

In recent years there has been growing attention paid to a kind of human action or activity which does not issue from a process of reflection and deliberation. It has been variously characterized by expressions such as ‘engaged coping’, ‘unreflective action’, and ‘flow’, to name a few. Perhaps its most famous exponent is Hubert Dreyfus who has developed a phenomenology of expertise that is rooted in his understanding of engaged coping, which he developed on the basis of insights taken from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Dreyfus 1992; Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986). According to his theory, in activities such as driving or playing chess, one first learns and applies the rules of the activity or game explicitly, but with a great deal of practice one proceeds through levels of increased proficiency until one reaches the level of an expert where the rules are no longer before one’s mind and one is rather entirely immersed in the activity, responding automatically and unreflectively to various cues and circumstances. While Dreyfus has used his account to target what he rightly saw as a doomed model of artificial intelligence based on computation as well as theories of human action which depend on a representational theory of the mind or what he has recently called the ‘myth of the mental’ (Dreyfus 2006), he has also sought to apply his theory to ethics in order to develop what he calls a ‘phenomenology of ethical expertise’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1990, 1991).

Dreyfus’ account of ‘everyday ongoing ethical coping’ seeks to expose what he sees as the inadequacies of accounts of moral action implicit in mainstream moral theories such as deontology and consequentialism which are premised on an explicit process of moral reflection and judgement. Other recent attempts to capture this dimension of ethical activity include Francisco Varela’s notion of ‘ethical know-how’,

which he bases on Dreyfus' account (Varela 1999)¹, and Julia Annas' use of the concept of 'flow' in characterizing the phenomenology of virtuous action which she sees as having the structure of a practical expertise or skill (Annas 2008). All these accounts, which seek to "save the (ethical) phenomena", as it were, offer important insights into the nature of everyday ongoing ethical coping. But there are important limitations to the analogy with the more familiar forms of expertise. Most importantly, ethical expertise is not first acquired through a process of explicitly learning rules in the same manner in which one learns to drive or to play chess. While it seems right to speak about a form of ethical action we can characterize as everyday ongoing ethical coping, it is important to understand how the conditions of the genesis of ethical coping differ from those of other forms of expertise. The point here is that it is essential to introduce a distinction between pre-reflective ethical know-how and unreflective ethical expertise. Beyond the obvious difference that the acquisition of the latter but not the former is mediated by reflection, there is a more fundamental difference. While newly learned ethical rules can descend to the level of unreflective ethical expertise, this rule-based expertise in turn depends on the prior acquisition of pre-reflective ethical know-how and the associated sensitivity to the ethical without which we would not even be able to understand what the rules are about in the first place (a similar argument will be made below with respect to the more familiar forms of expertise too, which analogously depend on pre-reflective *bodily* know-how). A complete theory of ethical know-how must therefore include an understanding of pre-

¹ Varela's discussion of 'ethical know-how' centres on how such a model of ethical action (vs. one of explicit moral deliberation as in the Kantian tradition) lines up well with the principles of the enactive theory in cognitive science through its emphasis on situated and embodied immediate responsiveness to a situation. (He then goes on to relate this kind of responsiveness to Confucian and Buddhist wisdom traditions and the notion of the virtual self.) The account of ethical know-how in this article differs in that it seeks 1) to examine the genesis and conditions of such know-how, and 2) to outline what an enactive theory of ethical agency might look like.

reflective ethical know-how and the conditions of its genesis. This article seeks to make a contribution towards this objective. It will require the examination of some ancillary elements.

In the first section, I develop, following John McDowell, an account of the ‘ethical second nature’ which every individual develops from childhood onwards and which includes the formation of pre-reflective ethical know-how. The key point is that the acquisition of an ethical second nature early on is what opens up the very domain of ‘the ethical’ for us in the first place and is constitutive of our sensitivity to it. In the second section, I turn to a closer examination of pre-reflective ethical know-how and the question of whether or not it is conceptual in nature. I will argue that just as sensorimotor understanding forms the basis of our reflective perceptual concepts, pre-reflective ethical know-how is similarly proto-conceptual and forms the basis of our reflective ethical and moral concepts. Finally, in the third section, I will examine the process whereby ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how are actually acquired, namely, through immersion in an ‘ethical world’. This world consists of both the web of ethical meanings and significances (what I call ‘ethical fabric’) which has evolved in a particular society or community as well as its members whose actions and interactions continually reproduce that web.

A fundamental goal of the account given here is to correct what I think is an erroneous tendency in Dreyfus’ account both of expertise in general and ethical expertise in particular whereby he portrays the level of engaged coping as too separate from or independent of reflective thought and action.² The source of Dreyfus’s tendency lies in

² This is particularly evident in the 2007 exchange between McDowell and Dreyfus in *Inquiry*—which informs this article and to which I return below—and it prompts McDowell to accuse Dreyfus of

his particular interpretation of conceptuality and his associated resistance to seeing how the level of engaged coping can be conceptual. In sections two and three, I draw on recent research in cognitive science to show how, through a different approach to conceptuality which allows for the proto-conceptual nature of pre-reflective ethical know-how (leave alone ‘everyday ongoing ethical coping’, which would at least in part have reflective and thus conceptually mediated origins), one can plausibly see such know-how as a constitutive condition of reflective thought and action. It is also only by adopting such a perspective that we can have any hope of reconciling the natural and the normative, reason and nature.

1. Ethical second nature

We are born into a world of significances. This is the basic point that we do not first encounter things as pure objects, but rather as useful things or tools.³ Our primary access to things is in pre-reflectively using them and having a corresponding pre-reflective familiarity with them. Later, on the basis of this familiarity and through language, we are able to take a step back from this involvement and look at the same things objectively and apart from their use, as substances with properties.⁴ Now another way in which we are born into a world of significances is ethically. We obviously do not start out deliberating on how to act, applying rules of conduct or morality in the process (nor, for that matter, do we in fact do this in our day-to-day life as adults for the most

perpetuating the “Myth of Disembodied the Intellect” (McDowell 2007a, 349-50). See also Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) where the “developmental stages” and “source of justification” of rational ethical reflection are seen as independent of those of everyday ethical coping (248).

³ This is a point common to both Husserl and Heidegger. For discussion of where they overlap on this point and also where they diverge, see Overgaard (2004), 10ff.

⁴ The corresponding distinction in Heidegger is between the “ready-to-hand” (*Zuhanden*) and the “present-at-hand” (*Vorhanden*). See Heidegger (1927/2010), §§15-16, 66-75.

part). Rather, we are immediately immersed in a world of actions and feelings already permeated by norms, conventions, and values which we observe and internalize and which come to frame and enable the kinds of actions and feelings we ourselves become capable of. ‘Ethical’ is conceived of here as both broader than and encompassing the ‘moral’ as concerned with right action. A corollary of the picture of how human beings become ethical agents is that we are never initiated into only a narrow moral sense of ‘right and wrong’, but rather into a more complex capacity that includes and enables it. Of course, the ethical shades off into the broadly cultural—the lines are necessarily blurred, as they must be, since we are not born into and raised in a world of discrete subsets of significances; they are interrelated. That being said, there are what one could call regions or cross-sections of coherence, and one of those is the ethical. And the point I want to focus on concerning the ethical is that we start out in a world that is ethically pre-reflectively familiar with the capacity for critical ethical reflection coming only later.

John McDowell’s conception of “second nature” captures this sense of the ethically pre-reflectively familiar.⁵ Drawing on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean ethics*, McDowell paints a picture of how human beings acquire an ethical character through their upbringing. The process involves the moulding of motivational and evaluative propensities which results in the formation of the practical intellect and the concomitant acquisition of practical wisdom or *logos (phronēsis)*. The virtuous character that is acquired does not consist merely of habitual inclinations, but of a sensitivity to certain kinds of reasons for acting. Both motivational *and* evaluative propensities are shaped.

⁵ One could also adapt Heidegger’s useful terminology and call it the “ethically ready-to-hand”. See Hatab (2000) for an interesting application of Heidegger to ethics in this vein. McDowell’s discussion of “second nature” can be found in McDowell (1994), 84ff., and McDowell (1998a), 184-85, 188ff.

In acquiring one's second nature—that is, in acquiring *logos*—one learned to take a distinctive pleasure in acting in certain ways, and one acquired conceptual equipment suited to characterize a distinctive worthwhileness one learned to see in such actions, that is, a distinctive range of reasons one learned to see for acting in those ways (McDowell 1998a, 188).

Beyond the affective and cognitive shaping that comes with an ethical upbringing, McDowell is here pointing to another fundamental feature of an ethical outlook: its autonomous nature. The reasons to which we become sensitive are interrelated and mutually supporting—they constitute their own form of *logos*. McDowell's analysis is of a second nature of virtue, which he recognizes as one possibility among many (and I shall introduce a modified conception, 'ethical second nature', below) (McDowell 1998a, 188-89, 194). Now on the Aristotelian conception, virtue is unified. One is not sensitive to virtues one by one; rather, only someone who possesses them all can possess any one of them fully. As McDowell emphasizes in "Virtue and reason", this particular ethical outlook involves the instilling of "a single complex sensitivity" (McDowell 1998b, 53). This sensitivity ultimately amounts to a conception of the kind of life a human being should lead, of how a human being should live. The upshot is that this ethical outlook is not codifiable (McDowell 1998b, 57-8). One cannot derive universal principles of action from it which could be rationally justified from an external point of view, e.g., as producing the greatest good or as being the most conducive to human flourishing. The rationality of virtue is *internal* to its associated ethical outlook (McDowell 1998b, 71).

The example of courage can serve to illustrate this. A courageous action in the face of danger, for example, can also be motivated by benevolence and justice. In

addition, as McDowell also emphasizes, “courageousness is primarily a matter of being a certain kind of person” and this entails not being the kind of person who is “ready to rethink the rational credentials of the motivations characteristic of being that kind of person, on occasions when acting on those motivations is in some way unattractive” (McDowell 1998a, 192). There is of course a connection between courage and human interests. As McDowell formulates it: “human beings need courage if they are to stick to their worthwhile projects, in the face of the motivational obstacle posed by danger” (McDowell, 1998a, 191). But this is part of the “reflective background” of one’s second nature and is not directly in play when one acts courageously. One precisely does not engage in a rational weighing of considerations; rather, “what directly influences the will is the valuations of actions that have come to be second nature” (McDowell 1998a, 191).

A similar point is made by Michael Thompson with respect to promising in his recent book, *Life and action*.⁶ Thompson surveys various accounts in the literature of the rationality of sticking to one’s promises, even in so-called “tight corner” situations where someone who was not bound by a promise, but faced a choice of the same two possible courses of action as the person who was so bound, would clearly opt for the one which would involve breaking the promise as being the morally preferable one. The question, therefore, is: what holds people to their promises in such situations? Thompson locates the answer in the concept of a practice, which he construes in analogy with the concept of life-form. In our everyday talk about animals or plants, for example, we make statements about bobcats or cherry trees with respect to their typical behaviour or features, their goodness, etc. which draw on an implicit concept of that particular life-form.⁷ Thompson

⁶ See Part III of Thompson (2008), 149-210.

⁷ This is first laid out in Part I of Thompson (2008), 25-62.

argues that the same is true of our statements about actions which fall under a practice, such as promising. We share a concept of the practice of promising, the practice serves as a standard or measure of good and bad in actions that fall under it, and it is internalized by the bearers of the practice such that it affects “the inner character of [their] particular operations”—that is, “not as something to which the agent is externally related” (Thompson 2008, 199). It is this internalized concept of practice, and the associated disposition of fidelity, and not a weighing of rational considerations from an external moral standpoint, which is in play when we keep our promises, both in general and in “tight corner” situations, *from fidelity*. Elucidating the connection between life-form and practice, Thompson writes: “One turn of the categorical framework gives us the concept of a life-form or a living nature; the other gives us the concept of ‘form of life’ or a ‘second nature’” (Thompson 2008, 208). The apparent connection to McDowell here is most likely not coincidental.

What is common to both Thompson and McDowell is the conviction in the autonomy of the ethical. Both wish to protest against models of the ethical whereby we ground or justify our sense of the “thing to do” in reasons that are external to ethics.⁸ Practices, dispositions, virtues all belong to the second nature that we as human beings acquire in our upbringing, and this second nature opens us up to a space of reasons which has its own inner rationality or *logos*.⁹ Thompson and McDowell both draw on ideas of

⁸ Thompson makes his agreement with McDowell on this point (and in his rejection of neo-Humeanism) clear both in his defence of Philippa Foot’s theory of “natural goodness” (Foot 2001) as *not* justifying ethics “from outside” and in his rejection that “normative naturalism” could “express an unsound desire to give a sort of external ‘grounding’ to ethics, as John McDowell has put it, a grounding ethics doesn’t need and can’t have.” See, respectively, Thompson (2003), 7, and Thompson (2004), 62.

⁹ This of course does not mean that second nature is not fundamentally related to first nature, for it of course is. As McDowell makes clear: “the innate endowment of human beings must put limits on the shapings of second nature that are possible for them”, in part because second nature works on the motivational tendencies of first nature, but also because, if second nature is subjected to reflective scrutiny,

Wilfrid Sellars in this respect in their conception of their theoretical objectives: McDowell seeks to secure the autonomy of the “space of reasons” from the space of nature *qua* natural scientific intelligibility and Thompson seeks to show that the ethical operates entirely within what Sellars calls the “manifest image” (i.e., the system of concepts human beings rely on for their common sense understanding of the world they operate in) without being or needing to be grounded in the “scientific image” (McDowell 1994; McDowell 1996, 236; Thompson 2008; 10, 200).¹⁰ At the same time, however, both McDowell and Thompson insist on seeing the ethical as intrinsically bound up with the natural—it does not inhabit some realm of pure practical rationality utterly disconnected from human beings as natural organisms. As McDowell puts it, his proposal is for a *naturalized* platonism, not a “rampant” one (McDowell 1994, 83-4, 91-5). What is key, however, is to carve out a conception of naturalism which is not defined in exclusively natural scientific terms (McDowell) or based on a set of empiricist propositions (Thompson), and which preserves the intelligibility and integrity of the space of reasons particular to the ethical. Thompson’s proposal is ultimately oriented towards connecting the ethical with concepts of natural normativity, natural goodness, and the human life-form (Thompson 2004, 47). McDowell’s is to call for an expansion of our conception of what is natural to include more than what is intelligible in exclusively natural scientific terms. The concept of “second nature” is his candidate for showing how the space of reasons and the space of nature can be joined. Human beings’ capacity to be

first nature is one of the sources that limits what can intelligibly be a part of it. See McDowell (1998a), 190-91. An important line of inquiry would also seek to understand just how a constructed second nature meshes with an innate first nature, e.g., how much what we come to value owes to how impulses are shaped and how much to the nature of those impulses themselves. I return to this in the next section.

¹⁰ For Sellars on the “space of reasons”, see Sellars (1963a), and for Sellars on “manifest image”/“scientific image”, see Sellars (1963b).

responsive to reasons is not something supernatural, it is part of their mode of living and this mode of living corresponds to the specifically human way of actualizing themselves as animals (McDowell 1994, 78). And it is through human beings' acquisition of a second nature, which cannot "float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism", that they acquire a capacity to be responsive to reasons (McDowell 1994, 84). We shall return to the nature of human beings' responsiveness to reasons in the next section.

Let us generalize the picture we have been painting with the help of McDowell and Thompson. We can preserve the (neo-)Aristotelian approach of both these authors while broadening the understanding of second nature. McDowell's discussion of the concept of second nature is avowedly focussed on a second nature of virtue, but he clarifies that "[a]ny actual second nature is a cultural product" and that "some outlooks are informed—as Aristotle's is not—by a lively sense of alternative possibilities for human life, lived out in cultures other than one's own" (McDowell 1998a, 194). What remains common, however, to these cultural products is the basic structure of a second nature. While one could plausibly speak of cultures as inculcating a "cultural second nature" in its members (allowing naturally for degrees of heterogeneity and pluralism), I wish to focus on what we can call an "ethical second nature". Every human being acquires an ethical second nature during childhood and adolescence that comprises the interrelated, and possibly conflicting, values, virtues, goods, rights, behaviours, attitudes, etc. which make up the ethical fabric of that culture. In this respect, one could not have an ethical second nature of virtue alone, for the ethical fabric of a culture cannot possibly consist only of virtues—it must be broader and deeper than this.

Similarly, and more obviously, one's upbringing does not impart a stand-alone sense of what is morally "right and wrong" or a narrow conception of "the moral". Just as an ethical fabric never in fact consists of a sense of right and wrong alone, so too is an individual's ethical second nature never reducible to this. Rather, the sense of right and wrong only makes sense in the context of the ethical fabric, and one's corresponding ethical second nature, as a whole. A related crucial feature of an ethical second nature is the fact that in opening us up to an ethical space of reasons, it is in fact *constitutive* of one's sense of the ethical, including the narrowly moral sense of right and wrong or "right action". The very moulding of our motivational and evaluative propensities is what opens up the ethical for us. Normativity is rooted in the ethical fabric we are enveloped in as youngsters and the ethical second natures we develop as a result. Our sense of what is courageous or generous or noble, for example, is not based on any kind of external and reflective reason by which we make an evaluation. Rather, our sense will be inner and unreflective. Naturally, depending on the kind of ethical upbringing and the individual's own nature, this ethical sensitivity will vary; but the underlying point is unaffected by this, for no average human being is without an ethical second nature.

Bernard Williams' discussion of generosity highlights the fact that a genuinely generous action cannot stem from an external consideration such as feeling one ought to be generous (Williams 1981, 48). I would like to claim that, in fact, this point applies to the way we primordially evaluate *all* ethical actions. Our primordial ability to recognize and perform actions that are generous, honest, courageous is from an inner sense of these virtues. The ethical space of reasons can *only* be opened up by this kind of inner sense of the ethical. We perform and have a sense of ethical actions *first* in a pre-reflective

manner, only later developing a way of understanding and justifying them in a reflective and possibly rule-oriented manner. And it is that seamless integration of the motivational and evaluative which endows us with this inner sense of the ethical. Our sense of the normative could thus never be derived from a theory we learn as an adolescent or adult. As McDowell puts it, reason is not what orders human beings to join duty's army; rather, "they were not in a position to hear its orders until they were already enrolled." Nevertheless, it is true that "their continuing service [...] is obedience to reason's categorical demands" (McDowell 1998a, 197). It is also the case that reason and reflection, once acquired, allow us to work on the ethical fabric of our culture, but this important process of criticism and reform is always like Neurath's boat which, while at sea, can only be replaced plank by plank at best (McDowell 1998a, 189).

2. Pre-reflective ethical know-how

A persistent theme in our discussion of an ethical second nature is its pre-reflective character. This harks back to the description with which we began of the world we start out in as ethically pre-reflectively familiar. If we are to develop a more adequate picture of how we become ethical agents, we need to examine this aspect of an ethical second nature more closely. The objective is to understand the relationship between the pre-reflective and the reflective in ethical agency.

A good place to start our closer examination is to ask what it means for human beings to be "responsive to reasons". When a child has a pre-reflective sense of what the right thing to do in a given situation is, she is clearly responding to aspects of the situation which provide her with reasons to act in a certain way. But then does this imply

that her responsiveness is conceptual? *This* question of course opens up a Pandora's box of discussion and debate extending over the past few decades, most of which pertains to the conceptual or nonconceptual nature of perceptual, not ethical, experience. Clearly there is a difference between making sense of the content of one's perceptual experiences and having a sense of how to act in a given situation. But there is a way of aligning the two that can be illuminating.

The starting point is the realization that the possession of concepts need not be equated with an articulate, linguistic, and reflective awareness of them. This is a point McDowell makes on several occasions with respect to his claim in *Mind and world* that conceptual capacities are in operation all the way out in human perceptual experience. Our perceptual experience is different from that of animals in that we have the capacity to step back and give reasons for our beliefs about that experience or point to aspects of it. McDowell lays emphasis on the fact that we possess the *capacity* to do so, whether or not we exercise it, whether or not we have the concepts yet to do so (McDowell 2009b, 129ff). And it is this capacity which fundamentally changes the nature of human perceptual experience in comparison with that of animals—that we possess the capacity to do this means that our perceptual experience is conceptual. Being conceptual does not mean being linguistic; rather, conceptuality is the *condition of possibility* of experience being described in language (McDowell 2009b, 135ff). This allowance for a range of determinacy in the conceptuality of human experience (McDowell 2002, 283; McDowell 2000, 335) is taken further by Alva Noë through his enactive theory of perception as laid out in his book *Action in perception*. There Noë sides with McDowell on the conceptual nature of perceptual experience, but this agreement is based on a broader understanding

of “conceptual”. A basic argument Noë makes in his book is that perceptual experience is an *achievement*—we are not born with innate concepts which automatically and passively structure our perceptual experience. Rather, our perceptual abilities are enacted through the active interaction of brain, body, and environment. It is through embodied action that we develop our mature perceptual capacities and actively bring forth the concepts which structure our experience. The basis of this process is sensorimotor understanding.

Mere sensation, mere stimulation, falls short of perceptual awareness. [...] [F]or perceptual sensation to constitute experience—that is, for it to have genuine representational content—the perceiver must possess and make use of *sensorimotor knowledge*. To imagine a truly inert perceiver is to imagine someone without the sensorimotor knowledge needed to enact perceptual content (Noë 2004, 17).

Noë in turn associates this sensorimotor knowledge with a form of conceptuality. He argues that if to perceive you must have sensory stimulation you understand, the basic form of understanding is sensorimotor understanding. The perceptual concepts we come to articulate in language depend on this form of understanding and the skills associated with it, which in turn possess a form of conceptuality. Noë explains: “we should think of sensorimotor skills as themselves conceptual, or ‘proto-conceptual’ skills. Sensorimotor skills can play much of the role that concepts have been called on to play in Kantian theories of perceptual experience (such as McDowell’s)” (Noë 2004, 183). The upshot is that perceptual experience does depend on conceptual understanding, except that the

concepts in question are sensorimotor skills—“a special and primitive sort [of concept]” as Noë describes them (Noë 2004, 184).¹¹

Now the analogy of ethical experience to perceptual experience would proceed along similar lines. Just as contentful perceptual experience is something a human being achieves through the active development of sensorimotor skills, so too is an ethical second nature acquired through observation, action, and learning in a social setting. What is more, however, just as our development of perceptual concepts *depends* on these prior sensorimotor skills, so too is it the case that our eventual articulate understanding of ethical concepts such as virtues depends on this initial ethical learning process. And while this learning process follows a path that leads towards what we might call ethical conceptual determinacy, the starting point would be very different. First, in our infancy, we start out endowed with a first nature which is already selectively sensitive to a world of significances (e.g., in sensitivity to the encouragement or discouragement of primary

¹¹ This naturally raises the question as to how human perceptual experience is different from non-human animal perceptual experience if, as is surely the case, *both* depend on and share sensorimotor understanding. It might be argued, along McDowellian lines, that it is still the case that the fact that human beings eventually develop the capacity to reflect on their perceptual experience means that their perceptual experience is still different from that of animals at all stages of development. One of the first exponents of this way of conceiving the animal/human distinction was Johann Gottfried Herder, who, in his *Treatise on the origin of language*, argued that the very organization of the “soul-forces” (*Seelenkräfte*, possessed by both animals and humans) was different in human beings, placing them in a state of reflective awareness (*Besonnenheit*) from the outset. See Herder (2002), 79ff. While remaining committed to a contemporary equivalent of such a view, it should also be noted that McDowell has shown a certain openness with respect to the concept of conceptuality. I only have space to provide a few comments showing how this is the case. First, in his recent exchange with Hubert Dreyfus, he maintains that there is no reason “embodied coping skills” cannot be conceptual (i.e., “minded”, but not reflectively articulate) while at the same time preceding our acquisition of concepts “in the demanding sense that connects with rationality”. Second, it could plausibly be argued that an animal that flees danger has a concept of danger, as long as we recognize that this conceptuality is different from that of a rational animal like us who has the capacity to act on a reason like danger “*as such*” and thus to give it as a reason for action. (For an important recent discussion of conceptuality in animals see Hurford (2007), 11ff. Hurford defends animals’ possession of concepts *qua* “proto-concepts” whose evidence is regular behaviour and argues for an evolutionary succession from proto-concepts to prelinguistic concepts to linguistic concepts.) And third, McDowell has recently modified his position to allow for the content of an experience to be non-propositionally structured, but to include *intuitional* content that is capable of becoming conceptual and discursive. The upshot is that McDowell is prepared to have a more subtle conception of human “mindedness” or rationality, while remaining committed to the view that human experience is permeated with it. References for the three comments are, respectively, McDowell (2007a), 339ff, 345; McDowell (2009b), 133-34; McDowell (2009a), 258ff.

caregivers) via various natural impulses and emotions.¹² This innate sensitivity to significance is the basis on which we are initiated into ways of acting and feeling in certain situations that we learn to sense are appropriate, good, valued, etc. This occurs at a pre-reflective and prelinguistic level: our ability to act and feel in ways that are ethically appropriate is not from the outset accompanied by an ability to take a step back and reflect on our actions; nor do we have ethical concepts to describe them. A full discussion of this process would naturally involve the fields of moral psychology and moral and childhood development. The basic point that is relevant for our purposes, however, is that a full-blooded understanding of the ethical concepts we use as adults has its roots in our earliest pre-linguistic and pre-reflective learning and development. This ethical learning and the associated skills, which we can call pre-reflective ethical know-how, would, like sensorimotor skills, also be conceptual *qua* proto-conceptual. It is in fact actually easier to see this learning as proto-conceptual than perceptual experience since, unlike sensorimotor skills, we do not share it with non-human animals. Ethical learning, as described in this paper, is uniquely human.¹³

There is another way, however, in which what we may call pre-reflective ethical know-how is analogous to sensorimotor skills: both not only develop pre-reflectively, but this very fact is what makes them the constitutive background for other, more sophisticated abilities we learn at a later stage. Hubert Dreyfus has shown how various

¹² See, e.g., Trevarthen (1979, 1993, 2002); Reddy (2008), 73ff.; Nagy (2008).

¹³ This does not mean that non-human animals do not possess certain emotions and even a capacity for empathy as recent work in cognitive ethology demonstrates. Human animals share some of these emotions and capacities with non-human animals, and these form part of the foundation of our ethical second natures, but our capacity for (eventual) reflective conceptuality is the other part of the foundation and this we do not share with non-human animals. Some cognitive ethologists might argue, however, that just as we share proto-conceptual sensorimotor understanding with non-human animals (see note 11) that is in turn the necessary basis of our perceptual concepts, so too do we share with them not just emotions and a capacity for empathy but also a proto-conceptual pre-reflective ethical know-how which in us becomes the basis of our articulated ethical concepts. For a recent influential discussion of these issues see De Waal (1996).

forms of expertise—from chess, to nursing, driving, and playing baseball—involve moving beyond the rules one starts with and reaching a point of absorbed and egoless engagement in the activity, sometimes referred to as “flow” (Dreyfus 2006, 43-9; Dreyfus 2007, 352-65; Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1991, 229-50). In physical activities like sports, the kind of unreflective and automatic adjustments that are made in the course of the activity are examples of what Merleau-Ponty calls “motor intentionality” (Merleau-Ponty 1958, 127). The crucial difference, however, between forms of physical expertise and the sensorimotor skills and bodily know-how (which involves the various basic forms of motor control over our body such as moving one’s limbs purposefully, sitting, walking, moving around, manipulating things, etc.) we first develop is that the latter are not learned on the basis of rules.¹⁴ Moreover, it seems hard to think how an individual could acquire the vast and complex web of sensorimotor skills and bodily know-how that is learned by infants and toddlers through the application of rules, and this not because infants are obviously unable to understand any such rule but rather because their very basicness and interrelatedness seems to defy explicit action-guiding formulation. What seems rather to be the case is that this background web of sensorimotor skills and bodily know-how is constitutive of our ability to learn any kind of physical skill later on, which can in turn ideally sink to the same level of unreflectiveness and automaticity as the background web (with the important qualification that this expert activity is never truly egoless since without some level of self-awareness we would not be able to give any kind of phenomenological description of the activity afterwards (Thompson 2007, 315-17)).

¹⁴ Dreyfus is of course aware of primordial sensorimotor skills and bodily know-how and of how the acquisition of physical expertise depends on them (Dreyfus 1992); but instead of seeing the analogy between primordial sensorimotor skills + bodily know-how and pre-reflective ethical know-how as is done here, he focusses on the analogy between physical and ethical *expertise*.

Analogously, pre-reflective ethical know-how is not acquired on the basis of rules either.¹⁵ It forms, rather, the background that is constitutive of our ability later on to make sense of ethical rules and concepts and, relatedly, to think abstractly and critically about ethical and moral questions. The pre-reflective background never just gives way or cedes its place to mature moral reasoning. It is the very foundation on which such reasoning is at all possible. Critical ethical and moral reflection can only make sense on the basis of this pre-reflective background in which the integrated shaping of motivational and evaluative propensities first opens up the human being to the ethical space of reasons and endows her with an inner ethical sensitivity and *logos*. It is also hard to think how this inner sense of the ethical, which includes, for example, one's recognizing and taking pleasure in forms of generosity, honesty, or courage, could be learned on the basis of explicitly formulated rules or principles. On the contrary, it seems instead that one's acquisition of an ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how is in fact the ontogenetic condition of a developed capacity for ethical/moral reflection and reasoning, not to mention the ability to learn formulated ethical/moral rules. Newly learned rules can of course descend to the level of unreflective ethical expertise, but such expertise is different from *pre*-reflective ethical know-how in that 1) it is mediated by reflection whereas the latter is not, and 2) pre-reflective ethical know-how is the condition of possibility of unreflective ethical expertise. This discussion of the *analogies* between sensorimotor skills and pre-reflective bodily know-how on the one hand, and pre-reflective ethical know-how on the other, as well as their respective relationships to reflection and expertise, must be completed by the way in which the two are *connected*: pre-reflective ethical know-how structurally presupposes sensorimotor

¹⁵ This is a point which is also made by Shaun Gallagher (2007), 212ff.

skills and pre-reflective bodily know-how. In addition, as noted above, the formation of pre-reflective ethical know-how and an ethical second nature build on the innate selective sensitivity to significance that comes with first nature. All this can be usefully represented in a table:

PERCEPTION AND BODILY KNOW-HOW	ETHICS
(I) Groundwork comprising proto-conceptual sensorimotor skills and pre-reflective bodily know-how	(I) + first nature sensitivity to significance enables: (II) Groundwork comprising proto-conceptual pre-reflective ethical know-how and ethical second nature
<i>Development of reflection and language enables:</i>	<i>Development of reflection and language enables:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinate perceptual and bodily/motor concepts • Learning of physical skills via rules which can descend to level of unreflective expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinate ethical/moral concepts • Learning of ethical/moral rules which can descend to level of unreflective ethical expertise.

The analogy also extends, albeit only fictionally, to what one might call the *ideal* agent in each category. In the case of perception and bodily know-how, we noted that it is obvious that no one could learn how to perceive and develop the basic skills of moving in and navigating their way about the physical world on the basis of explicit rules. An ideal agent in this domain will have learned all these skills pre-reflectively and all their learned physical skills will reach the level of expertise. Similarly, pre-reflective ethical know-how and its associated inner sense of the ethical are the ontogenetic condition of the normal ethical agent, and the ideal ethical agent will be someone whose learned ethical/moral rules have all descended to the level of unreflective ethical expertise. For if someone who always and only acted in an outwardly ethical manner on the basis of the application of rules and principles alone would be unrecognizable to us as someone

whom we would call genuinely good or ethical, the opposite case of someone who always acted in an outwardly ethical manner on the basis of an inner and unreflective sense of what was the right thing to do would easily warrant the description genuinely good or ethical. Of course these are both unreal scenarios, not least because mature ethical action often requires deliberation, but the truth they reflect is that our baseline, so to speak, for judging ethical action or character is the ideal ethical agent. Even, for example, in the case of someone who takes a resolute stance against her own inveterate miserliness and tries her best to act as a generous person would, our respect and admiration for this person is premised on an implicit ideal of the spontaneously generous agent.

3. Ethical second nature and the ethical world

The discussion in the previous section, through its naturalistic way of speaking about ethical development, brings to the fore a theme of this paper which I would like to address more squarely in this final section: the connection between the natural and the normative. One of the objectives of McDowell's *Mind and world* is to show a path towards reconciling reason and nature (McDowell 1994, 86). A conception of nature which embraces "conceptual monism" such that only what is intelligible in natural scientific terms is permissible renders this impossible (McDowell 1996, 238). But if we can broaden our understanding of nature and naturalism to include the concept of second nature, we can show how the conceptual capacities associated with our rationality, while enjoying a certain autonomy insofar as they operate freely in their own sphere (Kant), are nonetheless simply an actualization of our particular nature as rational animals (Aristotle)

(McDowell 1994, 85). Although McDowell does consider the case of non-human animals and the way in which they too are “responsive to reasons” in their environments, he does this in the context of his primary focus, which is squarely on understanding human rationality or spontaneity. McDowell even calls for what he would see as “a fine branch of science” whose objective would be “to make the material constitution of living things with minds perspicuous, so as to render it intelligible that their lives exemplify mindedness” (McDowell 1996, 239).

Now there is another approach to this question which shares the same objective, but which comes at it from below, so to speak, and broadens the terms greatly: namely, the enactive approach in cognitive science.¹⁶ Enactivism is not concerned with human rationality or human life alone, but with life as a whole. In *Mind in life*, Evan Thompson explains that the book’s theme is the “deep continuity of life and mind” and that both share a set of organizational properties: in particular, “the *self-organizing* features of mind are an enriched version of the self-organizing features of life” (Thompson 2007, ix). The underlying thesis here is that all living systems entail both autopoiesis and cognition. Self-producing organisms interact with their environment in a manner that is determined by the needs of the organism. That interaction is governed by cognition whereby the organism takes in information about the environment via sensation, acts in response to it and in a way that affects its future sensation, and then new sensation in turn affects how it will act – cognition forms a dynamic loop in this way.¹⁷ An autopoietic organism thus *enacts* its world, which consists of the elements of the organism’s environment that have

¹⁶ The most important recent statement of the theory is to be found in Thompson (2007) which I draw on here.

¹⁷ For more on this wider understanding of cognition (which will strike philosophers unfamiliar with it as unconventional), see Maturana and Varela (1980), Bourguin and Stewart (2004), and Thompson (2007), 122ff., 157ff.

significance for it in its quest for survival, which includes preserving the boundary that is its body and all that goes on inside it. The case of motile bacteria is particularly illuminating (Thompson and Stapleton 2009, 24-5). The bacteria swimming in water will tumble around until they find the ideal orientation for exposure to and absorption of sugar and then will swim in the direction of the sugar, and away from salt, which is damaging to them. When they sense sugar levels decreasing, they begin the tumbling motion again until they sense a higher concentration and then begin swimming in a straight line towards it. At this most basic level one sees that the bacterium enacts a world. Things outside it take on significance (sugar, good; salt, bad; other elements, possibly indifferent) and it has a primordial form of albeit unself-aware consciousness and intentionality with respect to things in its world.¹⁸ The life of the bacterium cannot be understood in isolation from this world. It manifests cognition defined as “behaviour or conduct in relation to meaning and norms that the system itself enacts or brings forth on the basis of its autonomy” (Thompson 2007, 126). This example is meant to illustrate that life itself at each level entails a responsiveness to reasons and that cognition understood in this manner has the same structure across life forms.

The lesson here is that while human spontaneity or rationality of course introduces something qualitatively different from this, it must be seen as only one form of such responsiveness. McDowell doesn't deny this—he agrees that both humans and

¹⁸ This claim highlights one of the main motives of Thompson's account of enactivism, viz., to contribute to resolving the “so-called explanatory gap between consciousness and nature” (Thompson 2007, ix-x). The most obvious way in which it does this is by undermining the view that human consciousness simply springs onto the scene out of nowhere, like a ghost in the machine. Rather, the interiority of life, starting with the single cell, is a precursor to the interiority of consciousness (Thompson 2007, 225). At a recent conference presentation, entitled “Living Ways of Sense-making”, Thompson made clear that one of his guiding objectives in the book was to argue against a certain erroneous conception of nature that is presupposed in the mind/body gap view, i.e., that nature has no place for interiority prior to the rise of mind. Presented at the conference of the *Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, Montreal, November 4-6, 2010.

animals are responsive to reasons; but he focusses on how humans can further be responsive to reasons *as such*. What the enactive theory proffers, however, is a way to see this responsiveness as linked to others within the perspective of life as a whole. Rationality doesn't just suddenly spring onto the scene; it is dependent on (though not reducible to) the other forms of responsiveness of sensorimotor cognition and motor intentionality which we have in common with other lower level life forms. In a lively recent exchange, McDowell accused Dreyfus of promoting the "Myth of the Disembodied Intellect" because Dreyfus posits a fundamental difference between what he feels are the nonconceptual motor intentional coping skills we first acquire and the conceptual apparatus for thinking we later develop in order to rule out the possibility that anything "mental" is going on in the former. Now if we can, as suggested in the previous section, conceive of sensorimotor skills and bodily know-how as a proto-conceptual (and not *nonconceptual*) form of understanding, there opens up a clear path for reconciling spontaneity/rationality and the parts of our nature we share with non-human animals.¹⁹ What this amounts to is showing how the specifically human form of "responsiveness to reasons" is part of a wide range of forms of responsiveness to reasons that runs the gamut of life-forms, and how some of those more primitive forms are in fact constitutive of the uniquely human one. In the enactive view, there is an analogous view which sees life as involving "sense-making": "cognition is grounded on the sense-making activity of autonomous agents—beings that actively generate and sustain themselves, and thereby

¹⁹ Naturally, this requires seeing a connection between what McDowell would consider two different kinds of conceptuality. For while McDowell is ready to see embodied coping skills as conceptual in their own way, as realizing a practical concept of what *to do* (and not what to think) wherein the realization is precisely not reflectively or mentally directed (cf. McDowell 2007a, 339ff. and McDowell 2007b, 367ff.), the conceptuality of sensorimotor skills acquired in infancy and childhood are another matter. But if sensorimotor skills can be understood as analogous to McDowellian perceptual experiences (for on the enactive view they are of course intimately bound up together), it is plausible to see them as being capable of becoming discursive / conceptually articulated.

enact or bring forth their own domain of meaning and value” (Thompson and Stapleton 2009, 28). Showing how this is the case with motile bacteria is straight-forward. Human beings, however, are animals who have multiple domains of meaning and value and multiple ways of making sense of their world. Naturally, the ethical constitutes one such domain. In the remainder of this section, I would like to show, in a preliminary sort of way, how the enactive approach can enhance our understanding of how we become ethical agents.

The focus in this paper has so far been on how human beings acquire an ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how. A complete picture of how human beings become ethical agents would need to examine one further element in this process, part of which has already been encountered through the notion of “ethical fabric”. This element is what we can call the “ethical world”. A human being only develops an ethical second nature by being immersed in an ethical world which, allowing for varying degrees of heterogeneity and pluralism, consists of both the ethical fabric of a particular society or community as well as the agents whose actions and interactions continually reproduce it. It is here that our model acquires an enactive dimension. On the enactive view, organisms “enact or bring forth their own domain of meaning or value.” On the ethical level, human beings do just this: they collectively enact and re-enact the ethical fabric of their world each and every day through their actions and interactions. And they do so only on the basis of having first been immersed in that world themselves and having acquired ethical second natures as a result. The ethical world thus stands independently of its members, and yet concomitantly it also stands in a mutually constitutive relationship to them (whereas, in contrast, the physical environment on the basis of which an

organism enacts its world exists entirely independently of it). The ethical world is the necessary background for our initially pre-reflective acquisition and formation of an ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how. (The constitutive role and independence of this world is also reflected in McDowell's related conception of a shared language as a "repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom", which, he observes, "stands over against all parties to communication in it, with a kind of independence of each of them that belongs with its meriting a kind of respect", a respect which is "due to something to which we owe our being what we are" (McDowell 1994, 125, 184).) Naturally the ethical world is open to change and reform, but again, this process is necessarily carried out by individuals who have internalized that world themselves, being only possible on this basis, and is framed by the needs and demands of first nature. On the personal level, an individual acquires her ethical second nature by interacting or "coupling" (to use enactive terminology) with her world; she does not bring it forth herself. Whereas many of her perceptual capacities and sensorimotor skills naturally develop as a result of her interaction with the world *qua* catalyst, her ethical second nature, in terms of both its content and capacities, constitutively depends on the ethical world and the members of her community who represent it. Unlike perceptual capacities, ethical content and capacities are *acquired* from the members of the community. The ethical world that is continually enacted may exist entirely in the ethical second natures of its members, but it is no less real for it. Through it, individuals develop a form of uniquely human sense-making that exists on the intersubjective and social level.²⁰

²⁰ This kind of approach to ethics would be complementary to enactivist approaches to social cognition. See, e.g., Di Paolo, Rohde, and De Jaegher (2010). See also the discussion of the "constitutive role of

An enactive view of ethical second nature would have to provide an account of just *how* an ethical second nature is actually acquired. This would necessarily involve a wide range of disciplines beyond cognitive science, including moral philosophy, philosophy of the emotions, moral psychology, phenomenology and moral phenomenology in particular, and developmental psychology. A crucial element in this process, to mention just one, is empathy. Recent research on infant and childhood development has revealed just how astonishingly early an infant is able empathically to relate to other human beings, and how, only through joint attention scenes based on empathic relations, children are able to learn language.²¹ Empathy, rather than being primarily a capacity we learn from others, is in fact a condition of possibility of the social. Right from birth, infants demonstrate what Colwyn Trevarthen calls “primary intersubjectivity”, as manifested by the various forms of embodied and emotional relations between infant and mother (Trevarthen 1979) such as recognition of the mother’s face and voice and neonatal responses such as smiling, coo vocalizations, gaze approach/avoidance, and imitation (Trevarthen 2002, 166). From the outset, empathy plays a fundamental role in the process whereby an individual both *brings forth* and *acquires* a world.

A rough depiction of the picture of how human beings become ethical agents as we have assembled it would thus look something like the following. Human beings are born into a world of significances, one cross-section of which is the ethical world. This world owes its existence to the continuous enaction of it by human beings in a society.

sociology for agency and sense-making” (460) in Froese and Di Paolo (2009).

²¹ For an overview, see Thompson (2001). On joint attentional scenes see Tomasello (1999), 62ff., 96ff.

Through a complex and wide variety of empathic and later linguistic relations, individuals first acquire an ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how from members of their society who have internalized the ethical fabric of their world and thus already possess ethical second natures. On this basis and with the development of reflection, they acquire an explicit understanding of ethical and moral concepts and are able to learn new ethical/moral rules which can descend to the level of unreflective ethical expertise. Naturally this view needs to be complexified to correct for a too homogenous conception of the ethical world, but the fundamental structure and processes do not change as a result. Just as the bacterium makes sense of its environment by enacting a world, so too does the human being learn to make sense of her own, except on many more levels, enacting multiple and interrelated worlds. On the social level, the ethical world is what enables people to make sense of their own lives and their relations with others through a web of interrelated values, goods, virtues, rights, etc. which provide the essential framework for this sense-making.

The primary significance of this picture—whose gradual clarification has been the result of trying to work out the conditions and genesis of pre-reflective ethical know-how—if it is broadly right, lies in its corroboration of the project of ethical naturalism. It helps to make more perspicuous the connections between reason and nature, and, more specifically, between the natural and the normative. What made this possible was the broad understanding of the ‘ethical’ used throughout. The question naturally arises whether this picture also has significance for other areas of inquiry where this conception of the ethical is not dominant. For example, if our mature capacity for ethical agency constitutively depends on a complex ethical sensitivity that originates in the development

of pre-reflective ethical know-how in which our motivational and evaluative propensities are shaped, what implications does this have for a moral theory which isolates and focusses on the moral *qua* ‘right action’ and provides external reasons for such action? The answer to this question rests on how we understand the connections between the *genesis* of ethical identity and agency and our theoretical models of moral deliberation and decision-making. Whatever the answer to this question, the ramifications for moral psychology and studies of moral development are perhaps more evident. For while deontology and consequentialism clearly reflect the special status occupied by questions of right action in Western culture, it is not therefore also true that our ethical *formation* relates to such questions alone. Any adequate study of moral psychology or moral development must therefore take as its starting point not the narrow moral sense of right action, but rather the inner sensitivity to the ethical that is engendered by the acquisition of an ethical second nature and pre-reflective ethical know-how. It is only within *this* context that the narrow moral sense of right action is at all possible.

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