Jethro Masís

The Dreyfus-Searle Debate: Background Practices and the Logical Structure of Intentional Phenomena

Resumen: *Este artículo interviene en el debate entre Dreyfus y Searle acerca de la dialéctica entre el conocimiento implícito y explícito. Lo que está en juego acá es la interacción entre el conocimiento práctico (knowing-how) y el proposicional (knowing-that), dos formas de Welterkennen cuya diferenciación plantea la pregunta acerca de si lo que sabemos en nuestro afrontamiento práctico es proposicional o si, al contrario, el conocimiento intuitivo más bien se obtiene de forma no proposicional. En el caso presente hay todavía un problema más profundo que requiere una solución: a saber, determinar si la fenomenología precede (o no) al análisis lógico en la investigación acerca de nuestra toma de posición con sentido del mundo. Si bien defenderé una posición prima facie más cercana a la de Dreyfus que otorga primacía a la fenomenología frente al análisis lógico, daré razones para cuestionar las credenciales fenomenológicas de la explicación dreyfusiana del 'background' fundante del 'foreground'.*

Palabras clave: *Fenomenología. Afrontamiento situado. Análisis lógico. Conocimiento proposicional vs no proposicional.*

Abstract: *This paper takes stock of the Dreyfus-Searle debate concerning the dialectics between implicit and explicit knowledge. At stake is the interaction between 'knowing-how' and 'knowing-that', two types of Welterkennen whose differentiation raises the fundamental question as to whether what we know in practical coping is actually amenable to propositional verbalization or conversely whether intuitive knowing-how is rather gained nonpropositionally. In the case in point there is an even deeper problem needing resolution: namely that of determining whether phenomenology precedes (or not) logical analysis in the investigation of our meaningful rendering of the world. While I shall present a case that remains prima facie in the vicinity of Dreyfus's own defense of the primacy of phenomenology over logical analysis, I will also offer reasons casting doubt on Dreyfus's phenomenological credentials with regard to his explanation of the 'background' of the 'foreground'.*

Keywords: *Phenomenology. Absorbed coping. Logical analysis. Propositional vs nonpropositional knowledge.*

> *"Mystical explanations are considered deep; the truth is, they are not even shallow".*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* § 126.

1. Introduction: Phenomenology and Analysis Meet Halfway

The question whether our knowledge of the world (*Welterkennen* in Heideggerian sense, SZ, § 13) is evidentially justified needs to be stood on its head if we are to unequivocally ascertain that

our beliefs meet a standard that renders them fitting, reasonable, and epistemically correct. How are we to determine whether our beliefs are not just haphazard musings with no real epistemic bearing? Are our beliefs truly anchored in reality? How is objective knowledge at all possible?

The Dreyfus-Searle debate on *Welterkennen* is perforce premised on the aforementioned questions. For much the same reason the debate addresses the concerns motivating every contemporary theory of knowledge justification. The current situation, however, has crucially transformed the assumptions underlying the debate, because today's perhaps most promising venture—cognitive science—attempts precisely to achieve the articulation of empirically plausible answers concerning the place of mind and consciousness in the general scheme of things. The cognitive agenda itself can be said to be as such bequeathed by the two and a half millennia-old tradition of Western philosophy (Gardner, 1985), but the budding new science promises to revitalize old questions, pose new problems, and make an indelible contribution to reconceptualize our very worldview (Floridi, 2002, 117).

It is widely known, however, that Dreyfus and Searle are both venomous critics of the core project gravitating around cognitive science: the possibility of machines matching human intelligence. This partial agreement explains why for some time a fruitful exchange between the two philosophers was possible, especially due to Searle's insistence that "intentionality, in general, and meaning, in particular, both depend on a set of capacities that are not part of meaning or intentional content" (2001a, 176); a phenomenon that Searle christened the 'background' and that immediately got Dreyfus's attention for its phenomenological overtones. According to Searle, the background of everyday practice and meaningful dealings with the world is "a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enables all representing to take place" (2008a, 143). This striking similarity with Dreyfus's own concept of 'absorbed coping' explains the ecumenical spirit that made possible the organization of joint seminars on the intentionality of background practices, where a continental and an analytic philosopher teamed up and read each

other's papers—which is somewhat of a rare cosmic event given the extended *dialogue-de-sourds* attitude that has dominated the so-called continental/analytic divide in twentieth century philosophy.[1]

Nonetheless, the once idyllic philosophical commonality was destined to be short-lived and profound differences began to surface when Dreyfus commenced to establish a link between Searlean philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology—which understandably enough was not of Searle's liking. Searle's use of the term 'intentionality' along with his emphasis on the nonrepresentational character of the background gave the impression that he had somewhat taken up phenomenological (Husserlian) insights, even if he was not aware of doing so. On Dreyfus's account, Searle was indeed—albeit unbeknownst to him—a philosopher of Husserlian leanings. Searle's critique of computational explanations of the mind (Searle, 1980) according to which "computation is not *discovered* in nature but is *assigned*" (2001a, 178) is also shared by Dreyfus. In addition, Husserl would no doubt reject the computer metaphor of mind outright as a clumsy and untenable theory. Given that both Dreyfus and Searle share a common distrust in the very core assumption of cognitivism, a common ground for the shared distrust might lie perhaps in the adoption of phenomenological insights. But the peaceful coexistence of phenomenology and logical analysis rather morphed into a scathing debate, with Sean Kelly (now a Harvard philosopher who back in the day was student of both philosophers at Berkeley) mediating between them to tone down the more and more acrimonious exchange (Kelly, 2005).

It is my opinion that, in spite of its complicated twists and turns, the Dreyfus-Searle debate turns out to be very instructive with regard to the fundamental theme at issue: the background of the foreground. In what follows, I take stock of the debate in order to show that the differences concerning the proper characterization of the 'background' are not only profound but also exemplary of the so-called continental/analytic divide in philosophy. Nonetheless, the latter divide is not the central plank of this paper but the very determination of how *Welterkennen*

comes about and the explanation of the transition—or lack thereof—between nonpropositional and propositional knowledge. Finally, I offer reasons against the 'constructive point of view' according to which making something determinate by means of an array of logical propositions must be understood as derivative with regard to the worldly sphere that is previously grasped, for not all hermeneutic grasping is in itself propositional. I shall ultimately concur with Dreyfus that phenomenology takes precedence over logical analysis but I will also make clear that Dreyfus's phenomenological credentials remain somewhat blurry when it comes to his very interpretation of the background as explained at the behest of the concept of absorbed coping.

2. The Reasons of the Heart

In the 1980s the Dreyfus brothers—Hubert, the philosopher, and Stuart, the engineer—teamed up and jointly authored a book vindicating human intuition and expertise in the era of the computer (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). They concluded that one of the aspects that had stymied progress in machine intelligence was an unchallenged philosophical assumption: that which grants primacy to 'knowing-that' over 'knowing-how'. On Dreyfus's view,[2] this overall conception was pervasive in artificial intelligence (AI henceforth) and demanded correction precisely in the heyday of expert systems, which at that time were part of a knowledge engineering enterprise aiming at building knowledge-based systems and programs (Feigenbaum, 1977). Accordingly, there was a philosophical premise undergirding knowledge engineering, because "the key idea of expert systems is that of making the knowledge that underlies expertise *explicit*" (Fox, 1996, 80).

During this time expectations were at their highest level as computational programs were developed with the purpose of simulating human expert knowledge, of which DENTRAL (an expert system for determining complex organic molecules) and MYCIN (an expert system for the diagnosis of infectious blood diseases) were

pioneering examples.[3] The foray of AI practitioners into knowledge engineering was supposed to assist the project of gradually getting rid of the always onerous services of real, flesh and blood, experts, whose knowledge, if successfully implemented in computer programs, would foster the prospects for computer-aided decisions based on an enormous knowledge database. As Herbert Simon admitted when reflecting on the reasons for the belated development of knowledge engineering, in the first decades of AI researchers "did steer away from problems where knowledge was the essential issue" (as cited in Crevier, 1993, 147). Simply put, no large database could be built with the computers which were then available. Thus, on Simon's view, AI research mistakenly focused on mere toy tasks: "Quite deliberately we did a lot of our work in the early days... on toy tasks" (as cited in Crevier, 1993, 146). A new, more ambitious, project was then proposed: "You people are working on toy problems. Chess and logic are toy problems. If you solve them, you'll have solved toy problems. And that's all you'll have done. Get out into the real world and solve real-world problems" (Feigenbaum & McCorduck, 1983, 62). 'Getting real' in this sense amounts to designing intelligent systems for practical purposes in the real world. It is no wonder that both the military and the industrial complexes showed decisive interest in the prospects of these new knowledge-based systems. For AI researchers working on expert systems it was all about searching for ways to make knowledge available to computers in larger and larger amounts. One should consider for a second the prospects of knowledge engineering. If knowledge could be computationally managed in such a way, even social systems could be assessed with more and more precision and at larger scales. This could even lead to better and more effective legislation, for social knowledge and human behavior could be computationally dominated and measured. Back in the day, Simon and Newell regretted that the dimension of human judgement and intuition were merely conceived of as "a matter of hunch than of calculation", that is, as "vague and nonquantitative" (1958, 5). But what was instead needed was a sort of "judgement mechanics to match quantum

mechanics" (1958, 6). With the promising rise of expert systems and knowledge engineering a whole new world of possibilities was in the offing. The computer revolution in philosophy had finally arrived. On Sloman's terms, "within a few years, if there remain any philosophers who are not familiar with some of the main developments in artificial intelligence, it will be fair to accuse them of professional incompetence" (1978, 5). It was only natural that philosophers gone knowledge engineers was the new hype.

However, things proved to be more difficult than expected. If expert systems were to prove germane, human expertise should little by little become more or less dispensable. But the resounding fact that we have nowadays not definitely gotten rid of the dexterity provided by physicians, nurses, and military commanders, highlights the rather resilient character of human expertise. In fact, the definitive replaceability of human expertise remains largely resistant to computational programming. Margaret Boden has provided an example of why trusting computer programs instead of real people could have gone terribly wrong. When a nuclear red alert was issued during the Cold War announcing a menacing object on the horizon, the sole intervention of computer programs could have led to nuclear warfare. However,

> the reason why this frightening episode didn't escalate was that someone ruminated that the Soviets hadn't been making especially threatening remarks recently. The norms of political behaviour even during the Cold War, therefore made it highly unlikely that this mysterious object was a Soviet attack. And the same rules deemed it inadmissible to launch defensive nuclear weapons on the basis of such weak— i.e., *politically* implausible—evidence. Accordingly, the computer was overridden. (The unknown object eventually turned out to be the rising moon). (2006, 1019)

The incident makes clear how a shred of common sense, which expert systems overtly lack, is fundamental in critical situations. But the philosophical problem at stake is "whether professional expertise is describable, even in

words, in its entirety" (Boden, 2006, 1016). In fact, do we know everything we think we know? Or, rather, is everything we know propositionally ingrained? The large and even impressive range of explicit knowledge with which a knowledge-based program is to be provided (with all its heuristic, problem-solving, rules of thumb) might come short when the slightest sense of being in a situation is lacking. Situatedness seems to require some sort of knowledge which might be previous and implicit with regard to our propositional rendering of it. Accordingly, the commonsense knowledge problem seems to be here as recalcitrant than ever, because expert knowledge does not seem to be reducible to explicit facts. Rather, much of expert knowledge might consist "in informal heuristics developed over the years, rarely verbalized, and almost never communicated" (Boden, 2006, 794). If this is the case, the verbalization problem sets unsurmountable limits to the prospects of creating expert systems. We might be programing what we think we know, while at the same time leaving aside a great deal of implicit knowledge whose very nature demands remaining in the background. For knowledge to take place, what we ignore might be as important as what we explicitly know.

On Dreyfus's view, it is all the more understandable that, as part of any scientific enterprise, wrongheaded hypotheses must be discarded and research itself should be the basis for better and more accurate assumptions. But "unfortunately, what has always distinguished AI research from a science is its failure to face up to, and learn from, its failures" (2007, 249). Moreover, many decades of AI research have "lived up to very few of its promises and failed to yield any evidence that it ever will. The time has come to ask what has gone wrong and what we can reasonably expect from computer intelligence" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). After all, the knowledge engineering research program has raised the question regarding the heuristics of performance in hypothesis formation (Feigenbaum, 1992, 7).

Knowledge engineers were accordingly entrusted with the task of providing computer programs with all the knowledge required to solve any problem a human agent would face

up on a daily basis. But how can this be carried out? Can expert knowledge be transformed into explicit data amenable to computer programming? Moreover, can knowing-how be translated into knowing-that? Can expert knowledge be made explicit by providing a computer program with an array of verbalizations about how one does it? Dreyfus is of the opinion that the formulation of every rule of performance in a given task domain would still leave out other factors undergirding practical experience. These factors would intrinsically constitute the background which is always presupposed in human skillful activities—denizens in the fringes of consciousness (Dreyfus, 1992, 103). Accordingly, Dreyfus draws from Polanyi's (1962) assumption that there is a great deal of knowledge that is not—and cannot be—made explicit. As exemplified by St. Augustine's words in his *Confessions*: "I do not know what I do not know" (Book 11, chap. 12). So, according to Polanyi's view of scientific discovery, the grounds on which science is pursued "is determined at every stage by indefinable powers of thought" (1966, 1). Therefore, "tacit knowing is the fundamental power of the mind which creates explicit knowing, lends meaning to it, and controls its uses… Any attempt to gain complete control of thought by explicit rules is self-contradictory, systematically misleading, and culturally destructive. The pursuit of formalization will find its true place in a tacit framework" (Polanyi, 1966, 18)). So the data we obtain from our objective rendering of the world might not be the whole story, for they might be sustained by a meaningful sphere that is given beforehand and that cannot be made explicit. Explicit knowledge plunges into a different source of givenness: precisely, the background of the foreground. So what is given might be more than just the positive explicitness of our knowing. The implicit sphere might thus undergo fatal deformation when the attempt is made to make it explicit. In point of fact, inconspicuousness (*Unauffälligkeit*) is a defining feature of the world, for the "referential totalities in which our circumspection 'is absorbed' cannot become a theme for that circumspection any more than they can for grasping things 'thematically' but non-circumspectively" (Heidegger, SZ, 75).

Hence the Pascalian prologue opening *Mind Over Machine* (1986): "the heart has its reasons that the reason does not know" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 1-15). The clarification of these reasons which cannot be made explicit—simply because doing so would amount to interrupting what is at stake in performance—must take into account that 'knowing-how' cannot be conflated with 'knowing-that'. In addition, one should not be utterly oblivious to the aforementioned interruption of absorbed coping, because when thematization arrives on the scene performance itself suffers an interruption from its natural flow. As a result, Dreyfus's strategy consists in analyzing knowledge acquisition. This is what he accordingly calls "our phenomenology of knowledge acquisition" (1987, 30).

3. Knowledge Acquisition

It goes without saying that every expert has begun as a clumsy novice. How is it then that one can become an expert worthy of the name? How does one transition from not knowing *anything* at all to the several stages leading to expert knowledge? The case in point must be couched as follows: not knowing anything at all is never the case in human beings, for we are—unlike computers or robots—already acquainted with the world. Should we surmise that, in spite of appearances, "the mind and brain must be reasoning—making millions of rapid and accurate inferences like a computer [?]" (Dreyfus, 1987, 30). The main assumption behind the idea of expert systems—that experts must be making inferences from stored data without genesis transitions from background to foreground—must be questioned by recognizing the role of involvement and intuition in the acquisition and practical application of skills. On Dreyfus's view, there is "no reason to cling to heuristic programs as a model of human intellectual operations" (1987, 31). Therefore, five stages of knowledge acquisition are to be considered.

Stage 1: A novice learns at first to unambiguously manipulate defined context-free elements by precise rules, a procedure that Dreyfus christens

'information processing' (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 21). There is no situational awareness at this stage and therefore such rules ignore context outright. Novices usually cling to the handbook of rules they have been given, which thwarts flexibility to dynamic changes.

Stage 2: An advanced beginner must now cope with real situations. Coping improves performance to an acceptable level, for the real stage provides the learner with practical experience which cannot be reduced to sheer rule-following and context-free facts. This is the stage in which features that at first were not explicit begin to be recognized. So rules begin to appear embedded in a situation requiring more than the sheer application of them.

Stage 3: Someone exhibiting competence is able to deal with a number of both recognizable context-free and situational elements in real world embedded circumstances (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 23). And yet, any competent performer can still regard the situation as a set of facts that can be grappled with the adoption of a hierarchical procedure of decision-making: "A competent driver, for example, is no longer merely following rules designed to enable him to operate his vehicle safely and courteously but drives with a goal in mind" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 24). Dreyfus's idea here is that proponents of problem-solving strategies (generally cognitive scientists, psychologists, and AI researchers) just characterize competence but certainly not performance, for giving an account of the elements that need to be displayed to do something efficiently must not be conflated with the very act of displaying them in practice.

Stage 4: Proficiency implies that the learner of a new skill has managed to cope with situational relevance and has consequently made conscious choices in the form of reflection upon several alternatives. The proficient coper has gained some perspective, which allows for certain features to appear as salient as a consequence of past interactions with similar situations. This involved perspective is acquired by means of coping several times with the same situation. Past interaction with a situation induces one to form for oneself an assessment of what can and cannot, and what should and should not, be carried out in certain contexts. But what needs to be done depends on the situation at hand, so flexible coping with situational complexity is here fundamental.

Stage 5: Finally, "an expert generally knows what to do based on mature and practiced understanding" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 30). Experts have at their disposal the ability to discriminate relevance and nonrelevance among a myriad of situations; a skill that incidentally resists explicit thematization. For much the same reason, "we doubtless can discriminate many... situations than we have words in our vocabularies. Consequently, such grouped situations bear no names and, in fact, seem to defy complete verbal description. With expertise comes fluid performance" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 32).[4]

Given that experts exhibit a level of skill characterized by a fluid, involved (and absorbed, nonthematic) kind of behavior, the very idea that detached, context-free, problem-solving, and information-processing strategies could somehow entirely cover meaningful, situational coping must be challenged. There is no reason to suppose that this is the correct approach for appropriately grasping skill acquisition. In fact, the recognition of the misbegotten character of this approach may well render the theoretical assumptions underlying expert systems inadequate, if not overtly false. What is more, the stages of skill acquisition also put into question the explanatory powers of representationalism: "if the skill story I just told is correct, however, the problem of association of representations of an object can be avoided. What one has learned appears in the way the world shows up; it is not represented in the mind and added on to the present experience" (Dreyfus, 2002a, 373). Drawing conclusions from Merleau-Ponty on this regard, Dreyfus insists that "what the learner acquires through experience is not *represented* in the mind at all but is *presented* to the learner as a more and more finely discriminated situation, which then solicits a more and more refined response" (Dreyfus, 2002a, 373).

Some philosophical lessons are here to be learned. At stake is how to understand those 'reasons of the heart' that propositional knowledge ignores. Dreyfus's resort to an intuitive

nonrepresentational stance may be viewed, however, as magic by computer-oriented philosophers. Isn't intuition a rather murky concept? Dreyfus claims that, on the contrary, "*intuition or know-how, as we understand it, is neither wild guessing nor supernatural inspiration, but the sort of ability we all use all the time as we go about our everyday tasks*" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 29). The lack of experience that one is to find in novice performance is due to the attempt to decompose patterns into component features. Those patterns are at first provided as analysis of the situation, not as the involvement in a situation. The converse is true of experts who have the ability of holistic discrimination and association (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 28). Therefore, holistic template matching and association based on past experience as defining characteristics of expertise cannot be derived from information processing and mere rule-following. Drawing heavily from a phenomenological tradition that privileges perception and bodily prowess over merely cognitive—namely, 'mental'—activities,[5] Dreyfus prefers skillful embodied coping over machine-intelligent, information-processing, approaches:

> A boxer seems to begin an attack, not by combining by rule various facts about his body position and that of his opponent, but when the whole visual scene in front of him and sensations within him trigger behavior which was successful in an earlier similar situation. We call the ability to intuitively respond to patterns without decomposing them into component features 'holistic discrimination and association.' (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 28)

It should now be apparent that deliberative and propositional procedures, which are largely proposed by AI researchers as fundamental for intelligent behavior, lead one to regress to novice performance or to competent performance at most, but *never*—and this is the gist of Dreyfus's argument—to expertise. In novice performance a sort of monitoring sticking to the handbook of instructions and rules is constantly present to observe which actions are in need of reinforcement or correction. This means that "a portion of

the mind is thus responsible for the fine tuning or disaggregation of discriminable classes for more effective guidance of future behavior" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 40). But even if this species of monitoring can be traced back to the learning process, the presence of it is not at all times extant, for "there are rare moments, however, when all monitoring ceases. We are referring to those brief periods of what is sometimes called 'flow,' when performance, accompanied by a feeling of euphoria, reaches its peak" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 40. Typically, this flow is to be found in the experience of human agents, for instance, in an sportsperson's sense of what needs to be done in order to accomplish a certain aim, say a footballer's attempt to score a goal. So the 'flow' is not "a sixth stage of mental activities that produce skilled behavior but rather the cessation of the monitoring activity that normally accompanies the higher levels" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 40). This means that propositional knowing-that is just *a posteriori* reflection upon knowing-how; the latter being more fundamental and basic, not conversely.

Dreyfus is indeed aware that his thrust against propositional knowledge renders his account of skillful human activity somewhat strange for the mainstream philosophical tradition. Dreyfus has it that there is a transformation of ancient *logos* into *ratio* and, consequently, into 'reckoning', which we might be tempted to deem the kernel of human rationality (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 205). Be that as it may, Dreyfus is not pleading for a sort of feeling-romanticism but just casting doubt on the reduction of human meaningful coping to explicit knowing-that. Therefore, "the question is whether we are going to accept the view of man as an information processing device or whether we are still enough in touch with our pre-Platonic essence to realize the limits of the computer metaphor" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 205). Nonetheless, deliberative rationality is not to be rejected *tout court*, because "put in its proper place rational deliberation sharpens intuition" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 205). So the study of knowledge acquisition pursued by Dreyfus reveals that the world is not a collection of objects and facts being captured in relation to a thinker. Dreyfus seems thus

to agree *verbatim* with Merleau-Ponty regarding perception:

> We cannot apply the classical distinction of form and matter to perception, nor can we conceive the perceiving subject as a consciousness which 'interprets,' 'deciphers,' or 'orders' a sensible matter whose ideal law it would possess. Matter is 'pregnant' with its form, which is to say that in the final analysis every perception takes place within a certain horizon and ultimately in the 'world,' that both are present to us practically rather than being explicitly known or posited by us... (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, 89)

What expert systems assume is precisely the converse: that the perceiving subject deciphers the objective world by means of information retrieval from stored data, the world being thus in turn nothing but a collection of objects and facts, as though it were natural to superimpose, as Merleau-Ponty would have it, "a world of ideas on the perceived world" (2007, 89). But as the analysis of skillful knowledge acquisition shows, deliberative reflection about one's own activities rather leads to degradation of performance: "here you fell victim of 'knowing that' as it interrupted and replaced your 'knowing how'" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 17).[6] Know-how consists in forgetting how one actually does it, and this is why nonthematization of the current flow of the ongoing situation is fundamental for satisfactorily coping with it, that is to say, for exhibiting the robust prowess and expertise which is wonderfully ordinary and easy in human beings. This seems to bring Dreyfus's ideas in close connection with the vindication of practice as more fundamental than theory, but there is more to this than meets the eye. Dreyfus is rather looking for the depths and foundations of propositional thinking and its genesis; a rather Heideggerian undertaking, as shall be shown in due course.

4. Absorbed Coping

Before laying out the details concerning absorbed coping, a caveat is in order. As a sort

of 'Heideggerian', Dreyfus is known for his animosity towards Husserl, which he might have contracted from Heidegger's own critical attitude towards the father of phenomenology, but most certainly from an Anglo-American construal of Husserl according to which the founding father of phenomenological philosophy favored an overemphasis of detached contemplation over situational coping. Surprisingly, this line of interpretation can even find in Husserl's philosophy a proto-Fodorian theory of mental representation.[7] McIntyre has argued, for instance, that Husserl's noematic *Sinn* is tantamount to Fodor's mental representations and that his so-called phenomenological reduction shares fundamental similarities with Fodor's methodological solipsism (1986, 101); the latter being a doctrine that Dreyfus castigated in what he calls 'Dasein's revenge' meant to "undercut the Cartesian prejudice that man is a subject embedded in the physical world" (1980, 78). Rather, "the pragmatic activity of taking-to-refer and claiming-to-be-true takes place against a background of already entrenched social practices" (1980, 78).

Dreyfus also falls prey to this barely phenomenological Husserl interpretation and hence is not really able to construe classical phenomenology as Heidegger did—as the very "possibility of thinking" (GA 14, 101), albeit in need of a radicalization to salvage it from its commitments to the metaphysical tradition. Actually, this Husserl interpretation has been ubiquitous in the Anglo-American reception of phenomenology. This is the case of the West Coast interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology, which has defended a Fregean interpretation of Husserl's theory of intentionality and conceives of the *noema* as an intermediary ideal entity (Zahavi 2003, 58 ff.). Varela, Thompson and Rosch, in a work whose partial purpose was at least to consider phenomenology as a fruitful philosophical companion to cognitive science, concluded that the Husserlian project was a failure (1993, 19) on the grounds that he was a methodological solipsist (1993, 16) whose philosophy ignored embodiment (1993, 17) given that it was basically a very abstract representational theory of mind (1993, 68). They even went so far as to deem the Husserlian theory of the life-world reductionistic and representational

(1993, 117), and opted out of phenomenology, what ultimately motivated a turn to the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness-awareness meditation. However, Thompson has changed his mind over the last decade and no longer holds that Husserl's project is a failure (2007, 414). Apart from Heidegger's largely uncharitable reading of Husserl, which explains the rising number of English speaking Heideggerians who openly launch venomous attacks on Husserl's phenomenology, Thompson credits Dreyfus's interpretation as the received view of phenomenology in America, which played an important role in informing his (and Varela's) misconstrued previous understanding of Husserl's phenomenology (Dreyfus & Hall, 1982). On this view, Husserl would hold that even practical activity is object-oriented and he would conceive of intentional experiences as belonging to a special realm of representational entities (Dreyfus & Hall, 1982, 9).[8]

However, the plot now thickens. Smacking of this interpretation of Husserl's philosophy as an antecedent to cognitivism, Dreyfus consequently puts together Husserl's and Searle's accounts of intentionality as if both philosophical undertakings were made of the same stuff: that is, as though both philosophers were staunch proponents of mental representation. Accordingly, Dreyfus can accuse both philosophers of capriciously subjectivizing intentionality, which has a great many serious disadvantages to be borne carefully in mind. Indeed, Heidegger has noted that "the idea of a subject which has intentional experiences... encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of the being that we ourselves are" (GA 24, 89). Heidegger's idea is that the traditional split between mind and world is artificial and a mere theoretical postulation. Conversely, "I cannot and must not ask how the inner intentional experience arrives at an outside" (GA 24, 89). On this account, Dreyfus questions Searle's formulation of the way the mind-world split is supposedly built into the experience of action.

In *Speech Acts* (1969), Searle argues that the essence of language lies not in its being only propositional content but fundamentally in its performative or—drawing from Austin's terminology—illocutionary character. Speech acts must therefore be conceived of as intentionally motivated by 'constitutive' rules. Indeed, "the different speech act types can then be seen as providing different institutional possibilities within the institution of human language, and explaining the structure of speech acts is a matter of laying bare the constitutive rules" (2001a, 174). Searle then goes on to argue that much of the harder work in speech act theory is answering how we get from the physics of sounds to the semantics and pragmatics of speech acts: "how do we get from the acoustic blast that comes out of the speaker's mouth to the illocutionary acts?" (2001a, 174). So the different possibilities of illocutionary (that is, performative) speech acts must be mapped out as one would proceed with a territory, by classifying the significant dimensions of differences between these acts.[9] But giving an account of every possible performative linguistic act implies the extensive resort to mental notions such as belief, desire, and intention. Searle (2008a) does well when he admits that his theory of intentionality owes nothing to Husserl's phenomenology. It instead came straight from his speech act theory based on what he learned from Frege, Strawson, Wittgenstein, and Austin (2001a, 175). Searle's admission is important because it is clear that, when referring to intentionality, he is thinking about *intentions* much in the same line of Anscombe's project of making plain the character of human action and will (Anscombe, 2000).[10] Searle's distinction between propositional content and illocutionary force provides one with the possibility of carrying over to the structure of intentional states, for one can both assert that p, or ask whether p, or make a promise that p, just as one can also believe that p, wish that p, fear that p, etc. (Searle, 2001a, 175). At the same time, the Searlean notion of intentional causation makes possible an analysis of the structure of willful or deliberative acts (as it would be better to characterize Searlean 'intentionality') in terms of the conditions of satisfaction, the direction of fit, as well as some other notions that Searle introduces in other works (Searle, 2008b).

On discussing Searle's work, Dreyfus's attention was drawn to how an 'intention in action' (a continuing representation on behalf of

the agent during the action itself) is arbitrarily superimposed. Notable is also Searle's insistence that the agent must continuously experience the casual connection between the intention in action and the bodily movement: "indeed, according to Searle, the experience of acting is just the experience of the bodily movement being caused by the intention in action" (Dreyfus 1993, 21). Dreyfus has it that Searle attempts a sort of integration of logical conditions and phenomenological description. Moreover,

> Searle incorporates a phenomenological analog of this analysis into his account of action by maintaining that the experience of an action must include a direct experience of the causal relation between the intention in action and the bodily motion. He argues that both the prior intention and the intention in action are casually self-referential. They both include in their conditions of satisfaction the requirement that the intention to bring about a goal cause the goal-directed action. Thus an action is a bodily movement experienced as caused by my intention to perform it. (Dreyfus 1993, 21-22)

Dreyfus has it that both components which Searle ascribes to any action, the intentional component (for example, the visual experience of something which is perceived) and the conditions of satisfaction (the presence of features of what is seen), might actually be absent in real situational coping. Of course, one has a visual experience and what is seen shows its own features that can be detected by the visual experience itself, but this way of putting things might just be an abstract way of reflecting upon an action and not the experience itself. So what is really an action? What elements should be borne in mind when considering what human agents undergo in the process of coping? What is agency as the capacity to act in the world? On Dreyfus's view, human agents are in the first placed absorbed, coping with the situations in which they are currently involved. They are certainly not deliberately thinking about what is being pursued, nor representing their actions beforehand, but carrying out meaningful acts whose sense is not given from any propositional

rendering. Thus Dreyfus casts doubt on the idea that an intention in action—the deliberate will to act upon something—should be regarded as the cause of one's movement. On the contrary, acting is "the experience of a steady flow of skillful activity in response to one's sense of the environment" (1993, 24). Not even when things go wrong for a moment does the agent resort to deliberative reflection. Such experience 'relieves the tension' of a deviation if, say, our bodily movement swerves from its course. In the final analysis, it must be recognized that, when coping skillfully with a situation, "activity is completely geared into the demands of the situation. One does not distinguish one's experience of acting from one's ongoing activity, and therefore one has no self-referential experience of oneself as causing that activity (1993, 24). Of course, this is not to decry deliberative reflection postulating its nonexistence or to deny that something as self-referring takes place, but merely to object to the merits of a false premise: that which grants primacy to representation and deliberative thinking over absorbed coping.

In order to dig into the sense of human action and to lay out its nonrepresentational character (also referred to as 'nonintentionalistic', cf. Dreyfus, 1993, 24), Dreyfus draws on phenomenological insights from Heidegger, Gurwitsch, and Merleau-Ponty. Indeed, as Gurwitsch has put it, what occurs in any action is not imposed by us but "rather prescribed by the situation and its own structure... We find ourselves in a situation and are interwoven with it, encompassed by it, indeed just 'absorbed' into it" (1979, 67).[11] This means that "*the experience of acting* has a *world-to-mind* direction of causation also" (Dreyfus, 2001, 25) which is clearly lacking in Searle's account of intentionality. On Dreyfus's terms, "we experience the situation as drawing the action out of us" (Dreyfus, 2001, 25). In this vein, Dreyfus agrees with Merleau-Ponty that human beings are "empty heads turned towards one single, self-evident world where everything takes place" (2005, 413). Dreyfus has it that the mixture of a first-person and a third-person—an internal and an external—account of perception and action is unstable, for the fission is merely due to an unchallenged commonsense prejudice

(1993, 26). Accordingly, "Searle starts from the first-person experience and builds the third-person casual account into the intentional content of the experience" (Dreyfus, 1993, 27). In contrast, "phenomenology rejects common sense in the name of the phenomena of everyday involved perception and action" (Dreyfus, 1993, 27).

A wide and variegated range of situations, namely skillful habitual activities such as riding a bicycle, driving a car, and playing tennis, shows that Searle's depiction of the intentional content of acting in terms of a representation of the action's conditions of satisfaction is unnecessary and misleading. Thus Dreyfus notes how much more time human agents spend in this immediate coping mode, when compared to the deliberative, purposeful, subject-object, theory-laden, and theory-oriented, mode of consideration, which is most of the time only sporadic. As a matter of fact, actions can be purposive without the agent entertaining any kind of purpose at all (Dreyfus 1993, 28). This can be defined as "the phenomenon of purposive action without a purpose" (Dreyfus 1993, 31), which has been more often than not totally ignored by the philosophical tradition of theory-oriented explicit deliberation. Therefore, very much in agreement with Heidegger and with the phenomenological tradition with its preference for nonobjective phenomena, Dreyfus remarks how the focus on propositional knowledge ends up obfuscating the very phenomenon of the world. But precisely being-in-the-world as originary intentionality, "amounts to a nonthematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment" (Heidegger SZ, 76). Being-in-the-world is a fundamental determination, not of objects, but of human existence or Dasein, and the way human agents are in the world is mostly an absorbed, concerned kind of coping with that which is required by the situation at hand. It is the world—as the orienting, nonthematic background—that which makes coping with things possible and it would be wrongheaded to imagine a gap between the agent's comportment towards what is being pursued and the world as disclosed. On this account, "self and world belong together in the single entity, Dasein. Self and world are

not two entities, like subject and object... but self and world are the basic determination of Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger GA 24, 422).

Dreyfus inveighs against Searle's idea that whatever intentionality should turn out to be, it must be seen as reference to acts of the mind, not to absorbed circumspection in the whole of activity. Against the backdrop of these objections, Dreyfus summarizes how skillful coping differs from mental states:

· Skillful coping is a mode of awareness, but one in which the agent is not aware of himself as separate from the world. Such a sense of a subject being confronted by objects is an abstraction, a theoretical construct, and hence nothing which can be originally found in the experience of the phenomena (1993, 34).

· Comportment is adaptable and therefore the agent copes with the situation in a variety of ways responding to things on the basis of past experience. Indeed, "one's behavior manifests dispositions that have been shaped by a vast amount of previous dealings, so that in most cases when we exercise these dispositions everything works without interruption" (1993, 34).

· Finally, only if the going gets difficult we pay attention to what is going on, thus switching to a deliberate subject-object attitude (1993, 34).

Dreyfus criticizes Searle for his emphasis on explicit 'intention in action', because in observing even one's own activity there is a monitoring attitude which is not present when everything goes well. So why is one to suppose that this monitoring observation is originally present in skillful coping? This monitoring way of knowing which Dreyfus calls 'knowing-that' is not originary but derivative. So both Dreyfus and Searle might be in accord with regard to strong AI but for entirely different reasons. The idea that know-how can somehow be transformed into knowing-that is a central plank of knowledge engineering; a tenet that Searle seems to hold without objection. Dreyfus adheres to Heidegger in this case: "if knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the

present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully" (SZ, 61). To be sure, when the door is broken, my attitude towards it changes completely and I can now consider it from the perspective of mere thinghood, but that does not support the argument that things primarily appear to us as sheer objects lacking meaning, which then must be somehow super-imposed on them by mental acts. Thus Searle's question as to how we get from the acoustic blast that comes out of the speaker's mouth to the illo-cutionary acts (2001a, 174) turns out to be rather artificial, for it constitutes no real philosophical problem. Such transition from a meaningless to a meaningful sphere is just an assumption arising from abstraction and theory alone. Indeed, no one has ever heard a raw sound, that is, a wholly abstract sound, because even the strangest of sounds is taken to be, *as* sound, an emission of something in the world. In the same vein, no one has ever seen a bare thing in its pure thinghood. The perception of something wholly abstract is impossible for human beings. Rather, abstract objectivities are conceivable only because they are founded on the existential structure of being-in-the-world, which is meaningful *tout court*.

5. Phenomenology Against the Grain

Searle has subsequently defended himself from Dreyfus's attacks by pointing out, first, that he is not acquainted with the phenomenological tradition and that he sees no point in Dreyfus's insistence that he must be some sort of Husser-lian thinker (Searle, 2000). Second, he considers that his ideas have been grossly misinterpreted by Dreyfus, who has conveniently found himself a straw man to argue against. And finally, not only does he not subscribe to phenomenological doctrines but he deems phenomenology "the first step but only the first step in logical analysis" (2000, 72). As the first step, phenomenology is concerned with the way phenomena appear to us for the first time but this initial appearance of the world renders phenomenological description rather superficial, since logical analysis con-cerns itself with the very structure of intentional

phenomena which lies deeper than the mere phe-nomenal manifestation:

> When I speak of 'representation,' 'condi-tions of satisfaction,' 'causal self-referenci-ality,' and 'intentions in action' he [Dreyfus] thinks I am talking about the phenomenolo-gy of agents. I am not. I am talking about the logical structure of intentional phenomena, and the logical structure does not typically lie on the surface, it is not typically discov-erable by mere phenomenology. (2000, 75)

Searle claims that human actions are informed and motivated by willful purposes and propositional attitudes:

> According to Dreyfus we are supposed to accept that when he wrote this passage, and presumably also when he rewrote, edited, and proofread it, he *had no mental states whatever*: no 'beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.'* Frankly, I find the idea out of the ques-tion. I believe that when Dreyfus wrote the passage, he did so intentionally, that is, he intended to write that very passage. Furthermore I think he wrote the passage in the '*belief*' that it was true and with a '*desire*' to say the things he said. Mental states like belief, desire, and intention are so 'involved' in the production of this passage that if he had not had them he would not have written the passage at all. Worse yet, I believe that all of this skillful coping was conscious. (2000, 77-78)

In the final analysis, "skillful coping is intentional behavior right down to the ground" (Searle, 2000, 81). Moreover, Searle boasts of his inability to understand Dreyfus's beloved skillful-coping examples as a rebuttal to his philosophy and jokingly asserts that "except in a few really weird epileptic cases, all skillful cop-ing requires consciousness" (2000, 82). He is not really practicing phenomenology, let alone of the Husserlian kind, because he is not interested in how things appear at the initial level of experi-ence. Rather, Searle is interested in the logical analysis of phenomena, not primarily in their preliminary manifestation. If we are to take cog-nizance of how intentional phenomena constitute

experience, logical analysis must not be dismissed as though the logical space of reasons had nothing to do with our coping with the world.

Searle espouses a continuity between philosophy and the sciences. Therefore, he casts doubt on Dreyfus's constant parlance of an originary dimension reserved for a special sort of philosophical inquiry: "philosophy starts with the facts of physics, chemistry, biology, and neurology. There is no going behind these facts to try to find something more 'primordial'" (Searle, 2000, 90). Searle has it that neither Husserl nor Heidegger seem to have anything relevant to say about physics, chemistry, biology, and neurology, for they seem to be overtly hostile towards empirical research. The focus of phenomenology is admittedly on how things appear to us, and so the difference between Husserl and Dreyfus is just the triviality that the former conceives of intentionality as a subject-object relation between a transcendental subject and an intentional object, whereas the latter prefers the existential underpinnings undergirding our background practices in the world. Searle deems irrelevant both phenomenological theories, for they have no real purchase on "getting an adequate theory of the logical structure of the intentionality of biological brains encased in biological bodies" (Searle, 2000, 90). Even worse, Dreyfus's conception of the background as a nonobjective terrain does not affect in the least the priority of logical analysis, because here one might have fallen prey to the fallacy of surmising that practices cannot be logically investigated due to the fact that their background is always presupposed (Searle, 2000, 92). However, "just as we use the eye to study the eye, language to study language, the brain to study the brain, etc., so we can use the practices to study the practices, and indeed we can, as I do, use the Background to study the Background" (Searle, 2000, 92). Phenomenology is thus bankrupt because "it can only deal with how things seem to me here and now in the immediate present" (Searle, 2001b, 282).

As can be expected though, Dreyfus is not convinced that these Searlean objections really capture the gist of his critique. Raging from knowledge engineering to Searle's mental capacities as trapped "in the head" (Dreyfus, 1991,

291), the traditional idea that the mind assigns meaning to brute facts encountered in a world of objects still mightily holds sway. On Dreyfus's account, the capacities and skills which make up the background are bodily embedded rather than just mentally had (2000, 325). On closer inspection, the point is not that Searle is not attempting to practice phenomenology, never mind of the Husserlian kind, for even if Dreyfus's characterization of Searle as Husserlian turns out to be misleading, Searle would nonetheless be engaging in bad phenomenology (Dreyfus 2000, 327). Dreyfus has it that Searle's naturalistic outlook of philosophy—which is clearly dismissive of phenomenology for its overt anti-naturalism—has purchase on some rather strange questions arising from his approach. For instance, the question as to how the brain processes acoustic blasts coming out of people's mouths and transforms them into meaningful expressions. On Dreyfus's view, Searle unjustifiably assumes that human agents somehow experience meaningless noises that are later transformed into the experience of speech acts by mental meaning assignment. Searle would thus adopt the view that human agents first and foremost encounter meaningless facts needing a sort of interpretative supplement on behalf of the agent. Thus Searle would be engaging in bad phenomenology due to his assumption of a meaningless stance of experience about whose existence and interaction with the higher sphere of propositional knowledge he still owes us an explanation. Dreyfus argues, with clear Heideggerian overtones, that meaningfulness comes first ('das Bedeutsame ist das primäre,' GA 56/57, 73), that is, the background cannot be wholly bereft of *Bedeutsamkeit*. On the contrary, the background is *bedeutsam* in its entirety.[12]

Searle favors indeed a functional account of meaning, according to which meaning is not intrinsic to the physical stuff of the universe, but instead is "*assigned* from the *outside* by conscious observers and users" (1996, 14). Given that Searle's conditions of satisfaction are conceived as mental, an even more controversial claim follows: namely, that the contents of the conditions of satisfaction must be propositional (Dreyfus 2000, 328). However, this again is a

relapse into deliberative, propositional, knowing-that. Hence Dreyfus refines his critique and argues that perhaps the point is not that Searle is thoroughly engaging in bad phenomenology but rather that his is only a phenomenology of "effortful, deliberate, thoughtful action, like lecturing on or writing about philosophy, and so leaves out the sort of skillful coping one experiences in the flow of sports or in simply finding one's way about in the world" (2000, 329).[13] After all, doing something deliberately, with a purpose in mind, is also part of human experience. But Dreyfus has it that "although we often engage in what I call deliberate activities, such thoughtful activity is not the only, nor the most basic, way we relate to the world" (2000, 329). This is illustrated by Merleau-Ponty as follows: "the polarization of life towards a goal is entirely unrepresented. Objective thought bypasses true intentionality, which is *at* its object rather than positing it" (2005, 446). It turns out then that "the phenomenological conditions are more basic than the logical ones" (Dreyfus 2001, 186). And yet, Searle still holds that intentional content need not be sentence-like, but surely though propositional, just like a dog can be said to have intentional states with conditions of satisfaction, which therefore have propositional content. However, "my dog does not think in sentences" (2001b, 278). In this regard, Searle's point is that "the logical structure is pervasive whether the activity is skillful coping or deliberate action" (2001b, 278). As a matter of fact, any habitual activity can be decomposed into its logical constituents, so Searle thinks they must be part of the experience itself.

For Dreyfus, however, absorbed coping is more primordial than *a posteriori* reflection on experience, given that it constitutes "the background condition of the possibility of all forms of comportment" (1999, 11). A panoply of culturally accepted practices lack any linguistically describable status. For instance, distance standing—an example Dreyfus is rather fond of—cannot be reducible to any explicit rule-like structure nor with recourse to any measurable physical distance that one could take into consideration. When I see that my child is standing too close to someone while standing with me in a

queue in the bank lobby, I just need to correct his position that I consider improper. In cases such as these, an agent who knows how to cope with such uncomfortable situations as being too close to someone "need only be skillfully moving to lower a tension" (Dreyfus, 1991, 17). There is no written rule about it, we just know how to act in such cases based on cultural experience. Social norms of this sort are too specific, given that they are context-bound and, for that matter, indexical, and therefore cannot be easily described in propositional or representational terms. Such norms are indeed indexical because they are produced by their concrete situational conditions of existence (Dreyfus, 1999, 20). According to Dreyfus, this brings one back to phenomenology precisely because human agents are always already in the world. There is no need to resort to the strange strategy of making intelligible a meaningless world by bestowing meaning upon it from the outside. This is the so-called primacy of phenomenology over logical analysis: not that logical analysis is forever futile and should be barred from our consideration of reality, but that a meaningful world is first and foremost disclosed to us. Being thus disclosed, the world is not posited by no one, nor discovered by complicated logical analyses: it is the condition of possibility of any theoretical endeavor. The background turns out to be "a kind of third being that is neither natural nor constituted, but is produced by the embodied intentionality that is always already present in the world of involved, active, social beings" (Dreyfus, 1999, 21). But still, Searle finds this characterization unfathomable:

> [Dreyfus] says, for example, that when people move to a comfortable distance from other people in an elevator, they do so *unintentionally*; they have no intentions. I do not think that can be a correct description. This is a typical case of intentional action. It is not premeditated; there is no prior intention. And it may be done without even the agent's awareness that he is doing it, but all the same, it is not the peristaltic contraction of the gut. It is clearly intentional. (2005, 334)

This unnerving discomfort by Searle is due to his theoretical leanings, especially his

conception of intentionality as purposeful and willful action. In contrast, Dreyfus attempts to disclose the background of the foreground with his emphasis on nontheoretical, absorbed coping. The source undergirding Searle's assumption that propositional knowledge is all there is to take into account is the bugbear of the intransigent metaphysics that postulates, without phenomenological evidence, that our rendering of the world somewhat embellishes a previous abstract stance devoid of meaning. However, is it accurate to claim that we provide ourselves with representations of the world which remain stored up inside and with regard to which—as Heidegger asserts—"the question of how they 'agree' with reality can occasionally arise [?]" (SZ, 62).

6. Conclusion:
A Founded Mode of *Welterkennen*

I concur with Dreyfus that propositional knowledge is not autonomous, inasmuch as for knowledge to be validated, it must be founded on the very experience which renders it fitting and evidentially adequate, that is, Being-in-the-world. On this view, *Welterkennen* is never primarily explicit knowledge of objective entities, precisely because rendering something explicit is just the result of a series of acts which are not in the first place objective, not even thematic.

The case in point is thus premised on the metaphysical assumption that knowing-that should be regarded as the sole stance by means of which we render the world intelligible. But the "*acquisition of a new region of being never before delimited in its peculiarity*" (Husserl, Hua III, 58) discovered by phenomenology is certainly not present-at-hand and therefore it is also not beholden to objective characterization. While the idea that the objective stance as the most fundamental retains its appeal, phenomenology has shown that nobody in the history of humanity has ever encountered an entity that merely is-there, as raw abstracted cosmic matter. Ontologically understood, all cognition is "a *founded* mode of Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger SZ, 71). So,

in point of fact, no scientific cognition could have ever been gained without the factic structures underpinning our existence. In the same vein, scientific empirical theories cannot encapsulate the meaning of this being-in-the-world, because "the world we find ourselves in, which is made intelligible by our understanding of Being, is a world in which we encounter the present-at-hand. It is not itself encountered as present-at-hand. The sense of belonging to a world cannot be reduced to an encounter with some object" (Ratcliffe, 2012, 144). Moreover, the very idea of 'nature' is beholden to its having been previously uncovered in its *Zuhandenheit* in Dasein's factic existence. Therefore, the investigation of Dasein's existential structures is a condition of possibility for the very understanding of the origin of objective knowledge. Our *Welterkennen* is never primarily knowledge concerning the objective features of entities. On the contrary, explicit knowledge stems from our pre-theoretical understanding already at work. On Heidegger's view,

> When Dasein directs itself towards something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always 'outside' alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered. (SZ, 62)

I gather that Dreyfus's approach is on the right track by distancing himself from the assumption of a meaningless world in need of sense bestowal, but his radical delogization of the background ends up jeopardizing the very dimension of intentional life. Close reading suggests that Dreyfus struggles to give a satisfactory account as to how both spheres—nonpropositional absorbed coping and higher level propositional understanding—are to be connected or, even better, how a transition between them takes place. In this sense, Dreyfus parts company with Heidegger inasmuch as his own explanation of the background stays nebulous throughout. Indeed, the background has degenerated into some mysterious dimension whose hidden and holistic character abjures both propositional

explicitness and intentional involvement. So Dreyfus understands the background as "a field of forces that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty call the phenomenon of the world" (2012, 9).

The gist of Dreyfus's interpretation of the world as a field of forces lies in the strong claim that the background "discloses a familiar world without the mediation of mental content" (2012, 9), and to support this argument he draws on a 1958 Heidegger essay, 'Principles of Thinking', in which the German thinker elevates darkness as the condition of possibility for all thinking. Dreyfus quotes: "The dark has nothing to do with pitch blackness as the complete, sheer absence of light. The dark is rather the secret mystery of what is light. The dark keeps what is light in its presence; what is light belongs to it" (2012, 9). It should be noted, however, that there is scanty evidence in Heidegger's own work to conclude that the phenomenon of the world is mysterious, dark, or that it can be regarded as a somewhat ineffable field of arcane forces. Let us quote at length:

> Heidegger calls this ultimate background *the phenomenon of world*. He points out that the world *must withdraw* like the light in a room to make it possible for things to show themselves. *Objects* can be imagined, remembered, and perceived *on the background of a withdrawn world*—a whole that functions only when one is *not* paying attention to it. On this view, it follows that the background *qua* background cannot be implicit because it cannot be made explicit and still be identified with what it was when it was doing its job as background. In short, the background is present by way of withdrawing, and it is only when it is present in this way that it can serve as the ground for anything. (Dreyfus, 2012, 4)

Some precisions are here in order, because Dreyfus drives a wedge between a transcendental interpretation of the background (Husserl) and an existential one (Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), leading to diametrically different conclusions. In this vein, Dreyfus unfairly pins on Husserl a cognitivist account of the background that barely passes the most basic phenomenological test, because the background would turn out to be "an *aggregate* of independent elements…" "of implicit sedimented intentional states (*Geltungen*) which can in principle always be made explicit" (2012, 1). In contrast, existential phenomenology would construe the background as "a *whole* on the basis of which things can show up, but anything that shows up does so only on the condition that the background not show up" (2012, 1). Properly understood, Husserl's concept of *horizon* as the background of intentional experience "embraces what one is conscious of in a non-thematic way" (Geniusas, 2012, 7). In Husserl's view, in our absorbed intentional experience the background does not become thematic, just like Dreyfus's own conception—as luck would actually have it. However, the horizon can certainly become a thematic space of phenomenological inquiry, just like Heidegger's *Weltlichkeit der Welt*.

It is hard to see how existential phenomenology would merely restrict itself to postulating the pervasive subsistence of a mysterious background, which cannot be made explicit due to its withdrawal. Actually, phenomenology accounts for its ontological structures and experiential features inasmuch as the horizon for all understanding must be brought to light (cf. Heidegger, SZ, 17). What is then Heidegger's ambitious analysis of environmentality and worldhood if not an explicit account of how the world pretheoretically announces itself? Of course, "the context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself" (Heidegger, SZ, 75). This announcement of the world, the fact that it *meldet sich*, can be couched in terms of how the world makes itself explicit for circumspection. Needless to belabor this announcement is not theoretical nor thematic, but that does not at all preclude the fact that the phenomenon of the world should not be regarded as some sort of obscure, ineffable, mystery. In point of fact, if the background were a mystery, as Dreyfus mistakenly claims, Dasein would not be able to cope with the world in any sense. Dasein would be a stranger to itself and to the world.

However, for phenomenological and hermeneutic reasons alike, Dasein —although ontically closest to itself and ontologically farthest— "pre-ontologically… is surely not a stranger" (Heidegger, SZ, 16). If Dreyfus's Heideggerian credentials are sound, his approach must be both phenomenological and hermeneutic. The method must be phenomenological because that which we are seeking to uncover consists precisely in uncovering itself on account of its very ontological structure. But from the fact that the background does not show itself in objective terms one cannot draw the conclusion that it remains forever dark, obscure, and ungraspable. A proper phenomenological method should help us grasp the world's own way of announcing itself. Of course, the world is no thing at all, but the very condition of possibility for propositional knowing-that. Nonetheless, it would certainly be remiss of us to forget that Dasein already has— however vague and implicit—a pre-understanding of what it is to be already alongside the world (hence the hermeneutic side of the investigation). Every act of making something determinate is no doubt founded on a primordial familiarity with a meaningful world, but such absorbed embedding is equivocated if one surmises that an air of mysticism and darkness skews the clarification of the phenomenon of the world. How one is to investigate that which does not present itself as thematic requires no doubt a burdensome undertaking concerning the interaction between what is thus captured (*begriffen*) in our concepts (*Begriffe*). But the fact that 'capturing' is not just abstract retaining in assertions, nor solely present-at-hand observation, does not compel us to succumb to Dreyfus's rather strange idea of a nonintentional field of forces. Experience is intentional from back to front, and the point is to account for a form of intentionality which is not premised on the primacy of an objective *Welterkennen*. Dreyfus is right that our primary way of absorbed coping is not necessarily related to predication, hence his disagreement with Searle's logical analysis. Heidegger himself has asserted that "in dealing with something, I do not perform any thematic predicative assertions" (Heidegger, GA 21, 17). Indeed, "an assertion is grounded on understanding and presents us with a derivative

form in which an interpretation has been carried out" (Heidegger, SZ, 154). But Dreyfus's extreme mischaracterization of Husserlian phenomenology has tainted his own theory of the background with a series of notions of dubious phenomenological ascendancy. Dreyfus has mistakenly conflated the nonthematic background with a somewhat irrational sphere.

In the end, logical analysis must be traced back to the sources of meaning that constitute its very genesis. Dreyfus's nonphenomenological decoupling of foreground and background adds unnecessary burdens and difficulties to his approach, which now requieres an uncalled-for transition between an irrational stance and the space of reasons (cf. Dreyfus, 2005, 59). It is my contention that, in the final analysis, the postulation of a mysterious darkness will only end up doing great disservice to the original project of phenomenological philosophy.[14]

Notes

1. There is a myriad of philosophical literature devoted to the so-called analytic/continental divide in terms of its overcoming, reconciliation, or methodological differentiation. See for instance Prado (2003), Chase & Reynolds (2010), Vrahimis (2013), Bell, Cutrofello & Livingston eds. (2015), and Rinofner-Kreidl & Wiltsche eds. (2016).

2. Although *Mind Over Machine* (1986) was jointly written by Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, quotes from the book will be (for stylistic reasons) presented from Hubert Dreyfus's point of view. This strategy has also been followed by the Dreyfus brothers throughout the book.

3. There are, of course, many more so-called expert systems. In 'Expert Systems Versus Intuitive Expertise' (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 101-121), some of them are critically put into question: for example, COGEN, R1, MACSYMA, PROSPECTOR, INTERNIST-I, PUFF and RECONSIDER. Dreyfus quotes Schank's assessment of expert systems in order to make it his own: "the words 'expert system' are loaded with a great deal more implied intelligence than is warranted by their actual level of sophistication" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 101). See also Fox's (1996) summary of the first three decades of expert systems.

4. On the five stages of skill acquisition, see also Dreyfus (2002a, 368-372). In addition, sometimes even experts themselves cannot explain how they do what they do. Being able to explain something to others is also primarily a practical ability. This is why, for instance, a football coach with no practical experience (for example, someone who never played football) can actually teach footballers to be better players, while a coach with previous experience as player might not be as good communicating her practical knowledge to others. So sometimes lousy players can become excellent instructors, bad music interpreters might end up being the best teachers for more talented musicians, and excellent philosophers might be terrible teachers. In this respect, being able to propositionally explain practice is in itself a practical ability.

5. Some classical phenomenological examples come to mind. Among the most salient ones are Heidegger's dealings with equipment or *Zeugzusammenhang* (for example, the always cited 'hammering with a hammer,' SZ § 15) and Merleau-Ponty's many exemplary cases of bodily comportment (Merleau-Ponty 2005).

6. The reader might have experienced forgetting the PIN code of a bank account, precisely when trying to remember it *propositionally*, as though the flow of that sort of knowing were interrupted by thinking about it! When that happens to me, I force myself not to think about it and let the body do the work.

7. See McIntyre (1986). See also Livingston on the "substantial historical and conceptual continuity between functionalism and phenomenology" (2005, 31).

8. As Thompson has noted (2007, 415), this misleading Husserl interpretation has been challenged by a number of philosophers. See Marbach (1993), Welton (2000) and Zahavi (2003; 2004). For other misuses of phenomenology in connection with Varela's neurophenomenology, see Lembeck (2010) and Ebinger (2012).

9. Searle (1976) has classified illocutionary acts by means of a taxonomy, correcting thus the previous one provided by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), which Searle deems defective for its lack of clear criteria.

10. Anscombe's *Intention* (2000) was rendered into Germans as *Absicht*, which very handsomely illustrates why 'intention' is not to be confused with anything related to phenomenological intentionality. It—one could argue—is precisely Dreyfus's mistake when associating Searle with Husserl's phenomenology.

11. It must be noted again that Dreyfus understands Husserlian intentionality as detached observation of lived experience. Very early indeed he was keen to set transcendental phenomenology, conceived of as detached, objective reflection upon experience, against "the crucial role of human involvement" (1967, 19). An early criticism of this Dreyfusian misinterpretation of intentionality was offered by Gurwitsch: "we ask whether involvement as experienced does not refer to consciousness experiencing it" (1974, 11).

12. According to Dreyfus, Searle's suggestion that human agents at first experience meaningless noises is not only bad phenomenology but also bad science: "Developmental psychologists have found evidence that the human fetus already responds differently to the mother's speech from the way it responds to other sounds. This research suggests that there is no sense in asking from the child's point of view how she learns to take as meaningful the acoustic blasts coming out of people's mouths. It seems that meaningfulness does not have to be learned. Rather, the talking that comes out of people's mouths is always already experienced by the child as meaningful, although, of course, the child has to learn the meaning" (1999, 13).

13. The reader should be reminded that this 'give and take' between Dreyfus and Searle constitutes a debate spanning several years and various journal papers and book chapters. Thus the refinement of the arguments and changes in expression are understandable.

14. Thanks are due to David Durán for critical commentary on a previous version of this paper.

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Jethro Masís (Dr. phil., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Germany) is Associate Professor at the School of Philosophy, University of Costa Rica. He is currently the President of the Costa Rican Circle of Phenomenology (CCF) and committee member of the Latin American Circle of Phenomenology (CLAFEN).). Contact: jethro.masis@ucr.ac.cr