

As Nabokov spells out brilliantly in *The Defense*, a chess master does not see the board as a propositional structure no matter how specific and contextual. When involved in the game, and only while involved, he sees "lines of force". [...]

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<sup>37</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79, no. 2 (2005): 53.

The Grandmaster also experiences containment, leaks, confrontations, pressures. These attractions and repulsions are not reducible to, or characterizable as, objective facts about a board position that can serve as reasons to be shared and criticized by detached observers. They are experienced only if one is already a master and only as long as one is totally involved in the game.<sup>38</sup>

On Dreyfus' view, when an expert is fully absorbed in his activity, it is his motor intentionality that commandeers his body and places his actions on autopilot. Fully absorbed, the expert loses himself in the activity. But this is contrary to Merleau-Ponty's claim above vis-à-vis attention when he says "consciousness does not correspondingly lose what it has gained and, moreover, lose itself in the changes it brings about."<sup>39</sup> In fact, this is a direct refutation that a person engaged in an activity, even at an expert level, can be fully absorbed in such a way as to completely lose himself in the demands of that activity. This places into jeopardy Merleau-Pontian resources as evidential support for Dreyfus' analysis of the engaged expert. But, more to the point, it reveals how Dreyfus' reliance on the idea of "full absorption" neglects the role of attention as creating both the perceptual field *and the mental field*.

There is an important way in which the omission of attention has influenced Dreyfus' position in the conceptual-nonconceptual issue, especially as seen in his debate with John McDowell. Again, my purpose here is not to develop an alternative account of that relation (for more, see chapters 2 and 4), but to illuminate how Dreyfus' interpretation turns out to weaken his case against McDowell's rationalist thesis regarding perception. It is possible to see McDowell's argument for that rationalist thesis in the following form. McDowell presents the idea that perception must be either

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<sup>38</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, "Detachment, Involvement, and Rationality: Are We Essentially Rational Animals?," *Human Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2007): 106.

<sup>39</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 34.

completely conceptual or completely nonconceptual; for him, perception cannot be nonconceptual without leaving us in one of two pitfalls, namely the Given or coherentism; therefore, it must be completely conceptual. The rationalist thesis holds that all perceptual content is, in one way or another, permeated with conceptuality; there is no perceptual content without conceptual content for a rational adult on McDowell's view.<sup>40</sup>

Now, I think the Merleau-Pontian response to this position would charge the rationalist with a false dichotomy: it's not the case that perception is either completely conceptual or completely nonconceptual. Conversely, perception understood in light of the role of attention comes in degrees and does so in the relation between the perceptual and mental fields. That perception comes in degrees helps elucidate the thought that one's intentional consciousness is never so fixed upon an object that it cannot be redirected elsewhere. Moreover, it suggests that the very structure of being directed toward an object involves the possibility of re-orientation. But Dreyfus' notion of "full absorption" conceals this gradient view. Instead of challenging the first premise – that perceptual content is either completely conceptual or completely nonconceptual – he accepts the dichotomy (at least implicitly) by arguing that engaged experts are fully absorbed in their activities and, consequently, that their experience is imbued with perceptual content that is completely nonconceptual. He writes,

The basic philosophical point is that, where action is concerned, there are two separate ways of being open to the world – the conceptual and the non-conceptual way. The conceptual way in its pure form describes what happens when one confronts a difficult situation, steps back, figures out what to do, and then responds competently. But, in so far as one is an

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<sup>40</sup> The way perceptual content is saturated with conceptuality differs throughout McDowell's writings. These will be dealt with more closely in chapter 4.

expert in any domain, and things are going well, one responds directly and transparently to the situation's demands.<sup>41</sup>

It is in virtue of accepting the terms of the debate, namely the first premise, that Dreyfus falls back into the Myth of the Given in the form of a nonconceptual motor intentionality driving what he takes to be pre-predicative thought. But this neglects the role of attention creating the fields by which objects and their meanings come into view.

Following the lead of Merleau-Ponty, I have argued that the otherwise elusive nature of attention is more approachable from a phenomenological standpoint that broadens our usual notions of intentionality. Attention is the capacity for redirection of an intentional consciousness and functions to reveal different features of intentional objects. Moreover, attention defies a strictly causal analysis of empiricism and the ontological and epistemological demands of intellectualism. Nonetheless, attention plays a constitutive role in creating two fields by which we navigate the world, the perceptual field and mental field, as well as the meaning inherited, sustained, and inaugurated in those fields. Fuller implications of this attentionality thesis will be explored with respect to motor intentionality (chapter 2), whether perception is nonconceptual or conceptual (chapters 2 and 4, respectively), and the positions of qualia realism and functionalism (chapter 3), before relating the notion of attention to the topic of motivations (chapter 5).

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<sup>41</sup> Dreyfus, "Detachment, Involvement, and Rationality," 108.

## CHAPTER 2 CONCEPTUALIZING MOTOR INTENTIONALITY

In the first chapter I introduced a distinction between Merleau-Ponty's attentionality thesis and the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis, culminating with the idea that recent interpreters of Merleau-Ponty's work have neglected his emphasis on attention with the consequence that this negatively impacts their ability to counter rationalists like John McDowell over conceptual issues. This chapter continues this line of criticism, not by focusing on attention, but by discussing the nature of motor intentionality.

Mark Wrathall, a former student of Hubert Dreyfus, opens an article on Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body in the following way:

A measure of the remarkable influence of Cartesian dualism is found in the fact that it constrains even the ways in which it is rejected. Few accept, it is true, the basic picture of a dualism of mental and physical *substances*. A dualism still shapes the philosophy of mind, however – for instance, in that almost everyone sees as central the task of figuring out the relation between mind and body.<sup>1</sup>

The primary task of this chapter is to argue that, despite their intentions, Wrathall's mentor Dreyfus and colleague Sean Kelly succumb to this Cartesian influence when interpreting Merleau-Ponty, thereby confounding issues related to the body. Specifically, I will argue that they reintroduce Cartesian-like dualism in their distinction between cognitive intentionality (the mind) and motor intentionality (the body), and that they fail to support the distinction with cited neuroscientific evidence from Milner and Goodale

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<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Wrathall, "Motives, Reasons, and Causes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 111.

and Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor, as well as textual evidence from Merleau-Ponty.<sup>2</sup>

These criticisms pave the way for chapter 3 in which I present a different understanding of intentionality that encompasses mind and body as seen through the lens of the already-discussed-but-to-be-further-refined idea of attention. As opposed to the distinction to be found in Dreyfus and Kelly between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality, I call it focal intentionality.

Simplistically, there are three sets of interrelated issues at stake in Dreyfus's and Kelly's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty related to establishing the cognitive/motor distinction. First, as will be discussed shortly, the distinction aligns with concerns over conceptual and nonconceptual content in experience; consequently, their success (or lack thereof) of supporting the distinction affects their nonconceptual position vis-à-vis debates over the content of perceptual experience. Second, and related to the first concern, anyone with a Merleau-Pontian background knows that discussions of the body necessarily implicate issues in perception. Nonetheless, Kelly's writings delineate analyses of bodily and perceptual issues, and I'll follow suit by focusing on the body and motor intentionality in this chapter while delaying related perceptual issues until further chapters. Third, I am convinced that Kelly's analysis of the normativity of motor intentionality is flawed. However, I believe that mistaken account is due to the prior issue addressed here in his description of motor intentionality as distinct from cognitive intentionality. In other words, if there is no motor intentionality that is distinct in kind, as

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<sup>2</sup> M.A. Goodale, L.S. Jakobson, and J.M. Keillor, "Differences in the Visual Control of Pantomimed and Natural Grasping Movements," *Neuropsychologia* 32, no. 10 (1994): 1159-1178; David Milner and Mel Goodale, *The Visual Brain in Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 126-143.

I intend to argue, then the idea that motor intentionality requires a separate analysis of its normativity, as Kelly argues, becomes less appealing.<sup>3</sup>

### *Kelly on Motor Intentionality*

The claim at stake in this section is that, according to Kelly, cognitive intentionality (CI) and motor intentionality (MI) differ in kind. He writes,

The claim I'm interested in is this: that the logical form of motor intentional activity is different from the logical form of cognitive or reflective intentional states, such as believing that John is in the bedroom, or hoping that the sun will shine, or intending to buy flowers. In particular, the difference is that it is impossible to distinguish the content of motor intentional activity from the attitude directed toward the content.<sup>4</sup>

CI exhibits the propositional attitude/content distinction, e.g. the attitude of "hoping" followed by the content "the sun will shine," whereas MI does not. According to Kelly, these propositional contents consist of concepts and representations about the world or its potential states of affairs. One can, of course, have different attitudes toward the same content or varying contents for the same attitude, such as "believing that the sun will shine" or "hoping that the rains will soon quench the fields." Swapping propositional attitudes and contents characteristic of CI indicates the possibility of concept and representation substitution in order to capture the wide variety of mental states we exhibit. However, on Kelly's view, substituting different attitudes or different contents is illegitimate to analyze motor intentionality. In coming to grips with a manipulable object, we unreflectively navigate our bodies and limbs to handle it "in all its

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<sup>3</sup> Sean Kelly, "Closing the Gap: Phenomenology and Logical Analysis," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2005): 2-23; Sean Kelly, "Seeing Things in Merleau-Ponty," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 74-110.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Kelly, "Merleau-Ponty on the Body," *Ratio* 15, no. 4 (2002): 387.

particularity;”<sup>5</sup> an attitude doesn’t even seem to appear in the directedness of actions because those actions seem to occur as something drawn from outside of ourselves instead of finding the source of their manifestation in our autonomous wills:

Because motor-intentional activity is called forth by the situation in this way, and is therefore to some degree independent of the autonomous will of the subject, it does not have at its heart the kind of autonomous representational content that a subject could have an attitude toward.<sup>6</sup>

Kelly textually supports this last point by referencing Merleau-Ponty’s famous case-study of the agnosia patient Schneider, who, concerning manipulating objects, testifies:

I experience the movements as being a result of the situation, of the sequence of events themselves; myself and my movements are, so to speak, merely a link in the whole process and I am scarcely aware of any voluntary initiative ... It all happens independently of me.<sup>7</sup>

This distinction between reflective and unreflective action further underwrites the CI/MI split because, Kelly claims, one cannot reflect on unreflective action without altering or distorting the kind of understanding inherent in that unreflective action. Mentioning the pedestrian example of turning doorknobs, Kelly writes,

We may be able to reflect on the activity itself of course – I sometimes seem to be able to remember, for instance, reaching out to grasp the doorknob, even if I wasn’t aware of doing it when I actually performed the activity. But again, this seems to be reflecting on the activity, not on the understanding of the doorknob that’s manifest in it. So there seems to be good evidence for thinking that motor intentional activity is like this even for normal subjects [the phrase “even for” means in similarity to the contemporary patient DF, to be discussed below], that it essentially discloses the world to us, in other words, but cannot be captured in the process of doing so.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 385.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Kelly incorrectly cites Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, 105; the quotation is from 119-120.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 389.

Kelly and Dreyfus tend to emphasize two kinds of worldly interactions when highlighting motor intentionality: everyday coping by which normal adults navigate their worlds and masters engaged in their skill or craft. So the underlying idea is that the unreflective motor intention of my reaching for and turning a doorknob, or Roger Federer's swinging a tennis racket to return a serve, is so attuned to the object that such behavior is distinct from thinking about turning a doorknob or thinking about swinging the racket. Limb movements are directed toward these objects to be manipulated or responded to, and it is this directedness that, from the very beginning of the movement, announces their intentional structure.

From this set of initial ideas, I think we can identify two criteria for distinguishing MI from CI within Kelly's account:

- (1) CI exhibits a propositional attitude/content distinction, whereas MI does not;
- (2) CI is conceptual and representational, whereas MI is not.

Moreover, these are upheld by three supporting ideas about the nature of substitutability of propositional attitudes and contents, of bodily engagement whose source appears outside our autonomous will, and of a distinction between reflective and unreflective action. Before examining other aspects of Kelly's account of MI and its difference in kind from CI, I will criticize these notions.

None of these ideas properly support (1) or (2) and, therefore, do not support a distinction in kind between CI and MI. If we consider (1) and (2) conjointly and the supporting idea that the intentional object of MI is not substitutable, we are led to the idea that the intentional object of MI is nonconceptual and nonrepresentational. This is to say that an understanding of MI can eschew both a concept of the relevant object and a

representation of the relevant object. When my hand reaches for the doorknob, or when Federer's racket, as if an extension of his arm, strikes the tennis ball, neither my MI action nor his depend upon a concept or representation of the doorknob or tennis ball, respectively. Now, I think Kelly is right to say that MI actions do not require representations of their intended objects. Merleau-Ponty, for example, describes the case of an organist:

It is known that an experienced organist is capable of playing an organ which he does not know, which has more or fewer manuals, and stops differently arranged, compared with those on the instrument he is used to playing.<sup>9</sup>

The organist does not build up a series of representations when confronted with a new kind of organ; rather, after very little practice on the new instrument, she can perform at her level of competence as with other organs she's played in the past. However, Kelly's description nears danger when he claims that an MI action is directed toward an object "in all its particularity."<sup>10</sup> He cites Merleau-Ponty here:

In the action of the hand which is raised towards an object is contained a reference to the object, not as an object represented, but as that highly specific thing toward which we project ourselves, near which we are, in anticipation, and which we haunt.<sup>11</sup>

If *particularity* is a parallel term for non-substitutability, then Kelly's description may go awry. Merleau-Ponty's organist example shows that she is not attuned to any *particular* organ – she can perform with new organs just like previous ones. One might think, then, that while Kelly is right to claim that MI actions do not represent their intentional objects, concepts – assuming concepts are not simply equivalent to representations – may still

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<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 167-168.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, "Merleau-Ponty on the Body," 385.

<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 159.

play a role. It's generally a feature of concepts that they function as rules for classifying objects, i.e. subsuming particulars, and now, from this vantage point, the organist example would seem to strengthen the thought that concepts are involved in MI actions, not detract from the idea.<sup>12</sup>

The underlying reflective/unreflective distinction also fails to support Kelly's point without simply begging the question, but we need to be careful here. It's true that many of our daily actions, including our bodily actions, are unreflective; I don't think about every doorknob I turn and I bet Federer doesn't think about every backhand during practice. And it's true that remembering turning a doorknob isn't the same as simply turning it because the mode of consciousness in its directedness, i.e. remembering, is different than being consciously occupied with something else, as we usually are while turning doorknobs. But reflecting on X is not necessarily the same as remembering X; nor is it the case that one remembers X just because X is already completed. To think of memory as what one has an intentional relation to that has occurred in the past and is now treats the present as a punctual now-point. Likewise, that would make the intentional relation, whether cognitive or motor, a temporal present without duration, width, or depth, i.e. as a series of connected now-points, which is just the return of an abstraction away from our phenomenological experience of time as a structural feature by which and because of which we come to experience objects *as remembered* under that intentional mode of comportment. So the more accurate phenomenological description would think not of remembering turning the doorknob, but of having an awareness of

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<sup>12</sup> Whether this is a correct feature of concepts is questionable and will be taken up in future chapters. However, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty does not believe motor intentionality is geared only toward particulars *qua* particulars if that term is being employed in contradistinction to universals.

turning the doorknob (or striking the tennis ball) as part of the retentional structure of an ongoing temporal experience. This temporal issue is important because I believe it informs Kelly's interpretation of the relevant neuroscience to be examined below.

Finally, it is a strange thing to even say that one "reflects on" turning doorknobs. It is just not the sort of thing one reflects on unless something has gone wrong. This brings us to the last point about Schneider.

As I noted above, Kelly supports the idea that MI actions occur apart from the autonomous will of the subject, as if the action were simply called for by the situation, by citing Schneider's testimony concerning his ability to manipulate objects. This, I believe, is one of the most interesting pieces of the motor intentional account – and one in need of further exploration. But Kelly gets Merleau-Ponty's view exactly backwards! Merleau-Ponty does not cite Schneider's testimony of his conscious experience manipulating objects in order to support the idea that Schneider's MI is just like everyone else's. He uses it *to contrast* Schneider's impaired experience with that of what he repeatedly calls "normal subjects." Here is a partial excerpt of Merleau-Ponty's introduction to the problem of accounting for Schneider's condition:

Even when his eyes are closed, the patient performs with extraordinary speed and precision the movements needed in living his life, provided that he is in the habit of performing them [I'll return to his emphasis on habit below]: he takes his handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose, takes a match out of a box and lights a lamp. He is employed in the manufacture of wallets and his production rate is equal to three quarters of that of a normal workman. He can even without any preparatory movement, perform these 'concrete' movements to order. In the same patient, and also in cerebellar cases, one notices a dissociation of the act of pointing from reactions of taking or grasping: the same subject who is unable to point to order to a part of his body, quickly moves his hand to the point where a mosquito is stinging him. Concrete movements and acts

of grasping therefore enjoy a privileged position for which we need to find some explanation.<sup>13</sup>

Note that the explanation required *does not* concern how concrete movements and acts of grasping therefore enjoy a privileged position *for normal subjects*, but rather for impaired subjects:

When ordered to perform a concrete movement, he first of all repeats the order in a questioning tone of voice, then his body assumes the general position required for the task; finally he goes through the movement. It is noticeable that the whole body is involved in it, and that the patient never cuts it down, *as a normal subject would* [PD emphasis], to the strict minimum. To the military salute are added the other external marks of respect. To the right hand pantomime of combing hair is added, with the left, that of holding a mirror; when the right hand pretends to knock in a nail, the left pretends to hold the nail. The explanation is that the order is taken quite seriously and that the patient manages to perform these concrete movements to order only provided *that he places himself mentally in the actual situation* [PD emphasis] to which they correspond. *The normal subject* [PD emphasis], on giving, to order, a military salute, sees in it no more than an experimental situation, and therefore restricts the movement to its most important elements and does not throw himself into it. He is using his body as a means to play acting; he finds it entertaining to pretend to be a soldier; he escapes from reality in the role of the soldier just as the actor slips into his real body into the ‘great phantom’ of the character to be played. *The normal man* [PD emphasis] and the actor do not mistake imaginary situations for reality [...]. This is what our patient is no longer able to do. In the course of living, he says ‘I experience the movements as being a result of the situation, of the sequence of events themselves; myself and my movements are, so to speak, merely a link in the whole process and I am scarcely aware of any voluntary initiative ... It all happens independently of me.’<sup>14</sup>

In these passages, Merleau-Ponty is contrasting Schneider’s condition with that of normal individuals; he is not suggesting, as Kelly puts it, that this “seems like good evidence for thinking that motor intentional activity is like this even for normal subjects.”<sup>15</sup> Finally,

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<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 118.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 119-120. Other surrounding passages in this section also support this claim.

<sup>15</sup> Kelly, “Merleau-Ponty on the Body,” 389.

Merleau-Ponty suggests a principled difference between Schneider and the normal subject:

The normal person *reckons with* the possible, which thus, without shifting from its position as a possibility, acquires a sort of actuality. In the patient's case, however, the field of actuality is limited to what is met with in the shape of a real contact or is related to these data by some explicit process of deduction.<sup>16</sup>

I cannot take up the entire question of what reckoning with the possible entails, but Merleau-Ponty seems to think, rightly or wrongly, that subjects with agnosia like Schneider are incapable of taking up the potentialities situations present, unlike normal people. They are locked into the standard ways of manipulating objects as they appear, whether this involves preparatory movements of the entire body, as with the hammer and nails example, or whether they obey the command of the investigator.

Neither (1) nor (2) are supported by Kelly's underlying ideas about substitution, unreflective action, or actions independent of the subject's autonomous will.

Nonetheless, there is more to Kelly's account in need of examination because he supports the distinction in kind between CI and MI by employing neuroscientific evidence from Milner and Goodale as well as Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor concerning a patient, DF, who, due to an unfortunate carbon monoxide poisoning, displays symptoms similar to Schneider while suffering from agnosia. In the former study, that DF's tactile abilities to manipulate objects succeed while her verbal abilities to provide accurate perceptual reports of them fail supports the distinction between CI and MI, according to Kelly. In the latter study, normal subjects manifest quantitatively different grasping motions when grasping present objects versus pantomiming grasping absent (and, it is

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<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 125. Throughout this section, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly contrasts Schneider with the normal subject.

claimed, remembered) objects; corroborating evidence from DF's performance in the study further supports the CI/MI distinction on Kelly's interpretation. I want to examine each of these studies, but before that, two notes are relevant. First, insofar as Kelly's interpretation concerning Schneider in the previous section is flawed, this immediately undercuts the idea that further neuroscientific evidence displayed by a similar patient will help support the CI/MI distinction. A good analogy between the patients doesn't matter if Merleau-Ponty's point was never that agnosia patients behave like normal subjects. Nonetheless, examining these experiments may shed light on why they fail to support the distinction in kind. Second, the researchers in these experiments are not interested in motor intentionality, *per se*, so much as supporting the claim that there is a division of labor within our neurological apparatus for processing visual representations and visuomotor representations, the former computed by the ventral stream and the latter by the dorsal stream. So I'll separate their conclusions from Kelly's interpretation of their experiments.

In the first study, Milner and Goodale placed a front-facing vertical disk before the patient DF. The disk contained a slot that could be variously oriented at 0, 45, 90, and 135 degrees. Looking at the slot, DF was unable to perceptually report its orientation. Likewise, placing a card in her hand, DF could not manipulate the card to match the orientation of the slot from a distance. Nonetheless, and this is the interesting part of the experiment, DF was able to post the card in the slot regardless of its orientation, meaning she could hold the card and, upon the investigator's directive, successfully navigate her arm and hand toward the oriented slot. This navigation fit well with the movement trajectory displayed by normal subjects; the arm and hand appeared

to adjust toward the orientation of the slot fluidly from beginning to end. It is not as if DF crashed the card into the disk and then rotated the card until forcing it through the opening.

For the sake of Milner and Goodale's purposes, this experiment supports their hypothesis that representations processed by the ventral (i.e. visually perceptual) stream and the dorsal (i.e. visuomotor) stream are distinct. Unable to perceptually report the slot's orientation, DF never formed perceptual representations that would serve as an input to her ventral stream; nonetheless, visuomotor representations of the slot's orientation are available to her for processing in the dorsal stream. For Kelly's purposes, that her perceptual report fails while her motor actions succeed supports the distinction in kind between CI and MI.

The first study helps support the second study. Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor further supported the original hypothesis separating the ventral and dorsal streams by conducting a study of grasping motions and pantomiming motions in a series of four experiments. In the first experiment, normal subjects were required to grasp blocks within reach; their grasping motions were monitored and calculated, particularly with respect to the aperture formed by the index finger and thumb, as well as the velocity and duration of their motions. After this baseline data, further trials were executed in which subjects would pantomime grips toward objects just-seen-but-no-longer-present following a two-second delay. In some trials, subjects knew the object would be removed by the researcher during the delay; in others, they did not. Milner and Goodale report that this knowledge was inconsequential because the pantomiming actions between these groups were indistinguishable. Overall, subjects' pantomiming motions were, in

fact, not identical to their gripping motions based on the marks mentioned above. This supported their claim, again, that visuomotor representations fodder for the dorsal stream were not identical to visual perceptual representations computed by the ventral stream. Subjects, they claim, had to rely on stored perceptual representations to inform their pantomiming motions since the visuomotor object – and thereby its representation – was no longer available. This, they claim, explains the measurable differences between grasping motions and pantomiming motions.

The second, third, and fourth experiments provide further evidence for the conclusion of the first experiment. The second experiment repeated the same procedures with more variables for distance to and size of objects for normal subjects. Subsequently, DF was likewise subjected to the grasping and pantomiming directives. Her grasping motions toward present objects were identical to that of normal subjects, much like the card-posting activity in the previous study. However, a major difference appeared in her pantomiming motions – and this is crucial for the conclusions soon to be drawn. *Like* normal subjects, her pantomiming motions were not identical to her grasping motions. *Unlike* normal subjects, her pantomiming motions did not display anticipatory grasping indicators. The researchers write,

When a delay is imposed between object viewing and movement initiation, all evidence of anticipatory hand shaping disappears in the patient. This is true even with a delay as short as 2 sec. [Experiment 2 was also conducted at a 30 second delay.] [...] [W]hile D.F. looks just like a normal subject when she reaches to objects which are continuously present, her anticipatory hand shaping is severely disrupted by the imposition of even short delays.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor, “Differences in the Visual Control...,” 1168-9.

In particular, her pantomiming grip aperture did not reliably differentiate with respect to the sizes and shapes of various blocks as it had with the grasping motion equivalent to those of normal subjects. Nonetheless, normal subjects' pantomiming grip apertures did reliably differentiate in this way even though the overall measurements of those pantomiming grips were not identical to grasping the blocks. There is a difference, then, in normal subjects' pantomiming motions and DF's pantomiming motions. For the researchers, this difference supports the ventral-dorsal separation hypothesis because, combining the results of the first study with this experiment, DF never formed the perceptual representations of the objects in front of her and, therefore, was unable to rely on those stored representations when asked to pantomime gripping those objects. In other words, without perceptual representations and without visuomotor representations – because the block is gone – her hand reaches blindly. This is unlike normal subjects who, relying on stored perceptual representations, reach with anticipatory grips toward no-longer-present blocks. I'll argue below that Kelly's interpretation misses this feature of the study that undercuts his support for the CI/MI distinction. But before that, I'll briefly wrap up with the third and fourth experiments.

If the first and second experiments dealt with a temporal delay between grasping and pantomiming, the third experiment deals with spatial differentiation. In this experiment, standard grasping motions were recorded once again. Subsequently, the object – still a block – was placed slightly to the left of the midline by which subjects were previously grasping it. With the block still present but slightly displaced from center, subjects were directed to imagine the block while pantomiming a grasping motion along the midline. (There is room for concern here over the intentional comportment

with this pantomiming motion. Were subjects *imagining* the block, *remembering* the block, *still perceiving* the still-present-but- slightly-displaced block? The researchers are unconcerned about “the strategy” employed by subjects in this task because, one way or another, they claim, we have reason to believe the task relied upon an initial perceptual representation of the object. This is questionable; however, it’s outside the scope of this paper.) Following the results of the first and second experiments, pantomiming motions differed from grasping motions and DF’s pantomiming motions lacked the anticipatory markers of normal subjects’ pantomiming motions.

Finally, the fourth experiment attempted to ensure DF’s abilities to attempt imagining objects (or the third experiment’s results could be skewed) and to understand the investigator’s directives (or a number of experiments would plausibly become illegitimate). The researchers recorded a number of brief results. Perceiving an object from a distance, normal subjects are able to estimate their sizes with the index finger and thumb with accuracy; just like her inability to estimate the oriented slot from a distance in the previous study by Milner and Goodale, DF cannot estimate here. However, when verbally directed to estimate the particular size of a *familiar object* from a distance using her index finger and thumb, DF’s performance matches that of normal subjects. This indicates verbal understanding – to be discussed below – without perceptual understanding on the part of DF. Also, interestingly, DF’s pantomiming motions exhibited anticipatory grips equivalent to those of normal subjects when she was asked to imagine familiar objects of known size. The researchers suggest that this indicates her neural machinery is still capable of image generation even if she is unable to process perceptual representations. This is further supported from a different study in which she

could draw objects reasonably well from memory, but not while viewing and copying them.

Regarding the second study by Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor, Kelly writes,

[There are] measurable qualitative differences between natural grasping movements directed toward an actual object and ‘pantomimed’ movements directed toward a remembered object. When an actual object is present to be grasped, the subjects typically scale their hand opening for object size and form their grip to correspond to the shape of the object. In pantomimed actions, on the other hand, where there is no object present, although the subjects continue to scale their hand opening, their grip formation differs significantly from that seen in normal target directed actions. It seems that the actual perceived presence of a thing, and not just some independent representation of it (like a memory), is necessary for the motor intentional activity directed toward it.<sup>18</sup>

So, due to the differences between grasping motions and pantomiming motions in the experiments, I think Kelly offers the following as another criterion distinguishing CI and MI:

- (3) CI’s intended objects may be either present or absent, whereas MI’s intended objects must be present.

However, I think this is misleading. I’ll argue that Kelly misinterprets the experiments’ results and that (3) remains unsupported. Moreover, I’ll argue that even if a distinction between CI and MI could be upheld on other grounds, we have reason to believe that MI can be directed toward non-present objects.

Consequent from the previous discussion concerning DF, Kelly continues equating the behavior of normal subjects and impaired subjects. Indeed, the first study shows that DF posts the card in the slot just like normal subjects. However, in the second study, Kelly misses the fact that DF’s pantomiming motions *do not exhibit* anticipatory grip like that of normal subjects. This is the crux of the matter. On Kelly’s view, normal

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly, “Merleau-Ponty on the Body,” 385.

subjects and DF alike exhibit MI when posting cards in the first study and when grasping an object in the second study. However, when the object in the second study is removed, on Kelly's view, neither normal subjects nor DF exhibit MI because MI can only be directed toward present objects. The problem is that normal subjects manifest anticipatory grips toward no-longer-present objects, whereas DF does not. This behavioral difference remains unexplained in Kelly's account and, moreover, it is strange within the parameters of his account that normal subjects would even form anticipatory grips since such grips appear directed toward non-present objects. He cannot simply rely on the researcher's claims about visual perceptual representations and visuomotor representations without giving up his non-representational view of MI. Thus, there is a gap in Kelly's interpretation.

We can consider this from another angle. Kelly's view in support of (3) rests upon whether the object is present or absent. But a phenomenological account of the scenario, properly bracketed via the *epoché*, would not begin with the actual existence or non-existence of the items appearing within the field of consciousness. Focusing on the actual presence or absence of the object to-be-grasped places Kelly's interpretation in the natural attitude of the investigator, thereby magnifying the fact that there are quantitative differences between grasping motions and pantomiming motions. And it is a fact. But what is more important to the phenomenologist is the difference in the motions of normal subjects and DF. By asking how subjects' motions appear, the phenomenologist would be struck by the fact that normal subjects' pantomiming motions anticipate while DF's pantomiming motions do not. The difference in focus determines which way the line of thinking goes. Following Kelly, focusing on the similarity between normal subjects' and

DF's grasping motions places the weight of the analysis upon the predication of the existence of objects within the natural attitude. As noted, normal subjects' anticipatory grips go unexplained, and, moreover, they start to seem rather abnormal. We find ourselves asking: Why would normal subjects form anticipatory grips for absent objects? And we are left with the researchers' representational explanations. Following the phenomenologist, on the other hand, we might ask: Do either normal subjects or DF appear to exhibit MI even with non-present objects? The answer is yes – normal subjects appear to form anticipatory grips toward non-present objects, while DF does not.

Now, returning to the natural attitude, here is yet another angle. This one borders on normative issues, but luckily I won't have to delve into normativity for this point. In the second study, people grasp objects successfully or unsuccessfully. People pantomime grasping objects and they do this successfully or unsuccessfully as well. But these are not the same thing. The success or failure of actually gripping an object depends on the object actually being there. You can't fail to grasp an object if it's not there! When the investigator removes the object, the conditions of success or failure change along with it. The success or failure of the action is no longer whether the person grasps the object, per impossible; the success or failure of the action is how well one *pantomimes*. This success or failure is in relation to the success of gripping objects which were there, but the success or failure of pantomiming depends upon being directed toward something which is not there. It depends upon non-present objects. Now, everyone seems to fail at pantomiming – their pantomiming motions are not identical to their actual grasping motions. However, to repeat, this failure is neither a failure of the object to be present nor a failure to grasp a non-present object; it is a failure to pantomime, i.e. a failure to

mirror the actual gripping motion. That the failure is a failure to pantomime is presupposed in the experiment because one has to provide for the possibility that pantomiming motions *could have* succeeded, i.e. by matching the apertures (and other marks) of real grips. Had our subjects been experienced mimes, perhaps they would have pantomimed perfectly.

Importing the evidence that normal subjects form anticipatory grips toward non-present objects while DF does not, we are led to the difference between them. Normal subjects fail to pantomime well – they’re just not as good as the perfect mime might be. But DF fails *to even initiate* a pantomiming motion. She forms no anticipatory grip; non-present objects are not there for her the same way non-present objects are there for normal subjects. It is not just that she can’t pantomime well – it’s that she can’t pantomime. To partially repeat a quotation from above, Merleau-Ponty writes,

In the case of the normal subject, the body is available not only in real situations into which it is drawn. [...] The normal person *reckons with* the possible, which thus, without shifting from its position as a possibility, acquires a sort of actuality. In the patient’s case, however, the field of actuality is limited to what is met with in the shape of a real contact or is related to these data by some explicit process of deduction.<sup>19</sup>

DF and other agnosia patients are not directed toward non-present objects like normal subjects are. They fail to exhibit MI in these cases. Is there room to say that MI can, in fact, be directed toward non-present objects? I think that’s what we must say if we are to take these experiments seriously. But, if the idea is also intended to be phenomenologically accurate concerning our everyday lives, then it might very well coalesce with what we believe anyway. Consider a non-experimental situation. A man has smoked cigarettes for twenty years, apexing at a pack a day, until his wife encourages

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<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 125.

him to give them up once and for all. He does. He is a man of his word, neither sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night for a quick drag, nor keeping them in his desk for work breaks. But every now and again, standing and conversing with his wife about their children, his right hand moves towards his shirt's front left pocket, forming an anticipatory grip for that block of cigarettes. Sometimes he notices, sometimes not. His wife notices. Occasionally she wonders whether he is keeping his word, but mostly she trusts him. What are we to say about this anticipatory hand? And what are we to say about the status of objects no-longer-present but unabashedly familiar?

Return to the fourth experiment of the second study. DF's MI is restored when she is asked to pantomime familiar objects. In other words, she can pantomime as successfully as normal subjects can, anticipatory grip included. While analyzing the kind of understanding involved with MI, Kelly quotes Merleau-Ponty discussing a typist:

To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eye. If [bodily skill]<sup>20</sup> is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action, what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort.<sup>21</sup>

While quoting Merleau-Ponty, Kelly inserts the phrase "bodily skill" in place of Merleau-Ponty's use of the word "habit." This replacement obfuscates the understanding involved in MI. On Kelly's view, the understanding involved is different in kind from the understanding involved with CI. Not so with Merleau-Ponty, who writes,

But this power of habit is no different from the general one which we exercise over our body [...] We said earlier that it is the body which

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<sup>20</sup> Kelly's insertion, not mine.

<sup>21</sup> Kelly, "Merleau-Ponty of the Body," 386. The quotation is from Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166.

‘understands’ in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense-datum under an idea, and if the body is an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of ‘understand’ and our notion of the body.<sup>22</sup>

To *revise* our notion of understanding is not to add another kind of understanding alongside typical notions of understanding tied up with CI. Merleau-Ponty’s use of single quotation marks surrounding ‘understands’ indicates a new meaning of the word between the empiricist and rationalist traditions. Like normal subjects, DF can exhibit MI toward some objects because of their familiarity, which is to say because of her habits. Like others, she is habituated toward certain items in the world, whether they are present or non-present. Emphasizing Merleau-Ponty’s use of habit over mere bodily skills highlights the temporal structures involved with being motor intentionally attuned to objects; they are not just bodily skills rapidly deployed in neuroscience experiments. That, I think, is why this piece of Kelly’s interpretation is misleading. I mentioned earlier that the reflective/unreflective distinction runs the risk of discussing only that which is presently occurring and labeling everything no-longer-present as having occurred in the past, thereby forcing us to think that our comportment toward the no-longer-present is that of remembering and, in turn, imprisoning our ability to account for memories by way of representations. But one is only inclined to think that way if bodily skills are taken as punctual events. They’re not. Bodily skills are just more skills caught up in habits and in an understanding threaded to both present and non-present objects through the intermediary of the body.

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<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 167.

I want to register two more concerns to summarize this line of argumentation before turning to the broader framework for Kelly's position within his mentor Dreyfus's picture. Even if Kelly's analysis of MI withstood the foregoing criticisms, another worry is that the importance of motor intentionality as contributing to action and perception could be swept away as entirely inconsequential on certain rationalist views of conceptual content, and in particular, Robert Brandom's rationalist program. (Recall that, for Kelly, motor intentional behavior is paradigmatically supportive of non-conceptually engaging with the world.) Sticking with the case of DF, Kelly offers these characterizations of motor intentional behavior:

In particular, Milner and Goodale report, DF is *capable of responding differentially* to spatial features of an object like its size, shape, and orientation even in cases in which she is incapable of visually identifying those very features.<sup>23</sup>

In motor intentional activity there is likewise a kind of motor intentional identification of the object – a way of being directed toward it that is in some way dependent upon an understanding of, *or at any rate a bodily sensitivity to*, its spatial features.<sup>24</sup>

The fundamental concern here is that characterizing motor intentional activities as differential responses or bodily sensitivities runs the risk of reducing motor intentional behavior to *merely*, in Brandom's language, reliable differential responsive dispositions (RDRD's).<sup>25</sup> But such dispositions are akin to the abilities of thermostats and parrots and, thereby, inconsequential to conceptual matters entirely. At first glance this might seem welcome on Kelly's view since part of his analysis suggested that bodily activities are nonconceptual affairs. However, Brandom's approach is more forceful and

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<sup>23</sup> Kelly, "Merleau-Ponty of the Body," 378. My emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 380. My emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> See Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Ch. 4, "Perception and Action: The Conferral of Empirical and Practical Conceptual Content," especially 214-229.

threatening here. It's one thing to characterize motor intentional behavior as engaging with the world non-conceptually, but it's another to suggest that motor intentional behavior is *inconsequential* for conceptual engagement entirely. I don't think Kelly or others supporting the line of thinking underpinned by existential phenomenology would want to deny that bodily activities influence cognitive activities; rather, the two should be seen as integrally intertwined. If that's so, then the analysis of motor intentional behavior needs to have the resources to resist this kind of rationalist elimination, show that the way our bodies interact with the world surpass an RDRD analysis, and illuminate how our specifically *human* bodies (alongside but different from thermostats and parrots) continue to interact with the world.

By way of summary, I've argued that Kelly's three proposed criteria to distinguish cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality are inadequate. Once again, those criteria are:

- (1) CI exhibits a propositional attitude/content distinction, whereas MI does not;
- (2) CI is conceptual and representational, whereas MI is not;
- (3) CI's intended objects may be either present or absent, whereas MI's intended objects must be present.

Moreover, I argued that (3) would not serve as a criterion even if CI and MI were distinct; that Kelly mishandles Merleau-Ponty's assessment of Schneider by missing the contrast between him and normal subjects; and that Kelly covers over the importance of habits in Merleau-Ponty's account of motor intentionality by reducing them to merely bodily skills.

Considering again the three criteria above, one might think there's a disservice in considering these claims atomistically instead of holistically. Taken together, they begin

forming a picture of our bodily, motor-driven actions in the world, one that captures our intuitions about our unreflective meanderings. Moreover, something seems right about the idea that it is simply difficult to reflect on those actions performed unreflectively and known to be so; recognizing and acknowledging the difficulty itself seems to lend credence to the thought that our conscious experience is cognitive only in part. And if that were the larger concern, then I would agree. However, it is one thing to say that our conscious experience is cognitively-driven in part and motor-driven in part; it's another to claim that these parts are different kinds of intentionality. So one more note about the holistic structure of these three claims should be kept in mind: scanning through them, one notices that MI is repeatedly defined as the absence of CI. Such is straightforwardly the case with (1) and (2). With (3), we might say that MI's absence is just the absence of absence, i.e. the impossibility of the absence of motor-intentional objects. A holistic approach to these claims *is important* precisely because they form a larger picture framing motor intentionality; nonetheless, it is the coherency of that picture that can mislead us. My hope is that having treated each claim in turn will propel us toward a different picture both closer to our everyday meanderings but also challenging them.

### *Cartesian Dualism Redux*

Kelly's analysis of motor intentionality is one brushstroke depicting the body within Dreyfus's Merleau-Pontian painting of being-in-the-world. My claim in this section is that Dreyfus and Kelly re-institute a Cartesian (or Cartesian-like) dualism in their interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's work, thereby mystifying rather than clarifying our embodied interactions in the world. The key to seeing this dualism has already been

issued: they treat cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality as two distinct forms of intentionality. While the previous section undermined this idea, two other authors have helped identify the resurgent dualism in Dreyfus's and Kelly's thoughts: Andreas Elpidorou and John McDowell.

In an article delivering a skeletal model for the transition of nonconceptual content to conceptual content, Elpidorou writes,

[W]hat is the philosophical benefit of maintaining that this should be the model of explanation of the transformation from the nonconceptual to the conceptual? The answer lies in the fact that this explanatory model does away with a dualism that threatens Dreyfus's account of human behavior. Dreyfus holds that human behavior falls under two main categories: either we are involved in a mindless coping, or we take up the reflective stance. What explains the latter – namely, the following of various rules – falls short of explaining the former. There are no rules, either implicit or explicit, that one follows when one is fully engaged in a project. In such a case, we “regress” into a more basic and immediate interaction with the world. The world presents itself in a certain manner, and we react to it without having to consider our actions.<sup>26</sup>

Elpidorou's comment only indicates that Dreyfus reinserts dualism, but to help support such a reading, consider the following from Dreyfus: “[O]ne must distinguish motor intentionality, and the interrelated solicitations our coping body is intertwined with, from conceptual intentionality and the world of propositional structures it opens onto.”<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, in what we might consider a philosophical confession, Dreyfus writes, “It seems that the conceptualists can't give an account of how we are absorbed in the world,

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<sup>26</sup> Andreas Elpidorou, “The Upsurge of Spontaneity and the Rise of an Undivided Subject: The Role and Place of Merleau-Ponty in the Dreyfus-McDowell Debate,” in *In/visibility: Perspectives on Inclusion and Exclusion* 26, edited by L. Freeman (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference, 2009), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, “The Return of the Myth of the Mental,” *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): abstract.

while the phenomenologists can't account for what makes it possible for us to step back and observe it."<sup>28</sup>

It is in these sorts of remarks that dualism resurfaces for a few reasons. First, the subjects of these types of intentionality remain distinct for Dreyfus. The subject of cognitive intentionality remains the mind (even if embodied), and the subject of motor intentionality remains the body (even if minded). Regarding the latter, McDowell responds to an accusation from Dreyfus with an objection of his own, namely that Dreyfus treats the body as if it were a person-like thing separate from the person himself:

Dreyfus objects to me from a standpoint at which he takes for granted that mindedness is detached from engagement in bodily life. This goes with a dualism of embodiment and mindedness that is reminiscent of Descartes. Of course this dualism is not exactly Cartesian; the body is not conceived as a machine. On the contrary, the body, as Merleau-Ponty and Dreyfus conceive it, is distinctly person-like. It is supposed to have practical knowledge. Now I could put what I urge at the end of my paper like this: *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.*<sup>29</sup>

I think McDowell is right to suggest that Dreyfus treats the body as a person-like entity, thereby revivifying a Cartesian dualism. As noted by Elpidorou above, Dreyfus deploys descriptions treating solicitations drawing one to act as if the subject drawn were the body and not the person, including assertions that such behavior is "mindless" and (can be) absorbed in such a way that descriptions including cognitive vocabulary supposedly fail. One way to consider why this is problematic is the following: suppose that one of the main tasks for those writing in the wake of Merleau-Ponty's work is to escape or alleviate dualistic tensions found within various domains of philosophy and our lives,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 364.

<sup>29</sup> John McDowell, "Response to Dreyfus," *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 369.

including philosophy of mind and language. One way of *not* going about that task is to describe certain bodily movements as “mindless” and others as primarily “cognitive.” The reason is that, under the influence of Cartesian dualism, descriptions denoting the cognitive or mental tend to be understood diametrical to descriptions denoting the bodily, and vice versa. So deploying descriptions casting some bodily behavior as “mindless” only reinforces those tendencies instead of eluding them and, consequently, mystifies rather than clarifies both motor intentional actions and the relation between motor capacities and cognitive capacities. The concern I’m registering is that we need more nuanced phenomenological descriptions because these descriptions from Dreyfus come all too naturally to us under the sphere of Cartesian dualism’s power without challenging that power.

Dreyfus or Kelly might respond in one of two ways. Either these kinds of descriptions are simply accurate in times of absorbed behavior, like a master performing an activity at an expert level or any normal adult in everyday coping behavior, and it is only the fault of those with a dualistic background understanding who don’t properly grasp the phenomena; or, whether these kinds of descriptions are accurate or not, one would have to provide different descriptions or a different vocabulary evading the purportedly infected dualistic vocabulary here deployed for evaluating these kinds of phenomena. In the positive account offered in chapter three, I explore and build the second option. But let me say something about the first disjunct. We can lay aside larger concerns about whether language can or does function in such a way that descriptive layers and prescriptive layers are distinctly analyzable. These days, Dreyfus seems to agree with his student Kelly that phenomenological descriptions are *normative* and not

purely descriptive (in the sense of lacking a normative dimension).<sup>30</sup> If that's so, then there must be better and worse descriptions for various phenomena. And if *that's* so, then I suggest the following: these kinds of descriptions, i.e. ones casting certain expert or everyday coping behavior as "mindless," may be appropriate at certain levels of accuracy and that those levels of accuracy may depend, in part, on one's audience. So, on that view, it's plausible to suggest that Dreyfus's and Kelly's descriptions of motor intentional behavior may shed light on phenomena for certain audiences. But I don't believe that some audiences they are challenging philosophically, including rational pragmatists like McDowell, will be persuaded because of the reason stated above, namely that Cartesian dualism is a bold historical line in the history of modern philosophy framing the background understanding of these kinds of phenomenological descriptions. And this, I take it, is in line with Wrathall's introductory comment above: it is part of the power of Cartesian dualism that it constrains even our attempts to escape or alleviate it. What I'm suggesting is that it is that much more powerful if it continues to operate in the background of the selected vocabulary.

Later in his life, Merleau-Ponty grew dissatisfied with his early work because, he thought, it did not properly escape these dualisms. Regardless of the verdict on his early work, I think it can be given more credit than McDowell's accusation that Merleau-Ponty, like Dreyfus, treats the body as a person-like entity. Though I have no doubt that some of Merleau-Ponty's prose could reasonably indicate such a reading, the accusation is partially due to Dreyfus's selective quotations. For example, this citation from Dreyfus prefaces McDowell's rebuttal:

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<sup>30</sup> Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental," 57.

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 into this body which is better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have and the means at our disposal [for synthesizing it].<sup>31</sup>

But consider what immediately precedes this thought in the same passage from Merleau-Ponty:

If, as we have said, every perception has something anonymous in it, this is because it makes use of something which it takes for granted. The *person who* [italics original] perceives is not spread out before himself as a consciousness must be; he has historical density, he takes up a perceptual tradition and is faced with a present.<sup>32</sup>

This should quell some doubt that Merleau-Ponty has in mind the idea that the body and motor intentionality should be treated separately from the person such that one might describe the body as another person-like entity. Rather, these thoughts about the body should be taken up with respect to persons (and not just their limbs) by investigating that “historical density” with which persons perceptually and bodily encounter items in the world.

While still focusing on this quotation, Dreyfus defends himself and attacks McDowell’s rationalism thusly:

Understandably, this way of putting our freedom to let ourselves be bound misleads McDowell into thinking Merleau-Ponty and I are victims of the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect. That is, it might seem that we are Platonists or Cartesians who hold that our rational capacity is our capacity to distance ourselves from our bodily involvement and that, when we become involved, we reenter our body from this self-sufficient disembodied distance. But this is more like Gadamer’s and McDowell’s view than Merleau-Ponty’s. It assumes that human beings are defined by their capacity to distance themselves from their involved coping, and that,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 56-57. Dreyfus’s citations are, as noted by McDowell, mixed up. The passage comes from Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 277.

in so doing, they reveal themselves to be the self-sufficient rational agents they implicitly were all along.<sup>33</sup>

However, only a few pages later he writes,

But once one distinguishes involved motor intentionality and the preobjective/presubjective world of interrelated solicitations our coping body is intertwined with, from the detached conceptual intentionality and the world of propositional structures it opens onto, the existential phenomenologist can agree with McDowell in rejecting traditional foundationalisms, and yet affirm and describe the special supporting role of motor intentionality.

Although not indubitable, the ground-floor level of everyday coping is self-sufficient.<sup>34</sup> In principle, given our body schema, which according to Merleau-Ponty is always already attuned to the logic of the world, and given our sense of our culture with its language and all its social demands such as gender roles which we take over as second nature without having had to notice them, we could go on coping in flow – changing from task to task – without ever facing a breakdown and having to step back and reflect, although, unlike animals, we would always have the capacity to do so.<sup>35</sup>

What I want to highlight in these remarks is the reliance upon the allegedly “self-sufficient” layer either of cognitive intentionality, as Dreyfus labels Gadamer and McDowell, or of motor intentionality, to which Dreyfus is committed. Casting the two this way suggests that, not only are they distinct, but one retains priority (cognitive intentionality for rationalists; motor intentionality for Dreyfus) and remains self-sufficient. I take it that, on Dreyfus’s view, motor intentionality does not replace Descartes’s *cogito* by offering us certainty in the face of methodical doubt. Regarding this special supporting role of motor intentionality, Dreyfus continues,

The world of solicitations, then, is not foundational in the sense that it is indubitable and grounds our empirical claims, but it is the self-sufficient, constant, and pervasive background that provides the basis for our dependent, intermittent, activity of stepping back, subjecting our activity

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<sup>33</sup> Dreyfus, “The Return of the Myth of the Mental,” 355-356.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 363.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

to rational scrutiny, and spelling out the objective world's rational structure.<sup>36</sup>

The lowest and most important layer of our being, according to Dreyfus, is this bodily layer which, in principle, is sufficient on its own apart from the lofty mental layer emphasized by the conceptualist. One offshoot of this thought is that we can understand how this self-sufficient lower level of bodily intentionality creates room for Dreyfus to think that absorbed activity, like in the case of an expert, is not susceptible to justification. It is not susceptible because of its independence from the conceptual layer of our being (as we saw with Kelly above). So Dreyfus places the body in full focus as the self-sufficient ground of absorbed action in the world.

A question arises about what this idea of self-sufficiency amounts to. The term, I think, is vague. If the claim is that the motor intentionality of the body is self-sufficient, then it becomes difficult to understand how these motor actions are *intentional* and not just reactions or, in Kelly's explanation above, reliable differential responsive dispositions (facing the already discussed problem vis-à-vis Brandom's rationalism). Motor intentionality would seem to require directedness toward items apart from the body of the relevant person being described, like the organ, the doorknob, or the tennis ball. Insofar as the enactment of motor intentionality requires these items or objects, it seems they would, in most cases, be outside the flesh of one's own body. In that sense the motor intentionality of the body does not seem self-sufficient but rather dependent on the ability for items in the world to solicit behavior.

The most pressing concern, however, is that Dreyfus simply inverts the self-sufficient layer of intentionality by charging Gadamer and McDowell with prioritizing an

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

allegedly self-sufficient cognitive intentional layer, but then arguing that, instead, motor intentionality is self-sufficient. One is reminded of the way that Heidegger, in his “Letter on Humanism,” criticized the Sartrean mantra of “existence before essence” by writing, “[T]he reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the reversal of a dualistic thought remains a dualistic thought. Prioritizing motor intentionality instead of intertwining our cognitive and motor capacities into one kind of intentionality only shifts our focus onto another element of our being while retaining the schizophrenia. In lieu of the reversal, the more challenging task, one to which Merleau-Ponty dedicated his philosophical life but remained unsatisfied, is to discover a way to express an understanding that illuminates our embodied existence in this world without unduly emphasizing our cognitive capacities or our motor capacities at the expense of the other.

### *Conclusion*

I’ve argued that Kelly’s distinction between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality fails and that, all things considered, Dreyfus and Kelly have reinserted Cartesian-like dualism in their interpretations of Merleau-Ponty. I would like to close with the following thought. By now it can seem like a hackneyed argumentative maneuver to accuse one’s interlocutors of reinscribing dualism in their work as a way of dismissing its importance since, as everyone knows, no one wants to be a Cartesian these days. Moreover, consider the last sentence of Wrathall’s introductory remark above: “A dualism still shapes the philosophy of mind, however – for instance, in that almost

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

everyone sees as central the task of figuring out the relation between mind and body.”<sup>38</sup> Whether Wrathall intends the remark to be understood this way, one might think danger lurks in even *entertaining* the concern of mind-body dualisms because doing so only serves to reinforce the distinction and thereby contribute to its subsistence *as a problem*. And now the reader might worry that *my* entertaining the problem will only contribute to its resurfacing in this text, that this chapter’s emphasis on the body will only be mirrored by another chapter’s emphasis on the mind, and, therefore, that I’ll be guilty of inverting without escaping the oft-referenced Cartesian dualism, precisely the charge just levied against Dreyfus and Kelly. The very act of acknowledging mind-body dualisms may resemble the similarly damaging argumentative faux-pas when one is willing, for example, to entertain the global skeptic instead of dismissing him.

This is not a dismissal. It seems to me that the myriad ways we can fall into dualistic thinking is itself worthy of philosophical investigation, including constructing paths leading out of those dualisms. It is an important task because, *prima facie*, the only way to overcome the power of Cartesian influence is to investigate its depths. Hilary Putnam once criticized Richard Rorty for merely dismissing the traditions of philosophy bequeathed to us by that mirror Descartes helped erect. But a dismissal isn’t enough since it doesn’t help us escape or alleviate the problems of those traditions. Moreover – and this is the key point of this conclusion – suggesting that those problems are not *our* problems expresses, implicitly, that one recognizes those problems *as problems*, whether for us or others. The deeper hope is to find a way in which certain problems aren’t even

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<sup>38</sup> Wrathall, “Motives, Reasons, and Causes,” 111.

problems any longer. And that can't be achieved by simply asking us to live differently.

We also need to be able to see and think differently.

### CHAPTER 3 ATTENTION AS FOCAL INTENTIONALITY

Inspired by the work of Merleau-Ponty, the first two chapters have cleared the way to advance a new understanding of one structural feature of consciousness. In chapter 1 I argued that Merleau-Ponty expands the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis into an attentionality thesis. Attention consists of the capacity for redirection of an intentional consciousness as well as intensifying and altering the directedness of consciousness toward objects to reveal different features of those items to a perceiver. Moreover, I argued that Merleau-Ponty's interpreters, including Hubert Dreyfus, have neglected his emphasis on attention, thereby detracting from their ability to counter rationalists concerning the nature of perception. In chapter 2 I extended this line of argumentation to criticize Dreyfus's and Sean Kelly's claims that cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality are distinct; the idea is neither supported by scientific evidence nor, again, does it effectively challenge rationalists concerning perception. This chapter returns to take up attention anew and argue that, instead of the split between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality envisioned by Dreyfus and Kelly, consciousness is characteristically attentional insofar as it is comprised of what I will call focal intentionality.

I support the idea in two argumentative maneuvers. First, I discuss two seemingly unrelated lines of thought, one focusing on qualia theory and Ned Block's Inverted Earth thought experiment, and the other focusing on a short story from Jorge Luis Borges, in order to reveal how our typical thoughts concerning the nature of mental intentionality are too narrow for the purposes of inquiring into the nature of attention. Second, by

employing the phenomenological method I develop a quadripartite vocabulary, what I call focal-talk, to elucidate focal intentionality. The key terms in this vocabulary are the focal, the non-focal, the focalizable, and the non-focalizable. The relationship between these terms are explored and defended as improvements upon Merleau-Ponty's use of both the figure-ground relationship and the visible-invisible relationship. In developing the vocabulary, I also contrast its descriptive merits with Alva Noë's Enactive theory, and in particular his actual-virtual distinction.

### *Part I: Attunement*

John McDowell has emphasized that skepticism about the external world and skepticism about (or the problem of) other minds are structurally linked. The Inverted Spectrum hypothesis is an exemplary instance of this link. Though perceptual skepticism of different varieties stem from the ancient world, the kind of skepticism at stake is typically modern and the idea of the inverted spectrum is often credited to John Locke. Contemporary inquiries into the nature and possibilities of inverted spectrum hypotheses vary, but the key idea is that two persons otherwise alike in their perceptual apparatuses may come into contact with the same object such that what it's like for one person to experience that object drastically differs from what it's like for the other person to experience that object without any detectable discrepancies of outward behavior on the part of either person. The thought experiment is often construed in terms of color differences such that one person will experience, say, an apple as red while the other person will experience the same apple as green, and yet, if queried about the apple's color, each person would produce an identical response, such as "red." That their

behavior is indistinguishable from a third person perspective while each person's first person experience differs suggests the possibility that there is something that it is like for a person, from the first person perspective, to experience an object or one of its properties that is untraceable from a third person stance.

The ultimate tale in a collection of short stories by the same title, Jorge Luis Borges' "The Aleph", narrated from the first-person perspective by a character identical in name to that of the author, recounts a story of unrequited love, enmity, and mystery. Twelve years following Beatriz Viterbo's death from an undisclosed illness, Borges continues ingratiating himself into her family's home amidst complex feelings of commemoration and loss, while her cousin, Carlos Argentino Daneri, a man of letters by his own standards, mirrors this behavior in the hope of winning Borges' approval and authoritative recommendation. The reader's first glimpse into Daneri's self-congratulatory and bold rhetoric is, according to Borges, "an *apologia* for modern man:"

"I picture him," he said with an animation that was rather unaccountable, "in his study, as though in the watchtower of a great city, surrounded by telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, the latest in radio-telephone and motion-picture and magic-lantern equipment, and glossaries and calendars and timetables and bulletins...."

He observed that for a man so equipped, the act of traveling was supererogatory; this twentieth century of ours had upended the fable of Muhammad and the mountain – mountains nowadays did in fact come to the modern Muhammad.<sup>1</sup>

Inquiring further, or perhaps just finding himself in the wrong place at the wrong time, Borges soon learns that Daneri's ideas have only begun coming into view in a poem entitled *The Earth*.

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 275-6.

I would like to introduce terminology from Ned Block to elucidate what is at stake for some theorists of mind in discussing the inverted spectrum and the soon-to-be-discussed Inverted Earth. A proponent of qualia-realism, Block argues that, when discussing mental states, intentional contents are functionally-describable, such as the claim *that one is seeing a red apple*, while qualitative contents, namely what it's like to see a red apple, are not. He writes,

My brand of qualia realism is quasi-functional. According to me, the **intentional** content of experience is functional. An experience has the intentional content of looking red if it functions in the right way – if it is caused by red things in the right circumstances, and used in thought about red things and action with respect to red things rightly. The functional roles I am talking about are what I call “long-arm” roles, roles that include real things in the world as the inputs and outputs. They are to be distinguished from the “short-arm” roles that functionalists sometimes prefer, roles that stop at the skin. It is essential to the functional role that characterizes the intentional content of *looking red* that it be caused (appropriately) by red things and cause appropriate thought about and action on red things.

So this is why my brand of qualia realism is quasi-**functional**; here is why it is **quasi-functional**: the **qualitative** content of experience is **not** functionally characterizable. Two experiences can differ functionally, hence have different intentional contents, but have the same qualitative content, that is, be alike in “what it is like” to have them. Further, two experiences can be alike in function (and hence have the same intentional content), but have different qualitative contents.<sup>2</sup>

On Block's view, this clean cut between intentional contents and qualitative contents is also demarcated by that which is expressible in public language (intentional contents) and that which is not (qualitative contents).<sup>3</sup> The idea that two experiences are functionally identical yet qualitatively different is just the typical inverted spectrum hypothesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Ned Block, “Inverted Earth,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 (1990): 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Block supports the other claim, that there could be two experiences qualitatively identical yet functionally discrepant, with the Inverted Earth thought experiment:

I will describe a case that is the “converse” of the usual inverted spectrum case, a case of inverted **intentional** content and functional inversion combined with identical qualitative content. In the usual inverted spectrum case, we have two persons (or stages of the same person) whose experiences are functionally and intentionally the same but qualitatively inverted. I will describe a case of two persons/stages whose experiences are qualitatively the same but intentionally and functionally inverted. If I am right about this case, the distinction between intentional and qualitative content of experience is vindicated, and the functionalist theory of qualitative content is refuted.<sup>4</sup>

In a bit of scientific fiction characteristic of many thought experiments – and now I’m paraphrasing – Block asks us to suppose that unbeknownst to our subject Smith, scientists place color-inverting lenses over his eyes and transport him to Inverted Earth in which the colors of the environment and objects really and truly are inverted, as is the language of Smith’s new community. The sky is truly yellow, bananas are truly blue, pine trees are truly red, and Inverted Earth’s American stop signs are truly green. Members of Smith’s new community call items by what we – on Milky Way Earth – would consider inverted were we facing the same objects in that environment: they call the sky blue, bananas yellow, pine trees green, and stop signs red. Thus transported, Smith fits right in. His words align with those of his peers and his perceptions align with the world due to the inverting lenses.

Block’s fundamental claim in this case of intrapersonal inversion is that, were *newly*-transported Smith to utter the claim, “That banana is yellow,” his judgment would in fact be incorrect. Insofar as Smith’s functional states and intentional contents are linked to their causal sources back on Milky Way Earth (remember: long-arm roles),

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 61-62.

those sources would still be operative in the early stages of Smith's new existence. However, Block claims, after living on Inverted Earth for an unspecified duration, Smith's functional states would be linked to their causal sources within the Inverted Earth environment, thereby making the identical claim but now reliably functioning judgment correct. The point of the thought experiment is that Smith's qualitative contents, due to the inverted lenses, would be identical to members of the inverted earth community's qualitative contents while their functional states, and thereby their intentional contents, would differ by causal linkage to different environments. As such, Block believes, "This is enough to refute the functionalist theory of qualitative content and at the same time to establish the intentional/qualitative distinction."<sup>5</sup>

Transmitted by telephone from Daneri's mouth itself, Borges comes to learn that his house, i.e. the Viterbo's home, is liable to be torn down by a pair of café commercialists looking to expand their business. While Borges is grieved by the news that a symbol of his lost love's heritage may soon be forgotten, Daneri's plight stems from losing a particular mystical object contained in the cellar. He reveals to Borges that the house contains the very source of his prolific writing: an Aleph, described by Daneri as both "one of the points in space that contain all points" and "the place where, without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist."<sup>6</sup> Hurrying to the Viterbo's home to verify Daneri's madness, Borges finds himself in the cellar, the place from which to view the Aleph, and recounts the following (apologies for citing in full):

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Borges, "The Aleph," 280-281.

I come now to the ineffable center of my tale; it is here that a writer's hopelessness begins. Every language is an alphabet of symbols the employment of which assumes a past shared by its interlocutors. How can one transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my timorous memory can scarcely contain? In a similar situation, mystics have employed a wealth of emblems: to signify the deity, a Persian mystic speaks of a bird that somehow is all birds; Alain de Lille speaks of a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere; Ezekiel, of an angel with four faces, facing east and west, north and south at once. (It is not for nothing that I call to mind these inconceivable analogies; they bear a relation to the Aleph.) Perhaps the gods would deny me the discovery of an equivalent image, but then this report would be polluted with literature, with falseness. And besides, the central problem – the enumeration, even partial enumeration, of infinity – is irresolvable. In that unbounded moment, I saw millions of delightful and horrible acts; none amazed me so much as the fact that all occupied the same point, without superposition and without transparency. What my eyes saw was *simultaneous*; what I shall write is *successive*, because language is successive. Something of it, though, I will capture.

Under the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brightness. At first I thought it was spinning; then I realized that the movement was an illusion produced by the dizzying spectacles inside it. The Aleph was probably two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution in size. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos. I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spiderweb at the center of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, all very close, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror, saw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me), saw in a rear courtyard on Calle Soler the same tiles I'd seen twenty years before in the entryway of a house in Fray Bentos, saw clusters of grapes, snow, tobacco, veins of metal, water vapor, saw convex equatorial deserts and their every grain of sand, saw a woman in Inverness whom I shall never forget, saw her violent hair, her haughty body, saw a cancer in her breast, saw a circle of dry soil within a sidewalk where there had once been a tree, saw a country house in Adrogué, saw a copy of the first English translation of Pliny (Philemon Holland's), saw every letter of every page at once (as a boy, I would be astounded that the letters in a closed book didn't get all scrambled up together overnight), saw simultaneous night and day, saw a sunset in Querétaro that seemed to reflect the color of a rose in Bengal, saw my bedroom (with no one in it), saw in a study in Alkmaar a globe of the terraqueous world placed between two mirrors that multiplied it endlessly, saw horses with wind-whipped manes on a beach in the Caspian

Sea at dawn, saw the delicate bones of a hand, saw the survivors of a battle sending postcards, saw a Tarot card in a shopwindow in Mirzapur, saw the oblique shadows of ferns on the floor of a greenhouse, saw tigers, pistons, bisons, tides, and armies, saw all the ants on earth, saw a Persian astrolabe, saw in a desk drawer (and the handwriting made me tremble) obscene, incredible, detailed letters that Beatriz had sent Carlos Argentino, saw a beloved monument in Chacarita, saw the horrendous remains of what had once, deliciously, been Beatriz Viterbo, saw the circulation of my dark blood, saw the coils and springs of love and the alterations of death, saw the Aleph from everywhere at once, saw the earth in the Aleph, and the Aleph once more in the earth and the earth in the Aleph, saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy, and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has every truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe.<sup>7</sup>

After replying to a number of objections to the Inverted Earth thought experiment and the intentional/qualitative distinction, Block takes up an objection within the confines of Frank Jackson's famous thought experiment about Mary, the young scientist who, growing up in a contained black and white cellar, comes to know all physical facts about the world in what would be a completed science, including all functionalist facts. Jackson proposes that, upon leaving her confinement and coming into perceptual contact with a red object, like a ripe tomato, Mary will have learned something new. Since, *ex hypothesi*, she knew all physical facts before exiting, and assuming she learns something new, she must learn a non-physical (and non-functionally characterizable) fact about what it is like to experience the color red.

One functionalist reply to this thought experiment is to deny that Mary *really* knew all the facts before coming into perceptual contact with the red tomato. This is Gilbert Harman's reply cited by Block. When perceiving the ripe tomato, the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 282-284.

functionalist argues, Mary gains a new piece of knowledge that alters her functional states such that she now understands what the concept “red” entails; the alteration of her functional states simply was not possible without coming into causal contact with a red object. So while she learns a new fact, this fact is itself physical and functionally characterizable.

Block’s response is that, even if Harman were correct that Mary gains a new physical and functionally characterizable fact about the color red such that she now gains new knowledge, *that* is no objection to qualia-realism. The reason, according to Block, is that even if Mary gains a new fact and new knowledge about the color red such that she can use the concept inferentially, she still gains yet another fact and piece of knowledge about what it is like to experience the color red. So, along with garnering functionally characterizable intentional content, she also gains a fact about qualitative content, and hence two facts, not just one.

Block’s rejoinder to Harman’s functionalist objection is intended to defend his account of qualia-realism by improving upon the impasses between qualia-realists and qualia-skeptics generated by previous inverted spectrum arguments and Jackson’s thought experiment about Mary. (Block suggests here that one feature of the impasse is that qualia-realists and qualia-skeptics tend to beg the question against each other.) However, I want to suggest that Block’s defense misconstrues one of Jackson’s key points. When Block argues that Mary garners two facts while perceptually encountering the ripe tomato – one with respect to intentional content and one with respect to qualitative content – he implies that the second fact Mary learns is what it is like to experience the color red. This is not Jackson’s position. Responding to his own critics,

and Paul Churchland in particular, Jackson emphasizes that what Mary gains upon exiting her confined space and encountering the red tomato is “*knowledge about the experiences of others*, not about her own [experience].”<sup>8</sup> Jackson readily admits the physicalist and functionalist thought that Mary’s brain states and functional roles will change upon experiencing the color red. Moreover, Jackson notes, there were no such brain states and functional roles for her regarding her experience of red since, per the thought experiment, she had never experienced red. So, in Block’s terminology, it seems as though Jackson would admit that Mary gains functionally characterizable intentional content. Nonetheless, Jackson writes,

The trouble for physicalism is that, after Mary sees her first ripe tomato, she will realize how impoverished her conception of the mental life of *others* has been *all along*. She will realize that there was, all the time she was carrying out her laborious investigations into the neurophysiologies of others and into the functional roles of their internal states, something about these people she was quite unaware of. All along their experiences (or many of them, those got from tomatoes, the sky, ...) had a feature conspicuous to them but until now hidden from her (in fact, not in logic). But she knew all the physical facts about them all along; hence, what she did not know until her release is not a physical fact about their experiences. But it is a fact about them. That is the trouble for physicalism.<sup>9</sup>

Block makes no reference to Mary gaining knowledge about others and the corresponding thought that her own experiences vis-à-vis colors, and red in particular, have been impoverished. As such, it seems to me that Block’s purported second fact garnered by Mary concerning the qualitative content of her experience differs from Jackson’s proposal that Mary gains knowledge about others and, by way of others, her own experience. Due to the fact that Block misses both that Jackson absorbs the kind of

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 5 (1986): 292.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-293.

functionalist concern proposed by Harman and that Jackson argues that the kind of fact Mary garners is essentially socially mediated, I think we have reason to doubt Block's claim that "[Harman] has shown that the Jackson argument does not serve very well as a locus of controversy between the qualia realist and the qualia skeptic."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, this leaves Block with the mere assertion that Mary purportedly garners two kinds of knowledge, one involving intentional contents and the other involving qualitative contents, without being able to specify the nature of those qualitative contents since, as Block has it, they are essentially ineffable.

"'You did see it?' Carlos Argentino insisted anxiously. 'See it clearly? In color and everything?'"<sup>11</sup>

My interests in these thought experiments, short story, and issues between qualia theorists and functionalists are three-fold. First, supposing that Block is correct that the usual arguments between these two parties over typical inverted spectrum arguments end in an impasse because each side begs the question, I do not think Block's Inverted Earth argument escapes this impasse. Even if we are able to construct thought experiments such that, assuming again that Block's terminology is legitimate, intentional contents may differ while qualitative contents remain the same, I think that leaving the notion of qualitative contents open to phrases such as "what it's like" or the "subjective experience of" or as being essentially ineffable will leave any proposals on either side of this debate at an impasse. Qualitative contents seem to lack the kind of specificity required to

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<sup>10</sup> Block, "Inverted Earth," 75.

<sup>11</sup> Borges, "The Aleph," 284.

combat functionalists and advance the debate even if some qualia thought experiments seem convincing. Of course, I cannot be sure that the debate will remain at an impasse, but if any reasons would suggest so, I think these are some of them. Second, supposing debates between qualia theorists and functionalists really are impassable, I want to suggest that they are so because they share an underlying assumption. Each begins with the idea that a given consciousness is already directed toward an object in experience, or at least a property, attribute, or other feature of an object in experience. That given consciousness is already seeing a blue banana or a yellow sky, a black-and-white television or a red tomato. And this is to say that, in these thought experiments, a given consciousness is *already* directed when the conversation begins. The deeper and prior question, it seems to me, is to ask: How do these items come to appear at all? What is it like for that item to come to appear before a consciousness? Or one more way: How do we get to the consciousness of an item regardless of what it's like for that item to appear to us one way or another once our consciousness arrives at the state in which it is directed toward that item? (Note: I intend to use the deliberately vague term *item* to that which comes to appear before a consciousness.) Third, in attempting to answer these questions, it would be a mistake to think that I am defending qualia theory or Block's intentional/qualitative distinction. To my mind, the qualia theorist finds himself attempting to recapture facets of consciousness from the first-person perspective that seem to him, if he's right, forever inadmissible from the functionalist, third-person perspective. To pursue this intuition and these questions, I will investigate the first-person experience with the aid of Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological standpoint.

It seems as though a consciousness becomes directed toward an item in perceptual experience *from somewhere*. It is not as if we come to be directed toward particular items from nowhere, and so we usually come to fix upon a blue sky or a purple plum either midstream, perceiving but not perceiving anything in particular at all, or from having been directed toward another item. This is the first feature of attention. While we can understand consciousness or mental states as exhibiting intentionality, namely the thought that mental states can be directed toward or about objects, it is also necessary that understanding consciousness as attentional involves acknowledging the capacity for consciousness to become *redirected* toward other intentional items in experience. (Whether consciousness can be directed toward only one or multiple items at a given moment are beside the point at this juncture.) What is crucial here is that, according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations, in both our current directedness toward an item and our redirection toward another item, it is a structural feature of our perceptual experience that items always come to appear as figures upon grounds. Regarding this figure-ground structure, Merleau-Ponty notes that even a patch of color against a homogenous background exhibits this structure; it is only a *patch* of color insofar as it exhibits a shape against a background by which it is seen and understood to be the shape that it is:

When Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception, which leaves us free, in an ideal analysis, to bring in the notion of impressions [as against an empiricist account]. It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all. The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'. A really homogenous area offering *nothing*

*to be* cannot be given to *any perception*. The structure of actual perception alone can teach us what perception is.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, despite any other differences between Merleau-Ponty's work in his early career and his later career, he retains the centrality of the figure-ground structure as a fundamental structure of perceptual experience in his scattered "Working Notes" in *Visible and the Invisible*: "To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground – one cannot go back any further."<sup>13</sup> Now, this is pertinent insofar as it provides one structure of perceptual experience to begin answering the question above: How do items come to appear before a consciousness at all? Even in the case of the inverted spectrum or Block's Inverted Earth, whether Smith is coming to experience truly red stop signs as red or truly green stop signs on Inverted Earth as red, the point is that these items are perceptually experienced as items upon backgrounds – as the word STOP framed by an octagonal sign, as stop signs beside roads, as bananas hanging from a hook, or as a sky above the earth, whether on Milky Way Earth or Inverted Earth.

To further pursue this line of thought, I would like to deepen Merleau-Ponty's work on the figure-ground structure, as well as a later development in his work, the relation between the visible and the invisible, to provide a new way to discuss some of these structural features of perception.

## *Part II: Focal Intentionality and Focal-Talk*

I intend to argue that consciousness is characteristically attentional in the sense that attention is best described as exhibiting a focal structure. In this way, when

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<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968): 191.

philosophers discuss intentionality, the real purpose of their efforts, or so I'll claim, is to elucidate not the directedness, aboutness, or of-ness of mental states, nor the directedness of motor actions, but the directedness of attention. I call such a directedness *focal intentionality*. In order to understand what I mean by focal intentionality, I will propose a new vocabulary (focal-talk) to describe its structure by way of discussing a competing account of embodied perception, namely Alva Noë's Enactive Theory, and by addressing what he labels the problem of perceptual presence.

Under the umbrella of embodied approaches to cognition and the mind, Noë's enactive theory posits, "our ability to perceive not only depends on, but is constituted by, our possession of [...] sensorimotor knowledge."<sup>14</sup> Contrary to dominant theories of the mind themselves dominated by input-output models in which perception is conceived as the input to mental processes that, in turn, produce behavioral and action-oriented output, Noë's view discusses perception as an achievement by the embodied organism. In order to count as perceiving, the organism must be able to integrate sensory information as it varies with respect to its own movement. Failure to do so counts as a failure to perceive. Such is the case, Noë claims, with what he calls experiential blindness as undergone by post-cataract surgery patients and experimental subjects wearing horizontal-inversion glasses.<sup>15</sup> In the former case, despite having the obstructive cataract removed and being susceptible to rich perceptual input from the environment, patients are unable to perceive others' faces and hands or even windows of a room, instead witnessing a series of variously colored blurs and blobs. Likewise in the latter case in which the inversion glasses take light entering the glasses from the right and redirect it to strike the person's

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<sup>14</sup> Noë, *Action in Perception*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 3-11.

left retina, and vice versa. Subjects are unable to integrate their sensory stimulations to understand their environment, thereby undergoing experiential blindness. In both cases, the experiences of patients and subjects change over time such that sensorimotor integration once again becomes possible, even in the latter case in which the glasses continue to be worn. This sense of self-movement varying with patterns of sensorimotor stimulation forms the basis of Noë's theory.

How is it that we come to see an object as having a side not currently visible from our current location but that, by all accounts, exists? Not as directly perceived, nor by inferring the currently absent side, nor by stringing together a series of representations (or sense-data) of the object, but by our ability, in principle, to move ourselves into the relevant position to witness that side of the object while integrating that sensory information with respect to our self-movement, writes Noë. This is just the problem of perceptual presence – that we are perceptually aware or have a perceptual sense of currently non-perceived facets of an object with respect to its voluminous whole.<sup>16</sup> In caching out this answer, Noë claims that our perceptual experience is *virtual*. He writes:

The content of a perceptual experience is not given all at once the way the content of a picture is given in the picture all at once[.] [...] I have a sense of the visual presence of the detailed scene before me, even though it is not the case that I see all that detail (or that I think that I can see it all). As a matter of phenomenology, the detail is present not *as represented*, but *as accessible*. Experience has content as a potentiality. In this sense, the detail is present perceptually in my experience *virtually*. Thanks to my possession of sensorimotor and cognitive skills, I have access to nearby detail.<sup>17</sup>

Both partially occluded objects and the invisible sides of (otherwise) fully visible objects appear wholly present to us in virtue of the fact that those objects' occluded or invisible

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 215.

portions are accessible to creatures capable of positioning themselves to perceive them. Two of Noë's examples illustrate his view. Consider seeing a cat behind a picket fence; you see portions of the cat through the slits, or perhaps its tail beneath and transgressing the fence's boundary. One sees a cat, he claims, as if a whole cat were perceptually present; the whole cat *is* perceptually present because the rest of the cat's body is present virtually; just move yourself to the other side of the fence (or hope the cat moves to this side of the fence) and you'll satisfy the perceptual expectation that was within your experience of the partially occluded cat. Or consider a tomato sitting idly on the table in front you. The far side of the tomato is present because one can rotate the tomato or circle the table with one's own body to perceive its currently invisible portions. Solving the problem of perceptual presence, according to Noë, involves realizing that items are present virtually, which is to say potentially, given our sensorimotor integrations and skills.

While Noë's nonrepresentational account of perception is Merleau-Pontian in spirit and admirably dependent upon an embodied account of the mind, I think his solution to the problem of perceptual presence via the concept of virtual content is inadequate. First, I want to suggest that he misses key perceptual moments indicative of the way we structurally perceive objects, and that the function of the virtual in his account leaves out the attentional structure of consciousness. It is not that he neglects the nature of attention entirely. Indeed, part of his own motivation for proposing the concept of the virtual is that, he believes, typical accounts of perception too heavily rely upon the notion that we represent entire objects or scenes in all of their detail, whereas

experimental evidence seems to confirm that this is quite false.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, I do not believe his positive account for perceiving objects relies heavily enough on caching out a fuller notion of attention, whereas my claim is that attention is a deep-seated and inescapable feature of perceptual consciousness. Second, I'll argue that he neglects existential aspects of a Merleau-Pontian notion of perception that reshapes how we understand the problem of perceptual presence. To begin addressing these, I intend to neologize a quadripartite vocabulary to account for focal intentionality and, thereby, perceptual attention.

Consider, as if you were Mary stepping out of the black and white cellar, the alien experience of perceiving the red tomato sitting upon the carbon grey table, its elliptical shadow extending away from you and toward the right as if pointing toward two o'clock. Slight textural protrusions tighten its skin without breaking. It is voluminous and it is whole and it is not completely visible. This is the problem of perceptual presence. You see the tomato on the near side and you always see the tomato on the near side. And this is true, even on Noë's account, when you move yourself to witness the tomato's current far side. But, then, you never witness the far side, since the far side has now become the near side, even if the tomato looks different from over there; after all, its shadow now leans toward you in the seven o'clock position instead of away from you. Keep circling toward the initial side, the shadow again falling away from you, and we are left with a concern: having circled the tomato, does one now possess all its detail? With everything virtual made actual, though not all at once, is the problem of perceptual presence alleviated? It seems as if we ended where we began. Indeed, by analogy with how we

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, chapter 2.

come to understand numbers through their formality, and in virtue of the rules of numerical systems, Noë writes,

As suggested earlier, in effect, there are no new numbers: *All of them* are given within the system. The claim is that this is how things stand with colors and shapes and textures and other perceptible qualities. In effect, there is no new experience. It's all familiar. There's nothing new under the sun. It is all comprehended by what we implicitly understand, by the structural spaces in which perspectival properties and apparent colors are located.<sup>19</sup>

Here's another tact. Here I am, visually perceiving the near side of the tomato with its shadow falling away from me in the two o'clock position. The near side of the tomato is **focal**. It is within my visual focus. Part of that focality is structured by the figure-ground relationship. The figure, the tomato, sits upon the carbon grey table, the ground of its being perceived the way I currently perceive it. The shadow is the link between the figure and the ground.

But that is not all. The figure-ground relationship is often, though not always, reversible. I can come to focus on the carbon grey table, the red tomato shifting to the background. And I can come to focus on the tomato's shadow linking the two. In this sense, these items are **focalizable**. I can come to focus on them because they are within my current perceptually accessible field. If I am focusing on the red tomato, the carbon grey table is focalizable though not currently focal. In this sense (and there will soon be another sense), to say that an item is focalizable is to say that it is not now focal, but that it could become focal from my current position. For the item to become focal would require a temporal shift along with either a shift of my bodily position, even if only a shift of my eyes, or a shift of the item.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 198.

But that is not all. Here I am, focusing on the near side of the tomato; the carbon grey table, as the background, is not only focalizable, but also currently **non-focal**. To say that an item is non-focal is to say that one is not currently focusing on it, but also that what is non-focal partially contributes to the way the focal item is being perceived. The non-focal carbon grey table partially determines how the focal red tomato appears. The table frames the tomato. It is not to say, however, that the non-focal is *necessarily* focalizable. In the case of focusing on the red tomato, it is true to say that the carbon grey table is *both* non-focal and focalizable, but this overlap does not apply to all cases. I will discuss some of these below.

But that is not all. I am focusing on the red tomato; its shadow falls away from me, two o'clock. It is voluminous and whole and not completely visible. The far side of the tomato is non-focal; I cannot now see it from where I stand. The far side of the tomato is focalizable – both from here and not from here. Now, this sounds like a contradiction, but that is only apparent. The far side of the tomato is focalizable *from here* in the sense that it is both not focal (I am not currently focused on it) and non-focal (it is contributing to the way that what is focal is being perceived). The far side of the tomato is focalizable, *but not from here*, in the sense that it could become focal, i.e. in Noë's sense that, were I to move my body into the proper position, the far side would become the near side, it would become focal, and the near side would become the far side, and it would become non-focal and focalizable. At this point, Noë's account claims that it is in virtue of my *conceptual sensorimotor understanding* – based in the patterns of sensory integration with respect to my movement – that the far side of the tomato is present virtually. But my point is the following: we need not resort to a conceptual

understanding, even at the sensorimotor level (supposing such a conceptual level exists), to describe how the far side of the tomato appears to be focalizable because we still have something within our perceptual experience *to see* this: the shadow.<sup>20</sup>

To say that the far side of the tomato is focalizable, both from here and not from here, is to say that the two o'clock shadow and the seven o'clock shadow are not equivalent. When I move my body from two o'clock to seven o'clock, other aspects of the tomato become focal and previously focal aspects of the tomato become non-focal and once again focalizable. But the shadow links the figure to its ground and the ground to its figure. The virtual at two o'clock and the virtual at seven o'clock are not identical. The claim here is not just that the red tomato sitting upon the carbon grey table appears differently from the first-person perspective from one angle and then another. The claim is that it is phenomenologically inadequate to account for the perceptual presence of non-visible sides of an object simply by citing that those aspects of the object are present virtually in the sense of being accessible. The reason is that the virtual content differs in and of itself.

How does the virtual content differ in and of itself? On Noë's solution to the problem of perceptual presence, we only need to rely upon patterns of sensory integration of an object with respect to the perceiver's (self-)movement. On Noë's view, perceiving is thus object-dependent and movement-dependent.<sup>21</sup> What I am claiming is that there is another dimension to perceiving, namely the *illumination conditions* that allow one to perceive an object. The illumination conditions are one feature connecting the figure and

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<sup>20</sup> Discussing the shadow is truly an instance of discussing the nature of *depth*. On my view, and Merleau-Ponty's view, we do not calculate depth; it is simply part of the structure of how we perceive objects.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 64-65.

the ground – or in the vocabulary I am presenting, connecting the relationships between the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable. Mary exists in a black and white cellar not only if the objects coming within her view reflect shades of grey, but only if the light itself is treated as transparent or non-colored. Upon exiting the room, perhaps Mary learns not only something about the experience of others, not only something about the impoverishment of her own experience, and not only something about the color red, but something about the entire conditions in which her prior existence had been lived.

Merleau-Ponty writes,

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being.<sup>22</sup>

Now, one may object that this argument depends upon further explicating the nature of illuminating conditions. Fair enough, though I think this would require an entirely separate treatment.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, even if my argument suggesting that virtual content (in Noë's terms) differs in and of itself because of this neglected third dimension fails, there are still two aspects of my account that challenge Noë's view – the focalizable and the to-be-introduced non-focalizable.

Noë does not identify what I am calling the non-focal and the focalizable and thereby reduces the focalizable to the non-focal, labeling it virtual content. My previous

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<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 151.

<sup>23</sup> A plan for future work is to argue that the non-representational character of illuminating conditions contributes to the fineness of grain argument for nonconceptual content, contra Noë's position and McDowell's position. For a fineness of grain argument independent of that consideration, see chapter 4.

claim was that virtual content is not even identical in and of itself. My claim now is that the non-focal status of an item and the focalizable status of an item are not identical even if they sometimes overlap. To see this, I would like to discuss the constitutive relations of focal-talk to further support the use of this vocabulary with respect to the deep-seated and inescapable feature of perceptual attention before turning to a few specific examples.

When describing perception, there cannot just be the focal. Nothing shows up in and of itself. Consider, for a moment, Kant's second argument in the metaphysical exposition of the concept of space intended to establish that space is one of the sensible conditions of the possibility of experience:

Space is a necessary *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions. We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think it as empty of objects. It must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, and not as a determination dependent upon them. It is an *a priori* representation, which necessarily underlies outer appearances.<sup>24</sup>

However, we *cannot* think, imagine, or – for the case at stake – perceive space as empty of objects. Try to think or imagine nothing and, inevitably, you think or imagine something against nothing. There is no point in space that contains all points, and there is no empty space that contains no points.<sup>25</sup> But following Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological method, even if the *epoché* can never be completed, one never perceives any thing in and of itself. The focal entails something that is non-focal. The

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<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 68 (A24/B38-39).

<sup>25</sup> In the postscript to "The Aleph," Borges writes, "I would like to know: Did Carlos Argentino choose that name, or did he read it, *applied to another point at which all points converge*, in one of the innumerable texts revealed to him by the Aleph in his house? Incredible as it may seem, I believe that there is (or was) another Aleph; I believe that the Aleph of Calle Garay was a *false* Aleph.

focal and the non-focal, as the figure upon the ground, co-constitute one another. The way an item appears is always against a background, the non-focal element.

When describing perception, there cannot just be the focal and the non-focal, which would be like a man staring at the same thing his entire life. If that were the case, he would be unable to discern the difference between that which is focal and that which is non-focal. The fact that there must be the focal and the non-focal entails that they must be able to switch, which is to say that the non-focal can become the focal and the focal the non-focal. So the focal and the non-focal entail that one of them – the non-focal – is focalizable. Again, this is true even if there is only one object (against a background) to which one attends. So the focal and the non-focal entail the focalizable.

Merleau-Ponty goes even farther than this. It is not just the case that one perceives something rather than nothing: “One witnesses that event by which there is something. Something rather than nothing *and this rather than something else* [PD emphasis]. One therefore witnesses the advent of the positive: this rather than something *else*.”<sup>26</sup> To perceive is to perceive X *and* Not Y; the focal and the non-focal, and the movement between them.

This is where one’s train of thought can go astray. It can think that everything non-focal is focalizable, but that is not the case. The non-focal and the focalizable sometimes overlap, but not always. Saying that X is non-focal does not entail that X is focalizable, though saying that X is focalizable does entail that X is (currently) non-focal.

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<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 206.

When describing perception, there cannot just be the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable. The asymmetry results in the possibility – and the actuality – that there are some non-focal items that are **non-focalizable**.

These fall into two classes. On the one hand, there are items and events that will never come into focus under any situation whatsoever. (I am not claiming these items are *transcendental* because the nature of these items varies. More below.) This is true in two ways. First, these items and events will never become focal because they structure what does become focal in virtue of being (i.e. in their Being) non-focalizable. Second, the very structure *itself* of the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable indicates the non-focalizable, not simply in terms of complementarity (the actual and the virtual; the focal and the non-focal; the figure and the ground) and not merely in terms of opposition (the common sense understanding of the visible and the invisible, yet not Merleau-Ponty's sense of those terms), but in terms of providing for the possibility of perception at all. In other words, how does one perceive at all? One perceives *from somewhere*, namely from here. Where one perceives from – this body – is non-focalizable. It can never come into focus in its entirety. It is not only non-focal, it is non-focalizable. And so the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable entail the non-focalizable.

Consider this point about the body in more depth. If perceiving an object entails the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable, and one combines this with the fact that one is perceived by others, then it must be the case that one appears to others as focal, non-focal, and focalizable. And then one might inquire whether one is focalizable to oneself. And the answer is: only in part, never in whole. Merleau-Ponty states,

What is a *Gestalt*? A whole that does *not* reduce itself to the sum of the parts [...] And who experiences it? A mind that would grasp it as an idea or a signification? No. It is a body – In what sense? My body *is a Gestalt* and it is co-present in every *Gestalt*.<sup>27</sup>

The ground of perceiving an item is itself non-focalizable. “[S]aw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me),” Borges pens. A writer never sees a reader, not even in the Aleph, and I never see myself, not even in a mirror or a series of them.

Seeing the image or a reflection of a thing is not seeing the thing (and the thought of the reader very well may keep going here, wanting to say “not seeing the thing *itself*”, which is precisely going one step too far.) Even if this body and its sensorimotor capacities are necessary for perceiving items in the world, including their non-focal and focalizable aspects, this body will never be focal in its entirety, and parts of it will remain forever non-focal and non-focalizable *for me*. I will never visually immediately perceive my far side or the back of my head, and I will never immediately perceive my face or my eyes. There is no getting behind oneself, and there is no seeing the shadow one casts from every angle.

At the heart of perception is nothing that will ever be witnessed. What often goes missing in these accounts of the first and third person perspectives, in trying to come to grips with them, is the fact that first person perception is inescapable and constituted by nothing perceivable from the first person perspective – not because it is perceivable in the third person, because the third person just entails its own first person perspective – but because it is part of the deep-seated structure of perceiving *qua* perceiving that it stems from a non-perceivability. This is another aspect of the non-focalizable that requires clarification. Unlike the focal, the non-focal, and the focalizable, the non-focalizable (in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 204-5.

this class related to the structure of perception and not just the non-focalizable aspects of some categories of objects) is nothing. It is no *thing* in the same way that my body is not a *thing*. It is part of the way of being a being that manifests the capacity to perceive. This facet of the non-focalizable is another difference between my account and Noë's enactive theory. On his view, perception is an activity. On my view, if perception is structured by the non-focalizable, perceiving is not just an activity, and perhaps not properly labeled an activity at all. Rather, perception is a capacity for certain beings to be open to and ineluctably tied to a world in virtue of a non-focalizable ground that is one's lived body.

I have noted one item in the world, namely my body as the ground of perception, as an instance of that which is non-focalizable in the class of items that structure perception. Certain events are also non-focalizable, and in keeping with the existential theme of my body as the nothing which grounds perception, the "event" of my death is and will forever be non-focalizable. One can tragically witness the death of another, and many more can mourn over the fading photographs of loved ones lost. Consider Borges:

On Calle Garay, the maid asked me to be so kind as to wait – Sr. Daneri was in the cellar, as he always was, developing photographs. Beside the flowerless vase atop the useless piano smiled the great faded photograph of Beatriz, not so much anachronistic as outside time.<sup>28</sup>

Until, of course, having passed through witnessing the Aleph, and having become indifferent, and having waited for forgetfulness to remind one that one's memories will fade nothing like the carbon copies of photographs, because they won't fade at all but rather become distorted, added to and subtracted from beyond recounting, and having been motivated to wonder whether one had really seen all there ever was to see and had

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<sup>28</sup> Borges, "The Aleph," 281.

simply forgotten it, and having seen all there was to see in the cellar, and yet not seeing Beatriz – because an image of a thing isn't a thing – Borges (in his somber tone) accepts a fact about her inside time. But he will never perceive his own death because he never even perceived himself in the Aleph nor the Aleph in himself. And I will never perceive my own death because my death is the end of my experience and the end of my perception. There is no getting around to the other side of my own death; there is nothing to access. And no one and no thing will take it from me. My body as the ground of perception and my death as the end of it are non-focalizable aspects of my perception.<sup>29</sup>

Perceptual antinomies indicate the non-focalizable. The common perceptual problem of knowing that a stick appearing bent in water is not actually bent, and yet not being able to perceive it any other way, indicates a fact – that the stick is not bent – which is non-focalizable. The important point here is that even if one pulls the stick out of water, thereby revealing that the stick is, in fact, not bent, it is not a fact that one can perceive while the stick is in water. It appears bent even when one knows better. Likewise with other perceptual antinomies.

I claimed above that the non-focalizable can be understood by way of two classes. The first class, composed of items and events which are non-focalizable because they structure perception, included my body and my death. The second class is composed of the way we experience some items that are either more object-dependent or socially-dependent. It is not clear to me whether perceptual antinomies fall in the first or the second class, but even if I am not sure where they lie, they are still indicative of the non-focalizable.

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<sup>29</sup> I take it this is in line with Heidegger's exposition of being-toward-death in Division II of *Being and Time* without some of the more questionable implications of that exposition.

Massive objects indicate the non-focalizable. While philosophers of perception, including Noë, often focus on middle-sized objects that are easily circumnavigated or manipulable, like cats and tomatoes, there are classes of objects that appear voluminous and whole and yet appear neither circumnavigable nor manipulable. Thus, they appear as having non-focal elements which are non-focalizable. Grand objects and terrain, like those mountains Francis Bacon's Muhammad could not will to move, appear to one as having non-focal and non-focalizable sides. So do celestial objects such as the stars, other planets, and the sun.

The earth appears to most humans as non-focalizable. But I would like to add something here. In one sense, the earth has become focalizable; human achievements building spacecrafts have allowed astronauts to perceive the earth in the way – in a grand sense – that the rest of us might see a tomato (though, I suppose, not sitting upon a table). Thus, it is possible with respect to some massive objects that what was once non-focalizable has become focalizable. One might think of this on analogy with Saul Kripke's notion of the necessary *a posteriori*: water is H<sub>2</sub>O necessarily even if that involves an empirical discovery. However, this analogy is meant in an extremely limited sense.

But even this won't account for our perceptions of all massive objects, such as Jupiter or the sun. And, moreover, it says nothing to most of us who will never travel to outer space. But this does suggest a distinction. There are massive objects that once appeared to us as exhibiting non-focalizable perceptual sides, but now appear to us as (in principle) focalizable. This point connects to the final issue I will discuss here.

Social norms and boundaries indicate the non-focalizable. Return to the cat partially occluded by the slatted fence. Parts of the cat are available to view and not others. Some parts of the cat, like its face and its tail beneath the fence, are currently focal. Other parts, like its back and its legs, are non-focal. Suppose, however, that I have no way of reaching the other side of the fence; maybe it's guarding a construction site. In this scenario, even if the cat appears to me as perceptually whole, it does not appear to me as something accessible. These non-focal parts of the cat are *non-focalizable*.

One of the objections that Noë considers against his view of virtual content is that it explains too much:

One problem is that even though you obviously do not visually experience the room next door, your relation to that room is no less mediated by patterns of sensorimotor dependence than is your relation to the back of the tomato, or to the cat behind the picket fence. Certainly, movements of your body in respect of the room next door are such as to be able to bring it into view. You just have to walk over there. The theory would seem, then, to have the unintended consequence that we *do* see the room next door. In this sense the theory is too strong.<sup>30</sup>

He responds to the objection by arguing that one's relation to the room next door is movement-dependent but not obviously object-dependent: "Movements or changes in the room next door will not provoke (visual) sensory change."<sup>31</sup> However, Noë has restricted himself to the object-dependency of *visual* patterns of sensory change instead of overall perceptual patterns of sensory change. The sudden crash of a dropped glass in the room next door would certainly provoke an auditory perceptual response. So claiming that our experience of the room next door is not perceptual is unduly constraining; it limits our actual capacities of directing ourselves and being directed toward items in the world.

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<sup>30</sup> Noë, *Action in Perception*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

Instead of claiming that our experience of the room next door is not perceptual, one could claim that one's perceptual experience of the room next door is focalizable with respect to certain sense-modalities (auditory; olfactory; tactile) but non-focalizable with respect to others (visual; taste).

Now, I have mentioned the tandem of the social boundaries and norms of accessibility with Noë's objection to himself because this highlights the last aspect of the structure of focal intentionality – and focal-talk – that I would like to note. It may seem that, *in principle*, to claim that one perceives X as voluminous and whole and not completely visible, and then to provide Noë's account of perceiving X in terms of actual and virtual content, is sufficient to account for the problem of perceptual presence. My final point, aligned with the existential themes already mentioned, is that this fails to provide the phenomenological description for how X appears *to one*. One of the key interests of the existential phenomenologist investigating perception is not to describe how X appears at all, as if speaking for the conditions of the possibility of the object, but to describe how X appears to one, and then to see whether these structures and aspects of perception are shared or even universal. Well, I suspect that how items and spaces appear to us are as, for example, *off-limits*. If I am sitting in a restaurant, I can *say* to myself that the ingredients in the kitchen are focalizable if only I were to go back there, but that is not a real option *for me* (unless I know the chef). I may not be able to enter the university library without the proper identification. There are no shortage of items and spaces within our world that appear to us – and are – non-focalizable. Recognizing this aspect of the structure of perception, then, contributes to the vocabulary – what I have

been calling focal-talk – necessary to address how we perceive our world from our embodied vantage points.

### *A Quick Extension to Technological Devices*

After articulating the notion of virtual content, Noë proceeds to utilize the virtual to criticize newfound skepticisms, i.e. Daniel Dennett’s thesis that we are mistaken that we are in touch with the world in virtue of the discontinuity of consciousness as evidenced by, for example, “the blind spot, and saccadic gaps.”<sup>32</sup> Noë writes,

Dennett’s claim is that we are misled as to the true nature of consciousness. Consciousness is *really* discontinuous. It *appears to us* to be continuous. A paradoxical way to put the point would be: It turns out that we are mistaken in our assessment of how things seem to us to be. This is a skeptical proposal more radical than anything Descartes would have found intelligible!<sup>33</sup>

Fair enough that Noë is motivated to respond to Dennett’s steroidal skepticism. But my concern has to do with our being-in-the-world. Another illusion may be on the rise. In being surrounded by technological devices, we may come to the illusion that nothing is non-focalizable. In other words, the illusion is that anything and everything is focalizable (in principle) from anywhere. But this just misses what I have been calling the structure of focal intentionality, and it misses how perception is embodied.

In preparation of his poem, *The Earth*, Carlos Argentino Daneri’s *apologia* for modern man cited modern technologies capable of generating our now all-too-familiar landscape of images and sounds. My quick extension of focal-talk is not claiming that our perceptual capacities have changed because of modern technological devices. Such a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

claim could be true, I suppose, but I'm not arguing for that. I am suggesting that this four-fold vocabulary helps elucidate moments in our perceptual consciousness related to items in the world, but also that it specifically helps address and understand a central feature of technological objects as well. That feature is that the non-focal and the focalizable become more blurred insofar as *the images of* items outside of my embodied situational space have *become* focalizable by way of technological devices: laptops, cell phones, electronic readers, etc. Distance has been erased. "Mountains nowadays did in fact come to the modern Muhammad." Even though Noë's account combats the snapshot conception of perceptual experience, I am not sure his virtual counterpart brings to light the (perhaps troubling) nature of technological devices if he misses the features of phenomenological perception outlined here. The reason is that virtual content in a techno-virtual world may just conceptualize how we come to access more representations of things in lieu of embodied perceptual encounters with things.

## CHAPTER 4 FINENESS OF GRAIN

In contemporary philosophical discourse, understanding how perception affords us knowledge involves determining whether perceptual content is conceptual or nonconceptual. John McDowell is perhaps the most famous recent proponent of the view that perception is completely conceptual, through and through, and that thinking otherwise would result in unsatisfactory epistemological positions regarding the potential objectivity of perceptual knowledge, including the Myth of the Given, coherentism, skepticism, or dogmatism. The arguments and motivations behind this conceptualist position and its alternatives are historically and philosophically complex, but over the course of this chapter, I will argue for the position that at least some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual. In fact, at times I will argue under the guise of a stronger and less popular view that some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual and some is conceptual. This mixed view contrasts with McDowell's thoroughgoing conceptualist claim that all perceptual content is conceptual; with views that, in every perceptual episode, all perceptual content is nonconceptual, such as that of Gareth Evans and the most recent position of Christopher Peacocke; and with views that at least in some perceptual episodes, like those of experts engaged in their craft or our everyday coping skills, that all perceptual content is nonconceptual. The latter view is the one held by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, challenged in previous chapters, making my claim in this chapter an alternative proposal even though they and I find the same source of inspiration in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

The argument at stake has been labeled the fineness of grain argument.<sup>1</sup> I will begin by canvassing McDowell's views on the fineness of grain in perceptual experience.

First, McDowell addresses the fineness of grain argument by considering the view of his former friend Gareth Evans.<sup>2</sup> On Evans' account, one reason to think that perceptual content is completely nonconceptual is that the fineness of grain of perceptual content outstrips the conceptual content of the subject. Some general thoughts supporting the idea of the fineness of grain include the rich detail, vividness, and variety of perceptual content enjoyed by subjects compared to the limited set of concepts within anyone's repertoire. Moreover, perceptual states are results of the informational states that our perceptual apparatus passively acquires, thereby providing the information by which our conceptual capacities can become enacted at the level of judgment. Hence, nonconceptual content can function conceptually upon being taken up in acts of judging.

In a consideration that McDowell repeatedly identifies and disavows – and in my view, correctly – another underlying motivation of Evans' view is to produce a theory of perception that could plausibly hold between human animals and other animals, including human infants.<sup>3</sup> On this thought, theories explaining nonconceptual informational (and usually representational) states obtained by perceptual operations are a prerequisite to mature, conceptual content informing the lives of adults judging and acting on the basis of reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> A plan for future work is to claim that the fineness of grain argument for nonconceptual content in perceptual experience can be strengthened by considering the illumination conditions of perceptual experience. Nevertheless, the arguments presented in this chapter are, I claim, sufficient to establish nonconceptual content in perceptual experience without support from claims about illumination conditions. For a connection to the issue of Noë's virtual/actual distinction, see chapter 3, footnote 23.

<sup>2</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): Lecture III; Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Dreyfus also presses this concern in his debate with McDowell.

McDowell rejects the fineness of grain argument for nonconceptual content by relying on the idea that demonstratives – such as *that color*, *that shade*, or simply *that* – capture the fineness and determinacy of perceptual content within the experience of a mature adult human being. He fully admits that we do not come into any perceptual experience already possessing the level of determinate concepts that could capture, say, every shade of color within a band of the color spectrum. It is not, on his view, as if we possess every relevant concept before the perceptual experience, or that we somehow wring the conceptual content directly out of the experience. But in those cases in which we come across, say, a shade of red for which we have no corresponding concept, it is always possible for us to utter *that shade* or *that* to capture the relevant detail, for this just amounts to the kind of linguistic mastery deployable by the use of demonstratives. Moreover, it is always possible to annex that perceptual content into our conceptual repertoire by naming it, say, *scarlet*. That demonstratives and our abilities to annex new content form part of our linguistic repertoire shows that the conceptualist is in no worse position regarding the fineness of perceptual content within experience and describes one function of demonstratives. Finally, McDowell suggests that the content would have to persist beyond the momentary experience of the sample in order to count as truly exercising a conceptual capacity. His point here is that a recognitional capacity is at stake in arguing that perceptual content must include the subject's ability to deploy that *same* content within thoughts after – if only momentarily proceeding – the episode.

A few overarching thoughts are important for McDowell's view within these fineness of grain considerations. First, the worry is that if we rely upon informational states somehow informing our perceptual states only to be taken up down the road by our

conceptual capacities within acts of judging, then we are beholden to another version of the Myth of the Given. On McDowell's view, the idea here is that we are somehow in touch with perceptual content purportedly outside the realm of our spontaneity and, thereby, our self-conscious rational capacities. However, this boundary between the supposed limit of our conceptual capacities with nonconceptual content on the far side places us beyond the possibility of truly justifying how it is that we come to perceive and what it is that we perceive because it places the grounds for what needs justification entirely outside the bounds of justification. We are thus left with exculpations, in McDowell's language. Instead of acknowledging our perceptual capacities as inherently conceptual, we treat the two as if they were separate capacities, thereby failing to appreciate one-half of Kant's conceptualist maxim that "intuitions without concepts are blind."

Now, McDowell revises his position from *Mind and World* in later texts, and I will address his more nuanced view within my discussion below. I would like to investigate this fineness of grain consideration in more detail to work toward a different position, one which agrees with the spirit of McDowell's therapeutic diagnosis to see our way out of skeptical and dogmatic labyrinths, but nonetheless, one proposing that our conceptual capacities are more limited vis-à-vis our perceptual capacities. In the end, I will argue that at least some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual.

Regarding the fineness of grain argument, I will argue for three claims. First, I will deny that demonstratives can capture the level of detail indicated by the fineness of grain within perceptual experience. In other words, I'll deny that conceptual content can match or equal perceptual content. Second, I will argue that the action of annexing

perceptual content within our linguistic-conceptual repertoire implicitly accepts that there is at least some nonconceptual content within perceptual experience, thereby denying a thoroughgoing conceptualism. This second consideration will force a deeper investigation into McDowell's Kantian heritage and, specifically, the form of an intuition. Third, I'll suggest that relying upon demonstratives to capture perceptual content may be a *non sequitur* anyway. Finally, I will consider and reply to two potential McDowellian objections regarding the separation between intuitions and concepts and the spontaneity of the subject.

Supporters of and commentators on the fineness of grain argument for nonconceptual content within perceptual experience have failed to note that the very phrase, *fineness of grain*, seems to be a metaphor. On the one hand, arguments surrounding the fineness of grain in perceptual experience often focus on visual perception with the typical example of analyzing various shades of color offered to our perceptual capacities. On the other hand, the notion of fineness of grain might find a better home within our tactile perceptions. Consider, for example, the fineness of grains of sand on the beach, of sandpaper in the workshop, of the smoothness of silk garments, of the texture of the strands of a rope, and so on. One might *see* the fineness of grain characterizing the texture of a multi-colored and unevenly mortared brick wall, or one might *feel* the fineness of grain of the same wall, or both. The phrase lends itself to the complexity of intersensory modalities, but the tactile is often left out, and thereby the intersensory case as well.

With the aid of Merleau-Ponty, I want to suggest that this can neglect the way in which colors or shades are witnessed as related to the particular kind of object of which they are an inseparable aspect. Merleau-Ponty writes,

Sight, it is said, can bring us only colours or lights, and with them forms which are the outlines of colors, and movements which are the patches of color changing position. But how shall we place transparency or 'muddy' colours in the scale? In reality, each colour, in its inmost depths, is nothing but the inner structure of the thing overly revealed. The brilliance of gold palpably holds out to us its homogenous composition, and the dull colour of wood its heterogeneous make-up. The senses intercommunicate by opening on to the structure of the thing. One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when, with a tinkling sound, it breaks, this sound is conveyed by the visible glass. One sees the springiness of steel, the ductility of red-hot steel, the hardness of a plane blade, the softness of shavings.<sup>4</sup>

When considered as a metaphor indicating our complex intersensory perceptual openings onto the world, the fineness of grain consideration can argue not just that we are able to visually perceive the lines comprising a band within the color spectrum, and thereby that perceptual content numerically and (with respect to that sense channel taken individually) qualitatively outstrips our concepts, but that our perceptions in the world are composed by a non-additive interplay between our sense modalities, thereby contributing to an overall qualitative difference within perception unequalled by our concepts. While focusing on color is a common argumentative maneuver in this regard, part of Merleau-Ponty's emphasis lies in focusing on how color appears for particular kinds of objects, how sounds, like the "tinkling sound," appear for breaking glass, and how treating colors and shades as separable from the objects of which they are aspects (as if they were secondary qualities, for example) is an insufficient abstraction from the actual content of perception.

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<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 266-67.

Thus, in characterizing the fineness of grain argument, two Merleau-Pontian claims that suggest the level, richness, vividness, and variety of detail in perceptual experience outstrip our concepts are that some aspects of some objects are inseparable aspects of *those* objects (e.g. the brittleness of glass), and that those aspects and objects appeal to our intersensory experience of the world. In this way, the overemphasis in the literature on shades of color neglects non-visual cases and intersensory cases, thereby revealing the built-in abstraction of the conceptualist's position and weakening (though not knocking down) the plausibility of that position.

Another consideration regarding the level of description of perceptual content is that demonstratives like *that color*, *that shade*, or simply *that*, even if coupled with the requisite recognitional capacity McDowell insists upon, do not seem to really capture the detail of our perceptions. Perhaps one could agree that these demonstratives are concepts within our linguistic repertoire, deployable to indicate *something*. Nonetheless, when discussing the detail, vividness, and complexity of perceptual experience, these demonstratives seem like impoverished concepts, escape hatches for those incapable, whether momentarily or permanently, of living up to the task of properly describing the perceptual thing in all of its demandingness. Sometimes, it is another part of our conscious experience, even on our most lucid days, that when we are describing an item in the world, we feel as though we have failed to do it justice. What else can this phenomenon of failing to live up to the intricacies of a thing *be* except to suggest that percepts can outstrip our concepts? It is for this kind of consideration that I think we deeply appreciate the artistic sensibilities of painters, writers, directors, and other artists, i.e. in their perceptual capacities at levels of discrimination some of us could only aspire

to. So even if demonstratives are conceptual, the fact – and I think it is a fact – that they do not *seem* to live up to the fineness of detail toward which they point is itself another part of our conscious experience inflected by our perceptual opening onto the world. And this fact that demonstratives seem to fail to match perceptual content is bolstered and explained by the intersensory claim above. If objects offer us overlapping aspects corresponding to each other in relation to our fully embodied perceptual experience, then demonstratives, by attempting to capture one of those aspects independently of the rest, reveal that they could ever be only an attempt underpinned by a procedure of abstract singling-out. In a series of radio talks compiled under the name *The World of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty says,

The unity of the object will remain a mystery for as long as we think of its various qualities (its colour and taste, for example) as just so many data belonging to the entirely distinct worlds of sight, smell, touch and so on. Yet modern psychology, following Goethe's lead, has observed that, rather than being absolutely separate, each of these qualities has an affective meaning which establishes a correspondence between it and the qualities associated with the other senses.<sup>5</sup>

To clarify, the conscious episode I am characterizing is not one in which one feels potentially deceived about a state of affairs or does not trust one's own judgments. The word "seem" here is not meant as it is in the conscious episode of wondering whether one is in the grip of an illusion or hallucination. Rather, the situation is one in which one recognizes that one's own descriptions or judgments are inadequate to the thing standing before one in its perceptual complexity and demandingness.

Perhaps McDowell could object that he is not committed to the idea that the artistic sensibilities of some cannot outstrip others in certain respects. Nonetheless, this

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver Davis (New York: Routledge, 2004): "Lecture 3: Exploring the World of Perception: Sensory Objects."

misses the perceptual experience of the non-painter, or the uninitiated, in which, even if the painter or art historian attempts to identify an element of a painting and direct the attention of the uninitiated by uttering a demonstrative, the uninitiated may just not, for whatever reason, perceive the relevant item. But it is not as if he perceptually experiences *nothing*. In his groping to understand, he still perceptually experiences colors or expressions. In his straining his ear to hear an instrument or a particular note, he still hears noise or sound, if perhaps not the music, the melody, or the timbre. Our gropings and strainings are not empty perceptual events even if, *to a degree or in a certain respect*, they are deaf or dumb. (I will return to this last comment near the end.)

If the first two considerations bear upon the level of detail of fineness of grain, the next concerns McDowell's suggestion that we can annex perceptual content within our conceptual-linguistic repertoire.

We can return to the case above in which, as McDowell says, we have no corresponding concept for a part of the perceptual episode we are currently enjoying. Nonetheless, McDowell claims that the way in which all perceptual content is permeated with conceptuality is that any and all perceptual content can, in some sense, succumb to our linguistic capabilities insofar as we can "annex a bit of language" to any perceptual content.<sup>6</sup> We bring that perceptual content into our linguistic repertoire, i.e. by assigning it a name. *That shade* can become *scarlet* within my conceptual repertoire, either because someone helps me name it or I arbitrarily assign it a new name.

My concern is that *having to annex* perceptual content into one's conceptual repertoire is evidence for the view that there is at least some nonconceptual content

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<sup>6</sup> John McDowell, "What Myth?," *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 319.

within perceptual experience. At most – though I will challenge this below – McDowell’s labeling maneuver suggests that perceptual content heretofore nonconceptual is *conceptualizable*, but hardly conceptualized. Moreover, the metaphor of “annexing” suggests territory (perceptual content) lying outside one’s settled property (conceptual content), thereby bringing the imagery of a conceptual boundary back into view. In a telling remark, McDowell seems to admit as much:

[W]hat is the point of insisting that the content of a world-disclosing experience is conceptual? There is an obvious sense in which content that never becomes the content of a conceptual capacity is not conceptual. So I am acknowledging that at least some of the content of a typical world-disclosing experience is not conceptual in that sense. And it is tempting to argue on these lines: surely *all* the content of an experience is present in it in the way in which I am acknowledging that some of its content is – that is, not conceptual in that sense.<sup>7</sup>

Now, I think this is evidence that at least some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual, even if it is conceptualizable. Nonetheless, this begins to pose the issue noted above as to whether all perceptual content is conceptual, through and through, whether all perceptual content is nonconceptual, through and through, or whether there can be a mixed position. The mixed position, that some perceptual content is nonconceptual and some is conceptual, begins to look as if perceptual experience is not unified. This moves us toward a deeper issue within McDowell’s Kantian outlook.

McDowell retains the conceptualist thesis by revising some of his views after *Mind and World*, as noted above. The revision concerns a deeper point about the overall *form* of experience for a rational agent because, on his view, the perceptual content for

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 347.

the subject “hangs together with other aspects of its content in a unity of the sort Kant identifies as categorial.”<sup>8</sup> McDowell writes,

What is important is this: if an experience is world-disclosing, which implies that it is categorially unified, *all* its content is present in a *form* in which, as I put it before, it is suitable to constitute contents of conceptual capacities. All that would be needed for a bit of it to come to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity, is for it to be focused on and made to be the meaning of a linguistic expression. As I acknowledged, that may not happen. But whether or not a bit of experiential content is focused on and brought within the reach of a vocabulary, either given a name for the first time or registered as fitting something already in the subject’s linguistic repertoire, it is anyway present in the content of a world-disclosing experience in a form in which it already either actually is, or has the potential to be simply appropriated as, the content of a conceptual capacity.<sup>9</sup>

So it is in virtue of the form of the perceptual content that all perceptual content is permeated with conceptuality for rational beings, even if some perceptual content within an episode does not get taken up by one’s conceptual capacities.

There are a few more important pieces to McDowell’s revision.<sup>10</sup> Swayed by some considerations from Charles Travis, McDowell repeals the idea, implicit in *Mind and World*, that in order to understand how perceptual experience can activate one’s conceptual capacities, one must think that perceptual content is structured propositionally. Likewise, he repeals the idea that the content of a perceptual experience would need to include everything that experience would enable the perceiver to know. In expounding the view, McDowell allows for a slightly deeper passivity to perceptual experience such that two persons could have perceptual experiences of the same object despite the fact that only one person possesses a more fine-grained concept of the object.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 347-8.

<sup>10</sup> See John McDowell, “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” in *Experience, Norm, and Nature*, ed. by Jakob Lindgaard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

In his example, he and another person may perceive a bird, but he may be inclined to apply the concept *cardinal* whereas the other person, lacking the concept *cardinal*, would not be so inclined. This kind of exercise, nonetheless, can be linked to and inform recognitional conceptual capacities. In one more revision, now closer to his previous view of demonstratives, McDowell argues that if one lacks the appropriate concept for some perceptual content, that perceptual content is nevertheless unified *in the same way* concepts are unified. In what way? The intuition is categorially unified in the same manner in which concepts are unified, thereby providing the form of the experience of that perceptual content (as alluded to above) with the potential to enter into discursive, conceptual activity.

McDowell supports this latter claim by way of his predecessors, Sellars and Kant. Sellars suggests a unity between the expressions *This is a cube* and *This cube*, the former unified in the form susceptible for judgments, and thereby conceptual, and the latter unified in the form of a perceptual demonstrative, and intuitive as such. And now relying upon Kant, and this is McDowell's key point:

The same function which gives unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*; and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding.<sup>11</sup>

McDowell writes,

One can make use of content's being given in an intuition to acquire a new discursive capacity, but with much of the content of an ordinary intuition, one never does that. (Think of the finely discriminable shapes and shades of colour that visual experience presents to one.) Nevertheless an intuition's content is all conceptual, in this sense: it is in the intuition in a form in which one could make it, that very content, figure in discursive activity. That would be to exploit a potential for discursive activity that is

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 4.

already there in the capacities actualized in having an intuition with that content.<sup>12</sup>

If it weren't for the deeper point about the categorial unity of the form of an intuition in experience, as well as the form-matter distinction as structuring perceptual content for rational agents, it is clear that McDowell would be forced to retreat to the position that some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual, and of two kinds. First, that perceptual content for which there is no conceptual content within the relevant agent's present conceptual repertoire, and second, that perceptual content which never gets taken up by the relevant agent's conceptual capacities.

I want to argue against the idea that the categorial unity of the form of an intuition in experience is accurate and necessary to describe perception and perceptual knowledge, and against the idea that the form-matter distinction is even the primary distinction characterizing perception. Both criticisms, I believe, are supported by Merleau-Pontian resources neglected by other scholars, including Dreyfus and Kelly.

Regarding the categorial unity of intuition, McDowell briefly mentions a necessary element within Kant's view by way of discussing Sellars, but neglects to expound upon the idea. The element is the productive imagination's role in coming to perceive objects. McDowell writes,

If there can be visual intuitions whose content is partly specifiable by, say, 'that cube', intuitions in which something's being cubic is visually given to one, then the higher cognitive faculty needs to be in our picture not just to account for the unity with which certain content figures in such an intuition, but also, in the guise of the productive imagination, to provide for part of the content itself — supplying, as it were, the rest of the cube, behind the facing surfaces. Sellars often uses the example of a pink ice cube, and one reason is presumably that it allows him not to bother with this complication, because he envisages his ice cube as translucent, so that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 8.

its back can be actually in view.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the problems of Sellars' view that one has to *infer* absent profiles of objects, it is the very suggestion that one has to rely upon higher cognitive faculties to account for perception, including the productive imagination and the understanding, that Merleau-Ponty rejects.<sup>14</sup> I would like to highlight the rejection by noting Kant's explanation here. "If we would determine the first origin of our knowledge," Kant writes, we'll have to turn to synthesis:

Synthesis in general, as we shall hereafter see, is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious. To bring this synthesis *to concepts* is a function which belongs to the understanding, and it is through this function of the understanding that we first obtain knowledge properly so called.<sup>15</sup>

On my reading of Merleau-Ponty, we can reject the necessity of this blind power of imagination and resorting to higher cognitive faculties in favor of paying attention to the phenomenology of embodied perceiving. Pinpointing the matter, Merleau-Ponty describes what it means to be a being that visually perceives with two eyes, i.e. with binocular vision, writing,

The unity of the object in binocular vision is not, therefore, the result of some third person process which eventually produces a single image through the fusion of two monocular images. When we go from diplopia to normal vision, the single object replaces the two images, one is clearly not superimposed on the other: it is not of the same order as they, but is incomparably more substantial. The two images of diplopia are not amalgamated into one single one in binocular vision; the unity of the object is intentional. But – and this is the point we are trying to make – it is not therefore a notional unity. We pass from double vision to the single

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>14</sup> See Wilfrid Sellars, "The Role of the Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience," in *Categories: A Colloquium*, ed. by Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (Pennsylvania State University, 1978), 231-45.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A78/B103.

object, *not through an inspection of the mind* [PD emphasis], but when the two eyes cease to function each on its own account and are used as a single organ by one single gaze. It is not the epistemological subject who brings about the synthesis, but the body, when it escapes from dispersion, pulls itself together and tends by all means in its power towards one single goal of its activity, and when one single intention is formed in it through the phenomenon of synergy.<sup>16</sup>

If we are concerned about the unity of perceptual experience, and if McDowell points to the formal unity of an intuition allegedly shared with concepts, Merleau-Ponty is offering two claims.

First, it is descriptively inaccurate and unnecessary to suggest that the way in which objects perceptually appear as unified is in virtue of their pre-organized, imaginatively-produced synthetic unity. Objects *do not* appear unified in the first instance; they only appear unified as we come to perceive them. We do not just have objects in view, McDowell's gloss on an intuition<sup>17</sup>; objects come into view, and they come into view by way of two monocular images coming to rest upon an object such that the result is no longer even an image, but rather the object. Missing this in favor of the supposed categorial unity of the form of experience inaccurately describes and thereby falsifies both the way we perceptually experience and the perceptual content itself. And if it falsifies the way we perceptually experience, then there is no way to come to understand how perception actually affords us knowledge in our coming to achieve it.

Second, Merleau-Ponty's view does not suggest there is no unity to perceptual experience, but he traces how unity is achieved through perception rather than being pre-given. This suggests there is something deeply flawed with McDowell's account of perception. By insisting that all perceptual content *must be* conceptually structured, at

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<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 270.

<sup>17</sup> McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given," 4-5.

least in terms of the formal unity of the intuition, McDowell becomes susceptible to another form of the Myth of the Given. It is the form in which the world is Given over to the epistemological subject, as something to-be-known in the first instance, instead of acknowledging the world, never quite given, as something to be lived through in the first instance, over which one's eyes rest upon in the second instance, and to be known only in the third instance.

Coming to view the object as unified with our binocular eyes resting upon it, Merleau-Ponty retains a unity to perceptual experience that is not pre-determined. If it were, we would never need eyeglasses. But more to the point, Merleau-Ponty not only substitutes an embodied perspective for the productive role of the imagination and higher faculties, he goes so far as to challenge the form/content structure of perception, replacing it with the phenomenologically-garnered and Gestalt-psychological figure-ground distinction. In a passage resonant with McDowell's rejection of bald naturalism, he writes,

[U]ntil phenomenology becomes genetic phenomenology, unhelpful reversions to causal thought and naturalism will remain justified. Our problem therefore becomes clearer. The task for us is to conceive, between the linguistic, perceptual and motor contents and the form given to them or the symbolic function which breathes life into them, a relationship which shall be neither the reduction of form to content, nor the subsuming of content under an autonomous form.<sup>18</sup>

It seems to me that McDowell's invocation of the form of perceptual content as suitable for activating our conceptual capacities is reminiscent of the idea of subsuming content under an autonomous form, not because the objects in our experience necessarily exhibit an autonomous structure, but because it is taken as a (transcendental) presupposition that

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<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 145.

such perceptual content would need to exhibit formal features for the sake of the possibility of objective knowledge for autonomous agents. On my reading of Merleau-Ponty, it is not his aim to dispute that the perceptual experience of human beings is structured in some way, but to dispute that it is structured in *that* way. His alternative proposal suggests that perceptual experience is structured on a figure-ground relationship in the wider domain of a perceptual field.

Regarding the figure-ground structure, Merleau-Ponty notes that even a patch of color against a homogenous background exhibits a shape by which it is seen and understood to be the shape that it is, emphasizing the centrality of this structure at the very beginning of the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

When Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception, which leaves us free, in an ideal analysis, to bring in the notion of impressions. It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all. The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field’. A really homogenous area offering *nothing to be* cannot be given to *any perception*. The structure of actual perception alone can teach us what perception is.<sup>19</sup>

This is not inconsequential for the topic at hand. Consider again McDowell’s acknowledgment that a bit of perceptual content can be present to an agent in such a way that the agent could bring that perceptual content into focus and thereby annex a bit of language to it. Merleau-Ponty’s point about the priority of the figure-ground structure is that bringing that perceptual content into focus at all, such that our binocular vision comes to rest, presupposes that it – whatever it is – comes to be framed by a background. Otherwise, it makes no sense to say that one can bring it into focus since there would

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<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 4.

have been nothing against which to bring it into focus. *The very act of focusing* presupposes the figure-ground structure, but hardly the form/content structure.<sup>20</sup> Or one more way to say it: that which is *focalizable* (and thereby conceptualizable) is so only in virtue of being set against a background. That we are always and already existentially in touch with the world is Merleau-Ponty's way of saying that the figure-ground structure is characteristic of our perceptual capacities before we are epistemically susceptible to the putative Kantian form of a given perceptual experience.

As for this consideration, I have argued that having to annex perceptual content within our conceptual repertoire admits that at least some perceptual content in experience is nonconceptual, and that this is so because Merleau-Ponty effectively undercuts the Kantian considerations for the categorial unity of the form of intuitions of perceptual experience and the form/matter distinction.

I want to suggest now that McDowell's reliance upon demonstratives to capture perceptual content may be a *non sequitur* anyway. That we could bring some perceptual content into our conceptual mastery by naming it indicates a feature of language and its infinite possibilities more than it indicates anything about our perceptual repertoire or the experience itself. I briefly want to suggest this thought against the ability for demonstratives to capture such perceptual content by way of Michel Foucault's analysis of Rene Magritte's two paintings, *This Is Not a Pipe*.

Personifying one potential lesson of the artwork, Foucault writes,

The drawn form of the pipe is so easily recognized that it excludes any explanatory or descriptive text. Its academic schematicism says very

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<sup>20</sup> I have called it an "act" of focusing, though we are on the porous border here of active versus passive perceptual engagements since the binocular vision coming to rest is not usually a concerted effort of function of the will, but rather of the body.

explicitly, “You see me so clearly that it would be ridiculous for me to arrange myself so as to write: This is a pipe. To be sure, words would draw me less adequately than I represent myself.”<sup>21</sup>

But even more deeply, Foucault reveals the inherent instability “indicated by the word ‘this,’”<sup>22</sup> including indicating (a) the so-called image of a pipe floating above the so-called text (making the statement true because an image of a pipe is not a pipe), (b) the statement itself (making the statement true because a series of words is not a pipe), and (c) the ensemble of the so-called pipe-image and the so-called text beneath the pipe-image (making the statement true because such an ensemble, and thereby a painting, is not a pipe). And while part of Foucault’s point lies in revealing Magritte’s play between the image-text and the text-image, what I am drawing from his analysis is the instability of the demonstrative *this* to capture the thing. Foucault writes,

On the page of an illustrated book, we seldom pay attention to the small space running above the words and below the drawings, forever serving them as a common frontier. It is there, on these few millimeters of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, classification.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of thinking with McDowell that we are referencing the thing with the conceptual mastery of *that shade* or *that*, what we may instead be doing with language, as a matter of linguistic pragmatics, is indicating the way in which the perceptual item within our experience appears to us to another or attempting to direct another’s attention to that perceptual item within our experience, or both. That there can be this instability in the experience of even such a painting as *This is Not a Pipe* is a lesson, I think, about

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, ed. and trans. by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

perception more generally, and that even simple demonstratives, by which one is trying to desperately latch onto the perceived, are not up to the task.

None of this criticism of the ability of demonstratives to capture the specificity of perceptual content in experience denies that language references things in the world, as it were. The position I am outlining as a criticism of McDowell's proposal is not committed to, for example, Brandom's idea that "truth and reference are philosophers' fictions, generated by grammatical misunderstandings," although that thought may be accurate.<sup>24</sup> I am only opposing the thought that our conceptual capacities could be brought to bear upon any and all perceptual content, and showing the limits of such a thought by suggesting that even simple demonstratives are underdetermined.

I would like to consider two potential objections. First, McDowell could argue, in the same way he does against Evans' nonconceptualism, that the distance between intuitions and concepts is being presupposed in my nonconceptualist position, not argued for. And separating intuitions from concepts in this way reopens the Myth of the Given. Second, McDowell could suggest that such a nonconceptualist view entails that our conceptual capacities are bounded. But if our conceptual capacities are bounded, then our spontaneity via self-consciousness is likewise bounded, thereby rejecting spontaneity and the autonomy of the space of reasons apart from the realm of law.

As for the first objection, it is a shared strength of my view with McDowell's view that there is no "distance" between intuitions and concepts. First of all, as noted above, Merleau-Ponty rejects that terminology in favor of phenomenological structures of perception. Secondly, at least under the guise of the mixed position that some perceptual

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<sup>24</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 324.

content in experience is nonconceptual and some perceptual content in experience is conceptual, I have not suggested that we can separate intuitions from concepts entirely, thereby returning to a picture in which perception could merely serve as the input process either on information models or on strictly internalist conceptual models. Rather, it is a structural feature of our perception that we come to witness the world as laden with both conceptual and nonconceptual content. It is possible, on this view, to retain the discontinuity thesis between human animals and other animals insofar as human perception is partially conceptual and partially nonconceptual. (This may also be true of some other animals, but there is nothing distinctly separating the two here.) If our embodied perceptual capacities are enacted in virtue of our attentional capacities, as I argued in previous chapters, this gives us reason to adopt the mixed position without falling into the Myth of the Given.

As for the second objection, I do believe the concern about spontaneity cannot be reconciled with McDowell's thought that our conceptual capacities are unbounded. While acknowledging that the way in which our perception is embodied does not entail giving up spontaneity only to reduce us to creatures in the realm of law, it does entail reformulating spontaneity such that it can come in degrees or such that spontaneity needs to be described with respect to certain modes of intentionality. (This is an aspect of what I claimed above when I said our perceptual episodes are never *completely* deaf nor dumb.) Merleau-Ponty writes,

Thus it is by giving up part of his spontaneity, by becoming involved in the world through stable organs and pre-established circuits that man can acquire the mental and practical space which will theoretically free him from his environment and allow him to *see* it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 100-101.

And the concern about shifting our view to a notion of spontaneity that comes in degrees or specified by mode of intentionality is just as true with our conceptual-linguistic capacities as it is with our perceptual capacities. Again, Merleau-Ponty writes,

It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words. [...] Before becoming the indication of a concept it is first of all an event which grips my body, and this grip circumscribes the area of significance to which it has reference.<sup>26</sup>

There are two other brief supporting reasons for reformulating spontaneity on this Merleau-Pontian view. First, specifying spontaneity by way of degree or direction helps explain how we mature in our corresponding perceptual and conceptual repertoires as embodied beings. Thus, we are further able to understand how embodied, perceptual habits within practices can lead to more discriminatory conceptual abilities. Second, reformulating spontaneity helps address the passivity of perception in a sense neglected by McDowell's notion of receptivity. In virtue of emphasizing our embodied perceiving, we are passive perceivers in the sense that we and our bodies are vulnerable to the richness, vividness, and complexity of our detailed surroundings in all that they afford us. In being vulnerable, we see the incredible mismatch between the force of the perceptual content we undergo and the conceptual content over which we wield more, though not total, control. And that mismatch, one once identified by George Berkeley when challenging John Locke's distinction between ideas of sense and ideas of reflection, is implicit in McDowell's claim that we can annex perceptual content by way of naming it.

A fuller response to this concern over spontaneity and the extent of our conceptual capacities, however, requires reformulating the relations between the realm of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 274-275.

law and the space of reasons. It is only by fully acknowledging our embodied existence that we can bring into view the degrees and directions of our freedom, not just apart from causal impingements and not simply in virtue of our rational capacities, but as embodied cultural beings living in a space of motivations.

## CHAPTER 5 MOTIVATIONS

Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?

((Are the kinaesthetic sensations my willing?))

- Wittgenstein, §621, *Philosophical Investigations*

... A thought comes when 'it' wants to, and not when 'I' want it to; so it is falsifying the facts to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think.'

- Nietzsche, §17, *Beyond Good and Evil*

This work has been building toward a new concept of motivations, a concept introduced but underdeveloped by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The significance of introducing motivations is at least two-fold, although given the number of surrounding issues of perception, embodiment, and conceptual and nonconceptual content, collateral commitments have begun forming a different picture of an embodied consciousness. The first reason to introduce motivations is to understand passive perception without needlessly inserting a rationalist conceptual apparatus and yet resisting purely empiricist sub-personal processes lacking perceptual significance. The second reason, tied to the first, is to provide a third way of understanding human action alongside explanations of human action in terms of reasons and causes.

My claim, to be developed in this chapter alongside the views of Hubert Dreyfus, Sean Kelly, and especially Donnchadh O'Conaill, is the following: a motivation is a capacity of P to be moved by X to Y. Let us allow these letters to stand for the following: stipulatively, P is a person or part of a person existing through a lived body; X is an intentional object, either perceptual or conceptual; and Y is one of three things: a perceptual expectation involving passive synthesis (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the

immediate perceptual expectation of thunder); a concept (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the thought that thunder will be heard soon); or a course of action (e.g. from the sight of lightning to being drawn to shelter). This formulation is indebted to O’Conaill’s argument for motivations, which has a similar but non-identical structure. I will distinguish my view from his soon enough and flesh out the concepts just introduced.

Importantly, my notion of motivations includes the claim that *concepts* can be motivating and motivated just as much as motor intentional objects and other perceptual objects, a view heretofore neglected but of a piece with Merleau-Ponty’s picture.

I will argue that this notion of a motivation satisfies the two foci above in a way that is both inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s account and truer to our phenomenological experience than offered by other authors. Before developing the formulation above, I will re-collect some thoughts from previous chapters, re-introduce the stakes of the discussion between Dreyfus’s camp and McDowell’s rationalism, and outline O’Conaill’s position on motivations.

### *Summary of Previous Claims*

Throughout this work, I have been arguing for these claims: that consciousness is structured by attention, an expansion of the intentionality thesis; that Dreyfus and Kelly reintroduce a Cartesian-like dualism in their distinction between cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality; that it is plausible to believe that motor intentionality is at least partially conceptual, though perhaps not wholly conceptual; that we perceptually experience items in the world within a phenomenal field, shaped by a specifically attentional embodied consciousness; that the attentional structure by which items

perceptually appear in the world are within the matrix of the focal, non-focal, focalizable, and non-focalizable; that attentional embodied perception is finely grained; and that plausibly, as finely grained, the content of perceptual consciousness is at least partially nonconceptual, though perhaps not wholly nonconceptual.

Two of these moments suggest a dialectic between Dreyfus's and McDowell's respective positions regarding the conceptual or nonconceptual nature of our engagements with the world. One last time, here is a skeletal form of McDowell's major concerns in *Mind and World*:

1. All perceptual content is either conceptual or nonconceptual.
2. If perceptual content is nonconceptual, then we fall into the Myth of the Given or coherentism.
3. The Myth of the Given and coherentism are intolerable; they lead to either bald naturalism, leaving us without resources to *justify* our beliefs in the world, or a frictionless spinning in the void, without justifying our beliefs *in the world*.
4. Therefore, perceptual content must be conceptual.

I have suggested repeatedly that the way to reject this argument – and the way I believe Merleau-Ponty would reject it – is to deny the first premise. (Generally speaking, one might think that denying the initial disjunction of any Kantian argument is the primary available refutation.) This is the argumentative move missed by Dreyfus and Kelly when they assert that, in some perceptual episodes, all perceptual content is nonconceptual insofar as our motor intentional behaviors take over, whether through mastery of a craft or the mindless autopilot of our everyday coping. I have rejected this view in previous chapters.

This is where motivations come into the story. As capacities, motivations offer an intelligible way of understanding passive perception and human action without resorting

to our rational capacities in the first instance, our causal impingements in the last instance, or only our motor intentional comportments in the world. Alternatively, and *in medias res*, our attentional embodied lives begin within the motivational relationships by which we come to perceive objects in the world and react to them.

### *O'Conaill on Motivations*

A recent article by O'Conaill proposes one of the most sophisticated accounts of motivation stemming from Merleau-Ponty's work.<sup>1</sup> I would like to review his major thesis and accompanying commitments before challenging the view and re-orienting some of his work toward a different conception of motivation.

O'Conaill proposes both a working formulation of motivation and a modified definition near the end of his paper. The initial idea is the following: "an agent, A, is motivated by X to Y. When A is motivated, we can speak of a three-way relation of motivation between A, understood as a conscious individual capable of action; an object, x, of which A is conscious; and a course of action, y."<sup>2</sup> By the end of the paper, the overall view is that for an agent, A, to be motivated is for that agent to have a conscious intentional relation toward a particular object, X, such that the relation normatively and affectively inclines the agent toward pursuing a course of action, Y, with respect to that intentional object, without that inclination necessitating that the course of action will be taken up. In working out this formulation, O'Conaill is fairly careful to delineate what he means by an intentional object, X, a course of action, Y, the normative aspect, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Donnchadh O'Conaill, "On Being Motivated," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12 (2013), 579-595.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 580-581.

affective aspect. However, he perhaps leaves room to wonder about the characterization of the agent, A, as well as the gap between being inclined toward a course of action, Y, and actually taking up that course of action. I will summarize each of these elements briefly.

It is the case that intentional objects, X, can motivate A to Y under different intentional relations, or *noeses* (though O’Conaill does not use the term), such as remembering X or imagining X. Nonetheless, O’Conaill suggests that the perception of X is the paradigm for understanding motivations within Merleau-Ponty’s limited view, and we are led to believe, in Husserl’s view as well. Likewise, the intentional object can either consist of standard whole objects, their parts, or their properties. Importantly, O’Conaill makes two further claims about relevant motivational intentional objects, ones I will soon challenge. First, intentional objects are particular in the sense that A is motivated by particular objects, situations, or events. While O’Conaill suggests that broader aspirations, such as desiring a good education for one’s children, can fall under motivational intentional objects, he neither focuses on them nor seems to believe that Merleau-Ponty has these kinds of intentional objects in mind.<sup>3</sup> So while he does not deny these kinds of motivational objects, it is unclear whether his theory can account for them. Second, O’Conaill claims that A must be consciously aware of X in order for X to motivate A. I think this view is far too limited to capture either motivations or Merleau-Ponty’s (albeit underdeveloped) notion of motivations, and I will return to this below.

For A to be motivated by X, the intentional object must have normative and affective components. The normative component of the intentional object is that, in the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 581.

case of perception, perceiving X places a kind of demand upon A such that a need for satisfying the demand is felt by A. In this suggestion O’Conaill both converges and diverges from the account of motivations offered by Dreyfus’s and Kelly’s notion of motor intentionality. In the latter account, objects present themselves as affordances or solicitations to be taken up immediately as motor intentional objects. The normative component overlaps in both accounts insofar as a norm for satisfying a need comes into play. In a famous example, one repeated by Kelly, there can be a motivation for my body to move closer or further away from a painting in an art gallery in order to better perceive the painting or one of its aspects. However, O’Conaill’s account seems to go further by suggesting two things. First, affordances (or solicitations) do not, by themselves, explain motivations. His claim is that one can be aware of affordances without being inclined to take them up, and it is this being inclined to act with respect to intentional features of an object that requires an affective component to actually motivate an agent to act. It is this affective component which, on his view, helps explain the normative component because it is the *felt* need toward a course of action with respect to the intentional object that requires satiation.

As for the course of action, Y, O’Conaill takes an idea from Husserl to help describe why A is motivated toward a *course* of action rather than a *specific* action. The clue is that our perceptual experience of objects exhibits (protentional) anticipatory features of those objects, including the inner horizonal features of those objects constituting corresponding expectations for A with respect to those objects. These expectations pre-delineate further phenomenological features to be explored, thereby opening up temporal space for fulfillments or explosions of those expectations.

Likewise, O’Conaill claims, the affective component just outlined is inherent within the internal horizons, and thereby expectations, of how an agent perceives objects that motivate him, opening up not just expectations regarding further perceptual features of the object, but further routes or courses of action with respect to that object. Citing Husserl, O’Conaill states, “Because of how the object appears the agent is aware of the possibilities for action, and because of what the agent feels they are stimulated to react in a certain way, to comport themselves toward the object in one way or another.”<sup>4</sup> It is important on the view that no particular action is motivated, but rather a course of action, because particular actions can be identified as indexable events whereas to be motivated to Y can be satisfied, at least in most cases, if not all, by a number of different specific actions.

It is worth noting, as an aside, an asymmetry between the *particular* object, situation, or event, X, that motivates the agent toward a *non-particular* course of action, Y, attempting to fulfill the normative demand of the motivation.

I would like to outline two more features of O’Conaill’s view: the qualification, under the modified definition in his paper, that to claim that an agent is motivated toward Y is not to claim that Y will occur, and a kind of example to illustrate this theory of motivation. O’Conaill writes, “To characterize this stimulation [of the affective draw of the intentional object] more systematically, I propose taking as a clue the following comment by Husserl: ‘the subject of the motivation can at one time yield to the stimuli and at another time resist them.’ The suggested account is as follows: A is motivated by

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 587. O’Conaill cites Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy II: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. by F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1982), 231.

x to y only if, on perceiving x, A will attempt to y unless they decide to not y.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to claim that one need not will the course of action in order to be motivated; however, *refraining* from the course of action does require an act of will. “However, one’s y-ing is still under one’s control, in that one can, by an act of will, refrain from y-ing.”<sup>6</sup>

O’Conaill admits two limits to this claim. First, he is dealing with single motivations instead of more complex views in which, for example, multiple motivations might outweigh each other in the calculus of affective qualities or degrees of intensity. Second, this applies “only to agents who have the ability to refrain from doing what they are motivated to do, e.g. rational agents such as mature humans.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, O’Conaill admits that describing the motivation itself is difficult, listing a number of phrases from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty which inevitably involve metaphors: “Husserl describes the stimulus as an invitation; the motivating object ‘intrudes on the subject’; it ‘knocks on the door of consciousness’. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the situation posing the agent a problem ‘set only in the form of a vague feeling of uneasiness’; of a felt tension in which something is ‘imminent.’”<sup>8</sup> To sidestep these phrases, he introduces an everyday example of a person motivated by a delicious-looking slice of cake. “In such an experience, the perceived features of the cake (the texture, the colour, how carefully it has been designed and arranged) not only suggest further features (what the cake would look or feel like in further experience); they pre-delineate a course of action (eating the cake) which one feels stimulated to take up.”<sup>9</sup> And he goes on to suggest that there are

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<sup>5</sup> O’Conaill, 590.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 591.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 589.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

differences between, say, actually feeling this motivation to take up eating the slice of cake versus cases in which one knows the cake is available for consumption without feeling the necessary affective component, thereby lacking the motivation.

Overall, O’Conaill’s view is insightful and nuanced; my own formulation is indebted to his clarity on this topic. However, I have a number of concerns about his theory of motivation, some of which I noted above. In the interest of developing an alternative, I will merely list the concerns here and flesh them out in the positive view.

First, I am not convinced that wider motivational intentional objects – like desiring that one’s children receive a good education – should be kept outside the purview of a relevant theory of motivations. Nonetheless, as stated above, O’Conaill does not deny this so much as acknowledge the issue and place it aside.

Second, on O’Conaill’s view, the agent must be consciously aware of the intentional object, X, in order for X to motivate. I think this is false. Motivations can be either conscious or unconscious, but even this is too narrow. Re-inserting some claims about widening the intentional thesis to the attentional thesis will provide more room for understanding how motivations can be shaped by objects, situations, or events outside of the conscious purview of the person involved.

Third, O’Conaill’s account, while surpassing Dreyfus’s and Kelly’s account of motivations by adding a necessarily affective component, and by suggesting that being motivated does not guarantee a felicitous performance of an action, nonetheless suffers from a shared flaw. In chapter 2 I argued that Kelly’s view of motor intentionality holds that motor intentional objects are *particular*, one way in which they were considered nonconceptual perceptual items in experience. I then argued that we have reasons to

believe that even our motor intentional directedness toward intentional objects is conceptual, at least in part. Relying on Merleau-Ponty's organist example, the organist plays the new, unfamiliar organ with as much depth and richness as any other organ. The object itself need not be particular. Likewise, O'Conaill, relying upon Kelly's research, cites the identical experimental psychology studies involving DF, the visual agnosia patient, and the differences in motor intentionally gripping actually present blocks versus pantomiming absent blocks to support the notion that motivations are born from particular objects.<sup>10</sup> However, I refuted the conclusions drawn from these experiments in chapter 2 with respect to Kelly's argument regarding particularity, suggesting that he misreads Merleau-Ponty's import of Schneider's deficiencies in such cases. So I want to suggest here, again, that particularity need not be a feature of motivations, or at least not all motivations. I will say more about another feature of this in relation to Schneider shortly.

Fourth, and finally, I believe that the second limit O'Conaill places upon his view – namely that mature rational agents can refrain, through acts of will, to act on their motivations – is too quick. It is not that the sentence, taken in the slice of cake example, is necessarily inaccurate. Rather, it misses out on the phenomenological aspects of motivation if we allow ourselves to deal with more than one motivation at a time. I will suggest below that this is absolutely necessary in any theory of motivations. Likewise, the worry is that, on this view (though O'Conaill is not committed to this), the will can be treated as un-motivated or outside the realm of motivations. Alternatively, if we open up the possibility that concepts can be motivated just as much as perceptions and actions, as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 590.

I argue below, then it becomes conceptualizable to believe that the will is also motivated. In this sense, refraining from following through with one motivation may itself be a motivated willing.

### *Motivations*

My view is the following: a motivation is a capacity for P to be moved by X to Y. As opposed to an agent, A, with the ineliminable connotation that the “subject” in question necessarily has the ability to act, and that we would, under suitable conditions, deem A as acting, I stipulatively suggest that P stand for a person or a part of person existing through a lived body. This requires some clarification.

The reason the index of a motivation is stipulative is because we are in the realm of thorny issues surrounding concepts of the self, personhood, consciousness, and self-consciousness. To address all of these would be impossible. If it turns out that the index of a motivation should be something other than a person, or part of a person existing through a lived body, I would not complain. On the other hand, attaching this view to personhood does not, in and of itself, preclude non-human animals or other beings from possibly undergoing motivations. It just means that considerations of personhood would have to be so extended. Indeed, O’Conaill does suggest that non-human animals may well qualify as agents on his view of being motivated.

Nonetheless, why have I suggested that the relevant index might be a person or part of a person existing through a lived body? While I criticized Dreyfus’s and Kelly’s view of motivations as affordances or solicitations of motor intentional objects, my criticism did not deny that motor intentionality exists as a phenomenon of our embodied

experience. It does. It is just that the features of motor intentionality are not as separate from the so-called cognitive intentionality defended on that view, what I called a resurgent Cartesian dualism. A part of a person, like one's hand extending toward the motor intentional object of a doorknob, can certainly form part of our experience. My claim, expanding upon previous chapters, is just that motivations are wider than the intentional objects drawing motor intentionality.

Likewise, motivations need not be drawn from actually present particular objects, as in the previous views considered. This gets to the heart of the problem. One of Merleau-Ponty's most famous examples illustrating the lived body is the phantom limb, that no-longer-present limb motivating traumatic pain. On my view, insofar as parts of persons exist through lived bodies, the indices of motivations can either be persons in general or parts of persons, whether existent or not. The same can be said in the other direction with respect to parts of one's body. In the case of paralysis, a person's paralyzed legs no longer exhibit the capacity for being motivated in the same ways. They may serve as a motivation in some ways – upon visually perceiving one's own paralyzed legs, they may motivate the painful remembrance of running freely, for example – but other motivations serving motor intentional compartments are cancelled out. So the existence or non-existence of parts of persons are irrelevant for whether parts of persons existing through lived bodies are sites of motivation.

This handles one more concern from a previous chapter. In the Dreyfus-McDowell debate, one rebuttal from McDowell was that Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty treat the body as if were it a person-like thing, thereby resulting in too many persons performing actions. At that juncture, I argued that McDowell was correct to rebut

Dreyfus' reliance upon the motor intentionality *of the body* as if it were person-like, and I also suggested that, while Merleau-Ponty's prose may be hyperbolic at times, his notion of motor intentionality was essentially linked to persons, not bodies as second persons. Now, then, the same holds true insofar as the site of motivation does not extend past parts of lived bodies.<sup>11</sup> The same idea could very well be extended to prosthetic limbs, the blind man's cane, or even the rubber hand illusion insofar as these formerly (and merely) ontic objects get taken up into one's body schema. These too can be sites of motivation.

Whether the claim that persons and parts of persons existing through a lived body is incompatible with O'Conaill's focus on the agent remains unclear. I suspect that my view opens up the possibility of micro-sites of motivation otherwise unintelligible by the concept of an agent in his view because of the idea that, generally – and this is part of McDowell's point above – we do not attribute agency (and thereby the capacity to act) to mere body parts in and of themselves, except metaphorically. In that sense motivations should be seen as the capacities of P rather than focus on an agent.

On O'Conaill's view, the agent must be consciously aware of the intentional object, X, in order for X to motivate A to Y. As previewed above, I think this is overly restrictive. My alternative claim is that the *motivating* object, situation, or event, X, can be either perceptual or conceptual, and can be either conscious or unconscious. However, I would like to rely upon other concepts already developed to better specify the sense in which motivating objects can be conscious or unconscious; in fact, I would like to drop

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<sup>11</sup> As a quick aside, I do have in mind Michel Foucault's claims, after Merleau-Ponty's corpus, concerning the site of the body as forming the locus of disciplinary measures. Nothing I am arguing is incompatible with that view, and I think, consistent with its possibility.

the vocabulary of the conscious and unconscious for the sake of understanding motivations, though perhaps that distinction is useful for other phenomena.

The major conclusions of chapters 1 and 3 were that Merleau-Ponty offers an attentionality thesis broadening the Brentano-Husserl intentionality thesis. Attentionality is a broader form of intentionality because, as a structure of consciousness, it captures how consciousness becomes *re-directed* toward other intentional objects and, upon focusing on the same object, it reveals different phenomenological features of that object as it appears for consciousness. According to Merleau-Ponty, attention is also *creative* because it structures our experience of the world in terms of a phenomenal field. I find my embodied self within the landscape of this phenomenal field, situated within the world spatially and temporally. In virtue of this embodied location, this here and now, I suggested that the phenomenal field, combined with the phenomenologically unstrippable figure-ground relationship, reveals a four-fold structure of attentional consciousness with respect to its possible objects: objects which are focal, i.e. the figure; objects which are non-focal, including the ground; objects which are focalizable, including the ground in virtue of re-direction; and objects which, given my current embodied location, are non-focalizable.

Given this alternative vocabulary revealing, I hope, part of the structure of our phenomenologically embodied experience, my claim is that motivating objects, situations, or events, X, can stem from either perceptual intentional objects or conceptual intentional objects that are non-focal, but are – in principle at least – focalizable.

Here's an example from urban planning. In her famous work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs disabuses readers of the notion that city planning

built upon rationalist principles produces worthwhile urban landscapes.<sup>12</sup> One might think, for example, that separating residential, commercial, and industrial (or perhaps financial?) zones would bring about the most rational order of cities. And, at least according to Jacobs, one couldn't be more wrong. The mixed use of zones and city spaces is necessary for safety, diversity, and well-being of residents and cities. But here is a more specific example from her book relating to the topic of motivations. Jacobs argues that short city blocks are far preferable to long city blocks.<sup>13</sup> One reason is that long city blocks unduly promote crime because, without constant eyes on the streets, either from denizens or workers of a block or strangers passing through, those streets become less safe. Another is that long city blocks do not encourage small shops, especially on corners, to take root, leaving long main streets as the corridors of large commercial chains. Alternatively, short city blocks encourage people to take different routes toward the same destinations and improve the conditions of urban life constituting those blocks. She writes,

Long blocks, in their nature, thwart the potential advantages that cities offer to incubation, experimentation, and many small or special enterprises, insofar as these depend upon drawing their customers or clients from among much larger cross-sections of passing public. Long blocks also thwart the principle that if city mixtures of use are to be more than a fiction on maps, they must result in different people, bent on different purposes, appearing at different times, but using the *same* streets.<sup>14</sup>

She further advocates for short blocks:

Like mixtures of primary use, frequent streets are effective in helping generate diversity *only because of the way they perform*. The means by which they work (attracting mixtures of users along them) and the results

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<sup>12</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, chapter 9, "The need for small blocks."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 183.

they can help accomplish (the growth of diversity) are inextricably related. The relationship is reciprocal.<sup>15</sup>

What is important for my purposes is that this kind of finding is based within an analogue of phenomenological thinking. As opposed to a rationalist order demanding that an urban landscape *should* look a certain way, Jacobs investigates urban street life to see what it is like before asking how it should be. True, she is not after the structures of consciousness – she is after the structures and principles of urban well-being. And here, with the example of short city blocks, I take it that the length of each block is an “unconscious” motivator regulating people’s behavior. It is non-focal in the sense that, as I walk through the city toward a destination, assuming I know my way well enough, I weave through city streets without consciously becoming aware that short city blocks are regulating my movements. A non-focal object – short blocks – motivates me toward a course of action – to turn left or right down side streets – as I head toward my destination. Nothing here seems to count as a *reason* except when, perhaps, an urban planner like Jacobs brings it to the foreground. And it would be difficult to understand some *causal* chain of events about why short blocks *sufficiently* move me to make the turns I do.

In this brief example, it might be objected that I have misidentified the motivation. The motivating object, X, is whatever is drawing me toward the course of action, Y, of walking to my destination. It is really the *destination* that is the motivating object, not short blocks. The weaving through the city streets is just one *particular* act within the course of action, Y. So I’ve misidentified the motivation.

But this, I have to admit, is why I think it is hopeless – and phenomenologically inaccurate – to suggest that we can ever really discuss only one motivation at a time.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 186.

Suppose that my destination is a toy store, and I'm heading there to pick up a small gift for my friend's child's birthday and the party starts in an hour. Should I say there is only one motivation here? And with greater levels of description about the friend, the child, the toy, or my relations to any of these, will there still only be one motivation, especially if we include O'Conaill's worthwhile addendum that affective elements lie within the anticipatory horizons of the intentional object? I worry that the very *thought* of singling out one motivation for the sake of analytic clarity only serves to obscure the way motivations actually structure our lives. My claim is that it is never the case that P has only one motivation, not existentially. We are always in the realm of more than one motivation at a time. As such, I think it is possible to understand how the length of city blocks can motivate the way one proceeds through a course of action, unconsciously as it were, and thereby motivate other effects (like safety and foot traffic for small shops) beyond just "my" motivation of finding the toy store.

While discussing the nature of the person or a part of a person existing through a lived body, I argued that the existence or non-existence of a body part is insufficient to determine whether it belongs to the lived body and, thereby, whether it can motivate. These are the cases of paralyzed legs and the phantom limb, respectively. However, Merleau-Ponty provides a wealth of examples in *Phenomenology of Perception* for why the existence or non-existence of certain regularities of behavior causes problems for both rationalist and empiricist views of consciousness. There is another problem with Schneider I would like to illuminate regarding his linguistic and rational capacities. Merleau-Ponty writes,

We shall have the opportunity of seeing this power, essential to speech, in cases in which neither thought nor ‘motility’ is noticeably affected, and yet in which the ‘life’ of language is impaired. It does happen that vocabulary, syntax, and the body of language appear intact, the only peculiarity being that main clauses predominate. But the patient [Schneider] does not make the same use as the normal subject of these materials. He speaks practically only when he is questioned, or, if he himself takes the initiative in asking a question, it is never other than of a stereotyped kind, such as he asks daily of his children when they come home from school. He never uses language to convey a merely possible situation, and false statements (e.g. the sky is black) are meaningless to him. He can speak only if he has prepared his sentences. It cannot be held that language in his case has become automatic; there is no sign of a decline of general intelligence, and it is still the case that words are organized through their meaning. But the meaning is, as it were, ossified.<sup>16</sup>

In these examples Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that Schneider lacks a capacity enjoyed by normal subjects. (This is analogous to the case of DF in chapter 2 regarding her operational motor intentional capacities but lack of perceptual and reporting capacities.) He is no longer motivated by language in the way normal subjects are. He is weighed down by that which is “real” – he never conveys “a merely possible situation.” It seems as though language no longer holds out other meanings. Or consider one more kind of example:

What impairs thought in Schneider’s case is not that he is incapable of perceiving concrete data as specimens of a unique *eidos*, or of subsuming them under some category, but on the contrary, that he can relate them only by a quite explicit subsumption. It is noticeable, for example, that the patient does not understand even such simple analogies as: ‘fur is to cat as plumage is to bird’, or ‘light is to lamp as heat is to stove’, or ‘eye is to light and colour as ear is to sounds’. In the same way he cannot understand, in their metaphorical sense, such common expressions as ‘the chair leg’ or ‘the head of a nail’, although he knows what part of the object is indicated by these words. It may happen that normal subjects of equal educational standard are no more able to *explain* the analogy, but this is for diametrically opposed reasons. It is easier for the normal subject to understand the analogy than to analyse it, whereas the patient manages to

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<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 228.

understand only when he has made it explicit by recourse to conceptual analysis. ‘He looks for ... a common material characteristic from which he can infer, as from a middle term, the identity of the two relationships’.<sup>17</sup>

And finally, Merleau-Ponty explicitly states my concern with the inversion of understanding Schneider, and related cases, as if they were part of the normal experience of persons: “If we described analogy as the apperception of two given terms under a coordinating concept, we should be giving as normal a procedure which is exclusively pathological, and which represents the roundabout way in which the patient makes good the normal understanding of analogy.”<sup>18</sup>

These longer passages further describing Schneider’s condition are absolutely critical for the point now at stake. My claim is that concepts – as intentional objects – can also serve as motivating objects. In the views of motivation presented by Dreyfus and Kelly, this thought is unthinkable because thinking and language are necessarily tied up with conceptual matters whereas motor intentionality and affordances are nonconceptual matters. However, on the view I am proposing, there are no lines between cognitive and motor intentionality. Motivations can stem from mental objects, including concepts, as much as they can stem from perceptual objects. My reading of Merleau-Ponty’s gloss on Schneider’s condition is that he *lacks* motivational capacities with respect to some linguistic and rational abilities.

I would like to discuss a few of these considerations in more detail. Schneider seems to lack the ability to understand analogies without an intervening middle term or claim. It is as if he is searching for an enthymeme. And this brings us to the critical phenomenological idea that it is part of our mental lives – as normal subjects – that we do

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 148.

not usually think via patterns only identifiable as inferential. If it is true that we do not, as a matter of our mental lives, always consider the middle term, or the minor of a syllogism, or the missing enthymeme, then the *thought* that we do is, itself, unnecessary and inaccurate. It is within this thought that proper reasoning conforms to an intellectualist requirement of deductive inferences; or that we form practical syllogisms composed of belief and desire components in all cases of practical action; or that enthymemes are being computed sub-personally. The thought is mistaken. Merleau-Ponty's suggestion is that such modes of reasoning, at least in some cases, serve as phenomenological evidence that P's capacities are *limited*, not normal or perhaps optimal. Paying more attention to phenomenology of thought reveals that we do not think or reason in these pathological ways. Sometimes, a thought comes when it wants to.

As such, the evidence for impaired motivational capacities cuts in two directions. In this instance, Schneider's deficiency is in actively searching for a coordinating concept in order to make an inference, whereas normal subjects do not perform the search. Rather, normal subjects understand the motivational move from 'light is to lamp as heat is to stove.' Recalling DF's visual agnosia problem from chapter 2, her deficiency is in lacking the anticipatory grip when pantomiming grasping motions for absent objects. Conversely, normal subjects understand the motivational move from the directive to grasp an absent object ten centimeters in front of them to the gestural motion forming the grasp. Hence, in the latter the motive (the absent object) is cut off from DF's motivational repertoire, and the evidence is a *lack* of the gestural motion. In the former the motive (the analogy) is cut off from Schneider's motivational repertoire, and the

evidence is in the *positive search* for the inferential connection. In the analogy case, the fact that it is not understood implicitly – that to be understood it has to be made explicit – is the evidence showing that normal subjects understand conceptual matters without always inferring them. For normal subjects, the inference in the analogy is not performed. It is understood because it is motivated. In the pantomiming case, for normal subjects anticipatory grips form for non-existent objects. Non-existent objects motivate anticipatory grips (though, as the research showed, inaccurate anticipatory grips). But for DF, non-existent objects do not motivate her movement at all. Her movement was blind. Therefore, whether X (the motive) is present or absent is irrelevant to determining whether P is so motivated. Likewise, whether X (the motive) is a motor intentional object or a cognitive intentional object is irrelevant to determining whether P is so motivated. What matters is the manner of engagement with X to Y by P depending on the kind of item X happens to be.

The objection may arise that the case of the analogy is still inferential, even for normal subjects, but that they just exhibit different behavior than Schneider when processing the inference. One way this objection could be strengthened is within the Sellarsian pragmatist approach to material inferences, and in particular, Robert Brandom's explication of the proprieties and explanatory priority of material inferences. Brandom writes,

As examples, consider the inference from "Pittsburgh is to the West of Philadelphia" to "Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburgh," the inference from "Today is Wednesday" to "Tomorrow will be Thursday," and that from "Lightning is seen now" to "Thunder will be heard soon." It is the contents of the concepts *West* and *East* that make the first a good inference, the contents of the concepts *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *today*, and *tomorrow* that make the second inference correct, and the contents of the

concepts *lightning* and *thunder*, as well as the temporal concepts, that underwrite the third. Endorsing these inferences is part of grasping or mastering those concepts, quite apart from any specifically logical competence. [...] Since neither the premises nor the conclusions of such inferences employ logical concepts, it seems appropriate to distinguish them from inferences whose correctness depends only on logical form.<sup>19</sup>

Part of the purpose for introducing material inferences is to distinguish kinds of inferential claims outside strictly logical claims within a formalist sense, i.e. the sense in which it is stated that either such inferences are processed with the implicit employment of enthymemes in the form of missing conditionals, or that the goodness (i.e. truth-preserving character) of such inferences requires such conditionals. Brandom denies both. The goodness in the truth-preserving sense is carried through by the contents of the concepts involved, and these contents are fulfilled not in virtue of the formal features of logical vocabulary, but rather in the know-how of interlocutors participating in practices susceptible to reason-giving and reason-defending. Thus, it would seem that material inferences would fit the kind of immediate cognitive movements normal subjects enjoy but that Schneider lacks, as in the case of the analogy.

But this is not convincing. Consider one more telling example from Schneider's behavior: "When he is given  $5 + 4 - 4$  to work out, he does the sum in two stages without 'noticing anything in particular'. He merely agrees, if it is pointed out to him, that the number 5 'remains'."<sup>20</sup> There is a gap in Schneider's behavior that lends itself neither toward the conclusion that he completely lacks rational capacities nor that he performs operations in the manner of normal subjects. On the one hand, he has the intelligence and the capacity to add and subtract. On the other hand, he does so in two stages, not one. It

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<sup>19</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 97-98.

<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 154.

is *like* he is going through the formalist strategy Brandom denies is necessary instead of answering straightaway. Or to put it differently: if we were only keeping score on Schneider's outputs (or language-exit moves in other behaviors), then he would be indistinguishable from other subjects capable of these cognitive functions. However, if we pay attention to the manner in which Schneider completes the problem, despite coming up with the correct answer, or despite exhibiting intelligence and rationality, it is not the same kind of *conceptual mastery* as that of other subjects. In the first two examples of material inferences above, it would be as if Schneider had to look at a map of Pennsylvania or refer to a calendar to confirm the goodness of the inferences.

The problem is the following. The category of material inferences not only depends upon the kind of know-how of concept-mongering creatures participating in a shared practice, but upon the manner or style in which those creatures participate in the shared practice. One can say that participants engage in moves of justification and defense partially in virtue of making that which is implicit explicit. But *having to make it explicit* in the form of additional inferences, though logically permissible, becomes evidence that the subject is no longer reasoning, but merely "going through the motions" or simply following a rule without understanding the task to the degree of other subjects. Or to put this point one more way: in the formalist tradition of logical inferences Brandom undercuts, enthymemes in the form of missing conditionals are logically *required*; in the pragmatist tradition of material inferences Brandom endorses, implicit conditionals are not required but are *permissible*; but in the recognition of the understanding of a person as rationally motivated by the intentional object, making

implicit conditionals explicit is *impermissible* without raising a red flag.<sup>21</sup> It shows that the person has one thought too many. In this mathematical example, Merleau-Ponty writes,

The true act of counting requires of the subject that his operations as they develop and cease to occupy the centre of his consciousness, shall not cease to be there for him and shall constitute, for subsequent operations, a *ground* on which they may be established. Consciousness holds in reserve, behind itself, completed syntheses[.]<sup>22</sup>

What I want to call *rational motivations* can have an inferentially homologous structure to that of material inferences, in virtue of their having become implicit. They form the sediments of consciousness such that the person no longer has the first-person phenomenological experience of *having the thought* of the inference. As such, the truth-preserving character of material “inferences” drops out, not because the truth-preserving character between “Pittsburgh is to the West of Philadelphia” to “Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburgh” becomes suspect, but because the goodness of that move is implicitly taken for granted. Completed syntheses form the ground that goes unquestioned.

Does this require that *all* rational motivations once had to have been explicit before becoming implicit? I think the answer here is no, and this answer connects to what was said above regarding unconscious – or in my vocabulary, non-focal or focalizable – motivations. It is sometimes said that there are all kinds of inferences one would make, but regarding claims one has never entertained, and that this shows these thoughts are therefore possessed by the subject but, having never been entertained,

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<sup>21</sup> These ideas involving permissibility and requirement partially stem from Edith Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, ed. Marianne Sawicki, trans. Mary Catharine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki (Washington: ICS Publications, 2000), especially 39-60. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty occasionally cites Stein (such as on 36 and 383) when developing the initial notion of motivation.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 154-155.

thereby must be unconscious thoughts. For example, perhaps one has never entertained the inference from “It is currently noon on a Tuesday” to “The President is currently wearing socks.”<sup>23</sup> But one would likely agree to the strength of the inference and the veracity of the conclusion, and on this line of thinking, it is said that the conclusion must have been an unconscious thought possessed by the subject. Indeed, given the plethora of claims we would be willing to believe, many or perhaps most of our thoughts – and their associated concepts – must be unconscious.

I think this inference to the possession of unconscious thoughts – indeed, the very category of unconscious thoughts – is ill-fated. One can agree that such inferences to heretofore unentertained thoughts are strong without thinking that subjects possess, internally as it were, unconscious thoughts. Rather, statements like “The President is currently wearing socks” – heretofore non-focal, heretofore focalizable – are surely focalizable and can be motivated (brought to conscious entertainment) insofar as we live within the same world. In other words, the conclusion *can be understood* without having been inferred, without having much of an inferential structure (many enthymemes are missing, we might say), and without believing the thought was unconsciously possessed.

The objection that the analogy is still inferential, and not a rational motivation in the sense I’ve just offered, can be taken in another direction. The objection is that Schneider exhibits child-like behavior due to his impairment, and thereby that he is unsuitable to be marked as inhabiting the space of reasons, even if he can follow prescribed rules. However, this suggestion gives too little credit to Schneider *and*

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<sup>23</sup> I have taken this example and consideration from Tim Crane, *The Mechanical Mind: A Philosophical Introduction to Minds, Machines, and Mental Representations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-30.

children in their non-inferential capacities. Consider the elasticity of our understanding when dealing with children. When the child is still a novice in the mother tongue, he may say something like, “John goed to the store to pick up milk.” We will understand the child perfectly well without inferring that “goed” means “went.” We won’t think to ourselves that the child *meant* “went” – which would be saying too much – although we may correct the child, indeed, ask or require the child to make an inference by rephrasing from “goed” to “went.” But it cannot be said that the child unconsciously possessed the concept “went,” nor that we unconsciously possessed the concept “goed,” nor that we have ever explicitly laid out the inference from “goed” to “went” (though some of us may have), but rather that language in a context motivates other language in a context.

Or to put the idea differently, one can consider the following dilemma. If ungrammatical linguistic items like “goed” in the child’s sentence cannot be concepts because they are ungrammatical, then one has to explain how nonconceptual items like “goed” can lead inferentially to conceptual items like “went,” either on the part of the adult or the child in his training. In other words, one has to explain the transition from the nonconceptual to the conceptual. (This is a mistaken path.)

Conversely, if ungrammatical linguistic items like “goed” can be concepts, then one has to explain how such concepts can be mastered and deployed appropriately within the space of reasons such that one would be willing to justify and defend the use of such concepts in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

It must be stressed here that, yes, the child’s mistake can be explained. But it can all too easily be explained *away*, thereby missing the point now at stake, namely that explaining away the child’s mistake as a child’s mistake too quickly produces the

*explanans* without acknowledging that the adult first *understands* the *explanandum*.

What I am after is this: how does the adult understand “goed” before correcting the child?

There is no appropriate use of the word “goed,” meaning no inferences can obtain from its deployment, thereby negating that it is a concept after all. The only “inference” available is *not to use it*. The reason not to use the word “goed” is because it is a mistake. But the mistake goes unexplained *unless* one first understands “goed” not meant as “went,” *but as goed*. Hence, the understanding of “goed” as goed motivates the concept “went” but does not lead to the inference from “goed” to “went” because “goed” is not a concept. This is why, as is often the case with children learning language, their mistakes are first encountered by adults not simply as mistakes, but as understandable mistakes: understandable both in the sense that it can be understood by the adult and in the sense that the child would commit it. The child takes it as permissible (and perhaps as required) to utter “goed” in the context, but the adult, in correcting the child, would demand that “goed” is impermissible and that “went” is required in this instance. The mistake here is one in terms of norms – i.e. the norms of grammar – but not a mistake of understanding. For the child understands perfectly well where John is, what he is doing, and where he goed. But when the word “went” comes to sediment in the child’s consciousness, it will form part of the ground for all kinds of other rational motivations.

I have been arguing that material inferences, though more liberal in their structure than formalistic logical inferences, do not always capture the moves from one claim to another, as in the analogy Schneider struggles with above. In tracing the so-called conceptual content within material inferences to the know-how of participants within practices comprising the space of reasons, I have suggested that such know-how cannot

reduce to merely conceptual engagements to inform that content but must resort to motives constituting that content. I would like to clarify this in one more way. I have not endorsed the claim that such content as figures in motivations, or rational motivations, is sense content and, thus, nonconceptual. From Brandom's corner, reintroducing so-called nonconceptual content would commit the view to a retrograde conception of the conceptual, missing the social engine that is the norm-instituting character of conceptual creatures. From McDowell's corner, reintroducing so-called nonconceptual content would commit the view to a distance between intuitions and concepts, thereby falling back into the Myth of the Given. But I have suggested no such thing. Rather, I have been arguing that X, the intentional object or the motive of motivations for P toward Y, can be a concept just as much as a perceptual object (like short city blocks) or a motor intentional object (like O'Conaill's example of a slice of cake). The phenomenologist Edith Stein accounts for a motive this way:

Considered from this side, what appears as the motivator proper within a process of motivation is not the execution of the initial act, but rather the sense content of that act. We want to reserve the designation "motive" for it, as is customary. *Lightning* turns into my motive for the expectation of thunder, not the *perception* of lightning. The motive of my joy is the arrival of the desired letter, not taking cognizance of the arrival.<sup>24</sup>

Stein denies that the perception of X or the cognizance of X is the motive for expectation or joy. Rather, now recast in my formulation of a motivation, P undergoes X and thereby is moved toward Y, not because P actively perceives or cognizes X, but because P encounters X. And now, returning to a way Merleau-Ponty might phrase the thought, one does not encounter the sense content of X because "sense content" is already a

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<sup>24</sup> Stein, 43.

philosopher's abstraction from the intentional object as encountered itself. Finally, using this lightning and thunder example from both Brandom and Stein, we can bring back O'Conaill's initial notion of Y to complete the formulation of a motivation.

On O'Conaill's account, Y is a course of action because no particular action is required, though a range of actions suitable to being motivated by X may be permitted, including refraining from the affective pull of X. However, if we open up motivations in the way I have been arguing, namely to include conscious and unconscious motives, as well as perceptual or conceptual motives, then I believe Y need not be restricted to courses of *action*. Rather, Y may be one of three things: a perceptual expectation involving passive synthesis (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the immediate perceptual expectation of thunder); a concept (e.g. from the sight of lightning to the thought that thunder will be heard soon); or a course of action (e.g. from the sight of lightning to being drawn to shelter). In this way no particular movement from X to Y is required, as both O'Conaill and Stein suggest; but moreover, I am suggesting, permissible courses of movement from X to Y can be isomorphic between intentional objects and percepts, concepts, and actions. In this sense the same intentional objects can motivate P differently but within a range of pre-delineated behavior.

Near the beginning of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty reflects on the phenomenological reduction, providing the famous line: "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction."<sup>25</sup> But before coming to this conclusion, he writes,

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<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xv.

The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world. Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical.

If this wonder in the face of the world slackens our intentional threads, redirects our attention, and beckons us to take notice of the world, then it must equally be possible to strengthen these intentional threads, these motivations, inexorably tying us to the world.

## CONCLUSION

This work has attempted to open a path toward thinking about the mind, consciousness, percepts, concepts, and their relations to the world differently. I have taken up key movements in the Sellarsian tradition, especially the thoughts of John McDowell and Robert Brandom, and attempted to apply pressure to these rationalistic theories from a very different quarter in the continental tradition, namely existential phenomenology. In doing so I have asked the reader to consider the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in a new light. The major claim of Merleau-Ponty's corpus, I have claimed, is that we are specifically *attentional* embodied beings, and not just embodied beings. This forced reinterpretations of his work away from recent American interpretations, the most prominent of which are beholden to Hubert Dreyfus, Sean Kelly, and Alva Noë. My thoughts on the attentionality thesis as structuring consciousness to bring out a characteristically focal intentionality provides a positive theory counteracting one of Merleau-Ponty's repeated targets, i.e. mind-body dualisms. I argued such a dualism resurfaces in the work of Dreyfus and Kelly in their support for cognitive intentionality and motor intentionality. Another theme of this reinterpretation was upholding Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of intellectualism and empiricism as being unable to account for phenomenological moments of consciousness directed toward the world or one's own body. Likewise, I have attempted to contribute to the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's work as emphasizing a role for the passivity of perception, *pace* Noë's enactivist theory of the mind and his actual/virtual distinction.

One particular dialectic in the work investigated whether perception is conceptual, with McDowell's corpus taking the lead, whether perception is nonconceptual, either via

Gareth Evans' empiricist leanings or Dreyfus's and Kelly's phenomenological approach, or whether the issue is, perhaps, ill-formed. I have attempted to suggest that arguments for or against the conceptuality or nonconceptuality of perception fall asunder, and in particular with the competing emphases on motor intentional components and fineness of grain considerations. We have reasons to believe, I suggested, that motor intentionality is at least partially conceptual in nature, while arguments from the fineness of grain of the world support that perception is at least partially nonconceptual in nature. While no impasse has been established, the dialectic itself, stemming from Merleau-Pontian considerations, suggests something of a tense existential standstill. This tension at the heart of percepts and concepts can be alleviated by redirecting ourselves toward the underdeveloped Merleau-Pontian notion of motivations.

Motivations, then, are the third way to understand our being in the world. By providing an initial formulaic sketch of the terrain of motivations, I hope to have shown they offer a promising beginning for phenomenologically investigating the ways we are moved by intentional objects in the world, whether those movements involve passive perceptual synthesis, rational motivations, or courses of action. The ways we are motivated and the ways we are not provide fertile ground for understanding not only our connections to intentional objects in the world, but the strength or weakness of those threads moving forward.

In the end, my attempt has been to reorient our view of the mind and consciousness, of the space of reasons and the realm of law, and of the importance of existential phenomenology for clarifying, but also unsettling, issues in perception, conception, and action.

Nevertheless, these efforts have only been a few steps in that reorientation. Numerous issues have been left unaddressed, and those that have can be bolstered. I would like to mention a handful of areas left open for future work based on what has been accomplished thus far.

A number of questions and claims arose in the course of these five chapters that deserved more attention than they received. For example, in chapter 4 the fineness of grain argument could be strengthened in at least two ways. The first would involve a deeper investigation into the role of demonstratives with respect to intersensory descriptions and reference in particular. Since my argument relied upon the importance of intersensory descriptions of intentional objects, there is room to develop a theory on the fineness of grain of object's properties as dependent on those objects, as well as investigations into particular cases of descriptions based in intersensory modalities resisting conceptual annexation. Second, the fineness of grain argument can be strengthened by delving into arguments regarding how illumination conditions affect either *noeses* or *noemata* in a phenomenological encounter. This also provides further avenues for determining the relevance of empirical psychology experiments whereby first-person descriptions can be garnered in various illuminating conditions with respect to different objects.

In chapter 5, two questions immediately suggest themselves. First, in discussing motivations for (stipulatively) persons or parts of persons existing through a lived body, how are motivations structured *for* persons? Or put differently, given the claim that every person finds herself with multiple motivations, how are motivations ordered or how do they relate to one another? Likewise, can taking a particular object as a motive

change the character of that motivation, and in what sense? Second, how else can one distinguish non-rational motivations from rational motivations, and to what degrees are implicit or explicit behavior necessary for understanding rational and non-rational motivations?

There are also, however, considerations outside of any broached in this work. One major consideration completely unaddressed is the question of how motivations can be intersubjectively constituted and how such intersubjectivity can contribute to the identity of the persons involved. These issues in particular may involve both phenomenological and extra-phenomenological approaches, the latter particularly with respect to the historical constitutions of motivations, aesthetic constitutions of motivations, and the ontological status of motivations. These represent limits not only of the current work, but perhaps of the phenomenological method for fully investigating them.

Finally, there is one overarching question that remains. Given that motivations present a third intelligibility for understanding human perception, thought, and action, what in particular constitutes the *space of motivations* as distinguished from the space of reasons and the realm of law? When and how do explanations by reasons and explanations by causes take precedence? And what are the limits, if any, of the space of motivations?

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