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BELIEVING ONESELF INTO EXISTENCE: A DYNAMIC APPROACH TO THE PUZZLE OF SELF-CONCEPTION

Abstract: Assuming the existence of ordinary human beings as a given, this article offers an assessment of the nature of the phenomenological self as a construct through which humans define each other and themselves based on their interdependent social roles. In order to address the question of what role does self-conception have in forming and constituting an individual's identity, I explore the puzzle of self-conception formulated by George Mead to determine the epistemic source of a human being's self-conception through different approaches to this puzzle. The focus of this article is the gap existing between the epistemic origin of self-conception and our ability to trace it back to first-hand experience.

Keywords: Self; self-conception; phenomenon

LA AUTO-CREENCIA COMO PASO HACIA LA EXISTENCIA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN DINÁMICA AL PROBLEMA DE LA AUTCONCEPCIÓN

Resumen: Asumiendo la existencia de los seres humanos ordinarios como algo dado, este articulo ofrece una evaluación de la naturaleza del self fenomenológico visto como un constructo a través del cual los humanos se definen unos a otros y a sí mismos en base a sus roles interdependientes. Con el fin de atender la cuestión de cuál es el rol de la autoconcepción en la formación y constitución de la identidad de un individuo, exploro aquí el enigma de la autoconcepción formulado por George Mead para determinar la fuente epistémica de la autoconcepción de un humano a través de distintas aproximaciones al enigma. El foco de este articulo es la brecha que existe entre el origen epistémico de la autoconcepción y nuestra habilidad de rastrear tal origen en

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nuestra experiencia de primera mano.
Palabras claves: Yo; autoconcepción, fenómeno

The belief that we are unique 'selves' is shown in the attitudes we assume in our daily activities and interchanges with others, as we carry ourselves in ways that exhibit a special importance we give to ourselves. There are several ways in which this conviction is shown in the behavior of a person. According to John Canfield, "[o]ne could know he remains so convinced by listening to him talk about himself, his personal problems ... or by observing him act in everyday life as if he believed he had a self that he valued and insisted other people value" (1990 129). It is as if we could infer from people's unreflective acts and utterances not just how they usually interact with others but, importantly, how they see themselves. Still, as we go about in our day-to-day lives under the impression that each of us is a unique human being, what good is such an impression for? Under normal circumstances, we would characterize the type of individual we are by considering our psychological and physical properties (see Strawson *Individuals* 388-397), and, moreover, by assessing our way of life (see Wittgenstein, *Investigations*). We appear to have not just an instinctive, pre-theoretical understanding of the class of creatures we are but also seem to possess a natural grasp on our identity. Roughly, this intuitive understanding of ourselves would amount to a 'self-conception' emerging from the handle we have on our particular way of life. And yet, such a basic understanding we have of ourselves remains utterly enigmatic, at least in respect to our ability to logically account for the epistemic origins of self-conception.

Ironically, it seems clear that having self-conception is an indispensable feature of our lives; without self-conception, it can be said that we would hardly comprehend our place in society and the range of opportunities available to us. But how do we even become acquainted with how we see ourselves? Assuming a conceptualist framework for the ontological status of 'self', what is the epistemic origin of this notion? We can focus on the status of existential beliefs about ourselves while disregarding the metaphysical issue about who we 'truly' are, as these are separate problems. Thus, putting aside the ontological status of ordinary human beings which, as a given, is assumed to entail a logical primitive conception of such individuals (Strawson *Individuals* 389), the issue I set out to address here is the nature and utility of the phenomeno-

logical self. This problem is intimately tied to a puzzle resting at the heart of the concept of 'self-conception': that is, how is an individual's self-conception supposed to play a key role in their daily affairs and bestow them an identity if they cannot even trace their self-concept back to a primitive conception, however ethereal this might be? The issue to be tackled in this article can thus be formulated in terms of the following baseline question: *what is the use of a notion of oneself?* By addressing the practical problem of the basic utility of self-conception to human beings, it will be possible to offer a treatment of the puzzle of self-conception.

1. Seeking Oneself: A Static Formulation of the Puzzle of Self-Conception

At first glance, it seems that we need not know whether the first-personal pronoun actually refers to anything in order to establish the origin and utility of our self-conception. We can start by focusing on the notion we already have of ourselves and then ask whether it is formed from a potential impression of ourselves, given that such a focus does not necessarily presuppose understanding how 'I' works. Then again, it should not be theoretically possible for a human being to develop a self-image informed by first-hand experience of themself given that, naturally, one can't see oneself neither as an object of perception nor as a subject of experience like in an out-of-body experience where one perceives oneself as an observing subject. For how could we ever directly perceive the person we are and attain by such means an impression of ourselves? If I can only immediately perceive parts of my body, how can these fragmentary impressions be put together to form my own self-conception? Since the development of my self-conception would follow parameters set by my prior sense of who I am, these parameters would not be useful—they would have to be as arbitrary as the conception I end up making of myself, which would beg the question of how such an image of myself could be of any service to me. Ultimately, how is each one of us supposed to know who they are if they cannot experience themself as they perceive others and create and image of them?

Mead formulates this puzzle in the following terms: "[h]ow can an individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself?" (1972 139) He thinks of this as "the essential psychological problem of selfhood or of self-consciousness" (139). This is a fundamental problem with our capacity to ever form a self- conception, which leads to

the question of how did we ever become self-conscious. Based on the assumption that "[w]e can distinguish very definitely between the self and the body" (136), the issue is how could we come up with a notion of ourselves, not of our bodies, since these are not equivalent. That they do not amount to the same thing is clear from the fact that "[t]he body can be there and can operate in a very intelligent fashion without there being" a notion of oneself "involved in the experience" of our own body (136). Mead explains this by saying that:

> [i]t is perfectly true that the eye can see the foot, but it does not see the body as a whole. … There are, of course, experiences which are somewhat vague, but the bodily experiences are for us organized *about* the self. The foot and hand belong to the self. We can see our feet, especially if we look at them from the wrong end of an opera glass, as strange things which we have difficulty in recognizing as our own. The parts of the body are quite distinguishable from the self. We can lose parts of the body without any serious invasion of the self. …The body does not experience itself as a whole, in the sense in which the self in some way enters into the experience of the self. (136)

Mead initially formulates this puzzle from a 'static' perspective by pointing out how a person seeking to *contemplate* directly his whole body would fail to attain self-awareness. Mead emphasizes one side of this paradox, namely, the case of a person failing to become an immediate 'object' of his own awareness: "the self as an object does not enter [experience]" (137). The difficulty consists in the fact that a human being cannot completely and immediately perceive themself, or else enter in contact with themself, so as to acquire an image of *who* they are. Therefore, how can we have an operative conception of ourselves if we do not have enough resources for coming up with this notion, given that we cannot become objects of our own awareness? Assuming that a person becomes self-aware by perceiving parts of their body would beg the question, as they would apparently have no basis for inferring that these are parts of *themselves* (136).

Turning now to the other side of this paradox, while a person is trying to directly and completely perceive themself, they might infer that they exist from the fact that there must be someone doing the perceiving. But on what basis could they infer this? While a person perceives, they should not be able to perceive themselves, such that there would be nothing in their own aware-

ness from which they could suppose that there must be a corresponding perceiver. Indeed, there is no perceiving subject *to be perceived*; one cannot, so to speak, step back and see oneself as a subject. Subsequently, the self as a subject cannot enter experience, either. The assumption that we can infer from our present experience that there must be an experiencing subject implies what Canfield refers to as the 'dual aspect' of consciousness: "there is the item we are aware of and, at the same time, an awareness of being aware" (1990 29). He explains how this dual aspect leads to an infinite regress, since there would have to be an infinite amount of perceivers to support the awareness of the original individual attempting to perceive themself: "if there is self-awareness, then the self must be a part of consciousness, and that ... seems unacceptable," because it "gives rise to an infinite chain of awareness of x, awareness of awareness of x, awareness of awareness of awareness of x, and so on" (31). Thus, since from this point of view a person would have to become self-aware by virtue of becoming a part of their own consciousness, self-awareness should be impossible.

As a result, since no one would ever be justified in taking themselves in either as an object or subject of their own awareness, it looks like we cannot explain our self-consciousness, let alone the key properties of our self-conception. Nonetheless, in the world of life, we claim to know who we 'truly' are and assume to know how others see us. From what we have said, though, it rather looks like can't know who we are. And even if we have a somehow acquired a notion of ourselves, it could hardly be an accurate one because we have no objective standard of comparison in contrast to which we could identify a 'subject of experience' in experience.

I will now turn to present relevant traditional approaches to the puzzle of self-conception, which are seen as 'static' as opposed to 'dynamic'; the latter category is usually linked in turn to modern approaches to the puzzle that will also be explored in this essay.

2. Static Approaches to the Puzzle of Self-Conception

Purism is a tradition that has paved the way for static approaches to the notion of 'I'. This doctrine consists of "an appealing conception of I as purified of the demanding features and requirements which make other terms so complicated. A 'simple rule' gives its meaning. No identification is necessary in central cases. Each use is logically secured against failure" (de Gaynesford

2006 28). A classic exponent of this tradition is Descartes, for whom 'I' is a term whose referent is guaranteed against failure provided a simple rule for its use. It is thus that there cannot be a doubt without a doubter, a thought without a thinker (1997 36), from which one could infer one's own existence (36). Accordingly, we could interpret his proof of the existence of the self (36) as implying that it would be practically impossible to conceive of a perception without a perceiver.

However, as we begin to look for what 'I' denotes, we stumble right away with the issue of whether this term refers at all, let alone to a person or a sub-personal entity. Lichtenberg claims that this term does not refer, arguing in turn that 'the self' must be a grammatical illusion arising from the assumption that 'I' has a substantive use (1971 412). We assume, in effect, a correlative reference for 'I' in the world as we utter it in diverse contexts, and we call this reference 'myself' or 'the self'. Lichtenberg suggests, though, that the first-person term does not refer at all because it works basically like 'it' as used in "It rains," which is a device of language not meant to denote in those cases an object (412). Yet, even if we do not postulate the existence of an object denoted with 'it' i to make sense of that statement, we tend to think that 'I' has a referent in the world. To avoid misunderstandings, he recommends reformulating Descartes' proof of the existence of the self as follows: "[w]e should say, 'It thinks,' just as we say, 'It thunders.' Even to say *cogito* is too much if we translate it with 'I think.' To assume the 'I,' to postulate it, is a practical need" (412). Lichtenburg's suggestion is thus to interpret the necessity attributed to Descartes's proof of the self as practical, since we must assume out of necessity a placeholder for 'I' given the way our language functions.

Since we have defined a narrower scope for our inquiry into the concept of 'I' in terms of a phenomenological approach to self-conception, we need not address the concern of whether the first-person term actually points to an object in the universe in order to account for the utility of our self-conception. So far, we have developed a preliminary basis for questioning the idea that 'I' always refers, which will later serve us in lifting the hold that static perspectives on the puzzle of self-conception tend to have on us. Keeping this in mind, let us examine some prominent static approaches to the puzzle of self-conception.

Hume's Quest for the Self as an Object

Hume famously introspected to find a potential impression in his experience that could explain how he got his idea of 'I'. His intent was indeed to track down the origin of his idea of himself. He can be seen attempting to perceive himself as an object by assuming a contemplative approach, as he inspects the current perceptions in his stream of consciousness without finding anything that he could properly call 'myself':

> when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. (2005 165)

The fact that his attempt was futile is not really surprising; after all, it is a given that there is no actual object we could adequately name "myself" which enters our immediate awareness in its entirety. There was no such impression in his experience or else a principle of association of ideas he could identify with himself — nor could there ever be one, for what would such an impression or principle have to look like if we are to properly call it 'myself'? For the sake of argument, let us assume that 'the self' is something that could in principle be perceived—i.e., something that could impress our understanding one way or another—whether it manifests itself as an impression or as a cluster of impressions. Still, what Hume showed is that we are only presently aware of a flux of impressions or perceptions of our own state of mind, and never experience ourselves as *complete* objects of our own awareness. We are only conscious of concomitant fragments or episodes that he calls 'impressions', but never experience these fragments together as a complete object we could think of as 'the self'.

Furthermore, there is nothing we can *directly* perceive which is worth calling 'the self'. Canfield explains that Hume's endeavor "was to gain experiential awareness of his self. Only if he could have such a direct, immediate awareness would there be a source in our experience for the idea of the self" (1990 32). But, since there is no such source, he had to conclude that there is no I. The point is that Hume could never have achieved his aim. The reason why this is not possible has to do with how we normally come into contact with objects in nature, which excludes the possibility of encountering ourselves. It is part of how we normally experience objects or enter in contact with

them in the world that we cannot experience ourselves the same way or else be ourselves objects to contact. By definition, our immediate experience cannot admit any object to be directly aware of in its entirety that we could properly conceive of as 'ourselves'.

The Subject as a Condition for the Unity of Experience

Meanwhile, there have been accounts meant to explain how we can conceive of ourselves as subjects of our own experience. For instance, Kant speaks of the 'transcendental subject of experience' as a condition implied in the acquisition of organized, coherent experience. Still, unlike Descartes, he does not assert the self's existence in a substantive way, since he just infers its formal existence. For Kant, we have to assume the existence of a transcendental reference for 'I' even if this entity is never experienced, as it constitutes a condition for the possibility of experience (1984 163). The reference of 'I'—this is, the *noumenal* self—is 'transcendental' insofar as it has no referent in time and space, but it is conceived as a requirement for intelligible experience insofar as the idea of a 'self' must accompany all of our perceptions for these to be obtained (166-167). As a consequence, even if he regards in the end 'the self' as a transcendental illusion, the notion of 'I' still has a use to the extent that it accounts for how our experience is attained in a unified way.

However, Kant does not explain the way in which this notion of a transcendental subject helps synchronize the data we retrieve from our senses. And without having a function in organizing our experience, it looks like we have no reason to hold on to it. In this way, Canfield claims that "[t]he transcendental I is a trick" (1992 43). He argues that if this entity does not lie in space and time, it is not clear how the existence of this subject in a "transcendental" sphere, being "forever devoid of contact with things in real space," can do any "explanatory work in how things are organized" in space and time (43). In effect, after close examination it is not clear that this concept of 'I' does the work that Kant wants it to:

> [t]he only thing it is called on explicitly to explain—the "unity of experience"—it cannot. The explanation is supposed to look something like this: "That this sight occurs simultaneously with this sound is explained by the fact that they are both experienced by a something-I-know-not-what which is itself forever beyond experience." Such an explanation is only the appearance of one. (43)

Although we cannot find the thing itself in the world denoted with 'I', we still assume that we are aware of a phenomenological 'I', if only implicitly, as the consequence of having intelligible experience. Nevertheless, this supposition is unwarranted. Just as we cannot experience what is to be strictly speaking called 'I' because it lies outside space and time, we have no evidence of the workings of a phenomenological 'I', not even indirectly. It is true that we possess the idea of an 'I'. But then, when we try to explain its origin, we arrive at a dead end: if the 'I' is supposed to synthetize our intuitions into organized experience, then it must be part of our world (that is, it must lie within space and time). Yet, if we cannot experiment it, it should not show up in any way, not even implicitly as a condition for our experience. Thereby, if the reference to a subject beyond our world cannot not explain what we think of as the unitary character of our experience, where can our self-conception acquire its content, and what would be its purpose? Therefore, from Kant's static perspective, it is not obvious how the phenomenon of a 'self' could ever emerge (even tactilely) and become a content to be asserted in propositions involving 'I'.

Wittgenstein's Conception of the Metaphysical Subject

Wittgenstein's claims in the *Tractatus* about the self can be interpreted from a Kantian point of view, whereby in a way it makes sense to speak of the 'I' despite the fact that, whatever the use of this notion might be, its referent must not lie in the world. But unlike Kant, he does not give the concept of 'I' a role in synthetizing our experience: "All experience is world and does not need the subject" (*Notebooks* 89e). Meanwhile, he denies the notion according to which "[t]he I is ... an object" (80e), this is, something we could confront (89e). The interesting issue for him is rather why the 'philosophical I' or 'self' does not enter experience as a subject, although it is somehow implied in it:

> [t]he philosophical I is not the human being, not the human body or the human soul with the psychological properties, but the metaphysical subject, the boundary (not a part) of the world. The human body, however, my body in particular, is a part of the world among others, among beasts, plants, stones, etc., etc. (82e)

Again, if the 'philosophical I' consists solely of the limits of the world, "[w]here in the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?" (80e) This question is senseless insofar as the metaphysical subject is not an entity to be

encountered in the world. As a matter of fact, we cannot get acquainted with 'the self'—or, according to our interpretation, with the phenomenon of *who* we are—anymore than we can infer from observing something "in the visual field" that "it is seen from an eye" (80e). He thus argues that the self as a metaphysical subject cannot enter experience as an event, from which it follows that there is no phenomenon of a 'self' that can be perceived: "it is true that I do not see the subject" (86e).

The notion of 'I', though, still plays a key role for Wittgenstein, because "the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence" (79e). Thus, even though "there is no knowing subject" (86e), in another sense there *must* be a metaphysical subject. The limits of the world can be shown in meaningful uses of language, despite the fact that we cannot state what these limits *are*. These boundaries do not make up for a 'thing' we can rightly call 'I', since in the end it is reduced to an "extensionless point" (*Tractatus* § 5.64). As the metaphysical subject is not *in* the world but constitutes a precondition for its existence, it is both true that "in an important sense there is no subject" (§ 5.631) and that there has to be such a subject if the world is ever going to be experienced. It can thus be argued that Wittgenstein adopts in the *Tractatus* a *static* approach to the issue of the self, which is inherently problematic as it refers to addressing the puzzle of self-conception. The question is whether we can properly characterize *our notion* of 'I' by appealing to a metaphysical subject, namely, something that is "not a part of our world" (§ 5.641). Indeed, how could something that presumably does not exist in space and time impact in any degree the way we see the world and how we conceive of ourselves (i.e., the human being) to the extent that, without it, there would be no world for us to experience? However, if the metaphysical subject amounts to the limits of the world but, yet we cannot say what such limits are, then this characterization of the self would beg the question regarding the origins of a human being's self-conception. That is, how could our self-conception obtain any content from a subject that does not exist in the realm of facts? At least in respect to the origins of our self-conception, it can be said that Wittgenstein's concept of self as a metaphysical subject comes down to an unnecessary postulate, because it does not really explain how we have acquired the former—nor, to be sure, it is meant to explain this. Thereby, such an appeal to the metaphysical subject could not contribute to explaining the role of our

self-conception. For even if we think of the *I* as the limits of our world, it is not clear that *that* is actually how we conceive of ourselves.

3. The Fundamental Unviability of Static Approaches

We have seen ways of undermining static responses to the puzzle of self-conception. Whether it is in respect to the 'self' considered as an object or a subject of experience, we cannot account for the origin and use of self-conception by appealing to an immediate perception of ourselves. I suggest that this puzzle is largely the product of how it was initially formulated. Specifically, I have argued that the paradox arises because we are trying to subvert a basic condition that must be satisfied for perception to ever occur: namely, it must be mediated. Perceiving the world through some channel (i.e., through a given sense) constitutes a 'natural barrier', so to speak, which is entailed in the very act of sensing. In effect, we must use some sense or another in order to become aware of anything. However, to contemplate ourselves directly and completely we would have to exceed such a barrier, thus undermining the very possibility of experiencing anything. Consequently, the puzzle of self-conception could not be solved with the use of a static treatment anymore than we could, say, run over our own shadows. Becoming aware of oneself either as an object or a subject would have to be excluded from the very act of perceiving, given that this exclusion is precisely a necessary condition for the existence of any perception.

What is problematic about static approaches in general is that they address this puzzle from a perspective that is largely distanced from and unaffected by the world. Ironically, instead of finding in such 'distance' enough space to perceive ourselves either as objects or subjects, we end up missing the trees and the forest altogether. While we try to immediately perceive ourselves through a contemplative approach, we unwillingly insulate ourselves from the rest of world, from the activities and interactions that are part of people's ordinary lives, such that the origin of our self-conception becomes a mystery. Moreover, by isolating ourselves from the context in which we are already situated, we are prone to think of consciousness as occurring in a private realm. We are led to believe that our awareness is a phenomenon that only we could ever witness, thus implying that self- consciousness, too, is an essentially 'private' event. In this way, we make it impossible for us to explain how did we ever become self-aware, as this would require of an infinite amount of

perceivers to explain our original awareness (Canfield 1990 29). We are then separating the person from his activities and interactions with other members of the community despite the fact that, as will be seen, it is due to them that we come up with a self-conception.

Modifying the Approach to the Puzzle of Self-Conception

I argue that a satisfactory way to tackle this puzzle is to adopt a dynamic approach. From a static perspective, the puzzle is intractable insofar as a contemplative human being has no way of becoming an object of his own awareness or else a subject to be accurately described as "aware" of himself. On the other hand, from a dynamic standpoint a person is already conceived as situated in a sociocultural context, engaging in ordinary activities and interacting with other members of a community. In this sense, the individual is not insulated from his ordinary life: he is not in a privileged, neutral position from where he can judge what occurs in the world with the dispassionate attitude a contemplating human being. Adopting a dynamic stance would thus involve rejecting the idea of a contemplative subject who has a freestanding perspective. Rather, he always sees some aspect of the world and environment from a specific angle; this is, with a set of interests and necessities in mind. This means that a person cannot just passively contemplate the world from an unbiased viewpoint to pick out the source of his self-conception by pointing to some potential cluster of impressions, ideas, or facts, or else fail in this attempt. On the contrary, from a dynamic stance a person's self-conception is not necessarily understood as a cluster of visual images or impressions. Instead, it consists of diverse attitudes and beliefs he has about himself. From this point of view, the individual is not separated from the social interconnections that shape his ordinary life. He is seen as a constitutive part of the forms of life around him and not just a passive bystander, which further entails that he cannot be the sole author of the notion he has of himself. This notion is molded in function of how others see him depending on the roles he plays in society.

Henceforth, by considering our self-conception as originating and being shaped in the context of the cultural and social background in which we are already situated, we can avoid many difficulties that are inherent to static approaches to the puzzle of self-conception. If we understand it this way, the basis of our self-conception does not appear as perplexing because it arises

during exchanges with other human beings from which it acquires its content. I will now propose a dynamic approach as a means to solving, if not dissolving, the puzzle of self-conception so that an intractable problem from a static perspective may receive a satisfactory resolution. After studying some relevant accounts of this class of approach, I will advance what I shall identify as the Two- Moment View to account for the use of self-conception. I will end by complementing this account with Mead's conception of the 'self', which in turn will help us tackle the puzzle of self- conception.

4. The Role of Self-Conception: A Dynamic Approach

A way of responding to Hume's static approach to the puzzle of self-conception consists in affirming that we become directly aware of ourselves when we willfully engage in action. James Cornman claims that "[w]hat Hume overlooked ... is that self-awareness comes primarily, if not exclusively, when I am active; it is not some object I find in introspection" (1970 178). He proposes a dynamic account whereby "[s]omeone is aware of himself when he is active, as in willing, just as surely as he is aware of any idea" (178). Though not exclusively, he argues that we become objects of our own experience as long as we behave in function of 'acts of will' (178). The actions through which we become self-aware are those in which our intentions are consciously carried out, for it is thus that we become aware of ourselves as agents of those actions. Canfield makes this point by saying that "to be aware of myself, I must do something; I will then be able to be aware of myself performing this or that act of will" (1990 33). Therefore, when we undergo these 'acts of will' we become active individuals as our behavior subsequently embodies our intentions.

Even so, consider the fact that while we (willfully) run to catch a bus that is about to leave us behind, we seem not to be self-aware in the way Cornman suggests, or at least we do not possess a notion of ourselves in accordance to which our actions unfold and that is at stake in this activity (Cf Sartre 2005 48-49). Perhaps deliberating or thinking too much about what is happening when having to suddenly act in the moment could lead to hesitation, which could diminish our chances of getting on the bus. If we get distracted because we are worrying about missing the bus, we may slip and miss it altogether. In this case, it is not clear that we entertain or presuppose a notion of ourselves or that such a notion, presumably involved in the mentioned hypothesis, would

be useful to our practical aim of catching the bus. Incidentally, if we suppose that a person's rushing to catch a bus is impacted by their act of will, the previous case constitutes a counterexample to the emergence or usefulness of a notion of oneself in the context of acting in the moment. For what is the ontological status of these 'acts of will'? That is, "[w]here are the acts of will or instances of "willing" Cornman alluded to?" (Canfield 1990 34) We are mainly looking here for the relative contribution of these 'acts of will' to the task of securing a self-conception but, as Canfield points out, they are "mythological," as "invisible as the alleged self performing them" (34). It is not obvious that a notion of oneself comes up primarily while acting consciously, since one has no corresponding experience of an 'act of will' as having any connection to how one behaves. If there is a sense in which a person's self-conception plays a role in this context, it is not explained by appealing to a person's experience of themself as an agent if this involves 'acts of will' on their part. It rather looks like we need not postulate a 'self' any more than we need to appeal to 'acts of will' to explain intentional action, since we can successfully interpret human action ordinarily, under regular circumstances, without having to appeal to either concept. Consequently, I will pursue a different path forward to assess whether a notion of ourselves emerges in action and if there is any use to it for, as just seen, it's not obvious that a concept of ourselves emerges and operates in ordinary actions such as running to catch a bus.

Acting Without a Sense of Self

If the way we see ourselves is not apparent while being active, to what extent can we say that appealing to a 'self' helps to account for the actions we undertake? Hubert Dreyfus has argued otherwise, claiming that many times the notion we have of ourselves does not play a role when we are absorbed coping with world and environment. Following Sartre (Cf. 2005 48-49), he suggests that when we are running to catch a bus, a deliberative subject is not present in our awareness whatsoever. An underlying notion of a 'self' motivating our actions would indeed not be found in this and many other instances, since it is precisely without such a notion that we excel when performing multiple tasks.

Dreyfus proposes this view by arguing that, when experts optimally cope by immediately reacting to the incoming series of solicitations or, in other words, when they perform 'in the flow', a "thinking subject" neither appears

in their awareness nor does it prescribe their action (Dreyfus 2007 358). He adduces the case of a pilot constantly guided by solicitations of the aircraft and instantly responding to them. In such a case, Dreyfus contends that a 'thinking subject' is absent because the pilot is apparently not monitoring or reflecting on his behavior, such that the lack of concomitant thought processes on his part means that he is coping properly (358). It follows from this his idea that when acting in the flow one has no sense of oneself: "[w]hen one is bodily absorbed responding to solicitations there is no thinking subject" (358). As I interpret Dreyfus, the notion of a 'thinking self' that could otherwise interrupt our natural coping with the world disappears with the type of detached premeditation that it entails. This does not imply, though, that there is no longer an ordinary human being, for even if there is not an operative concept of a 'thinking subject' in this type of cases, there is still evidently a human being acting in the world of life. In Dreyfus' view, it is rather the thinking subject that does not appear over and above the person. Therefore, as an awareness of a 'thinking self' loses its grip through the absorption of an ordinary person in his daily affairs (like when running to catch a bus) or in cases where experts such as a pilot perform at their best, it can be said that many times successful action does not demand a self-conception. He thus thinks that once we become competent in the diverse tasks we come across, we have the freedom of choosing to immerge ourselves in them in a way that involves renouncing to another human freedom, namely, the ability to occasionally step back and reflect on our behavior to understand what is off about it and how we can enhance it. Even so, for him what differentiates the expert from the merely competent and the apprentice is that the former *voluntarily* submerges in the current of responses and reactions to solicitations (355), even though this requires giving up a significant degree of conscious reflection: "[f]ollowing Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I claim that the freedom intermittently to step back and reflect presupposes a truly pervasive human freedom. Unlike mere animals, we have a freedom not to exercise our freedom to step back but rather to let ourselves be involved" (355).

Acting with a Sense of Oneself

An opposite position to Dreyfus' can be maintained by arguing that a concept of oneself is always involved in action, assuming that action is conceptually charged in its entirety. A prominent exponent of this view is

John McDowell, who, by inserting himself in the Aristotelian and Kantian tradition, conceives of rationality and deliberation as the human freedom *per excellence* and, thus, as its specific difference. In effect, he presupposes an Aristotelian notion of the human being as he conceives this individual as a rational and speaking animal (*Mind and World* 88-89). Meanwhile, he adopts a Kantian approach insofar as he finds in the notion we have of ourselves a precondition for deliberate action. This view follows from his idea that mindedness is pervasive in the world in that it goes 'all the way down'. Even in the context of constantly coping with the world, he believes that there is always rationality involved since we must deliberate our way about in the world. The pervasive nature of conceptuality in experience is thus shown in that "... thinking does not stop short of facts. The world is embraceable in thought," as the latter "constitutes a background without which the special way in which experience takes hold of the world would not be intelligible" (33). Therefore, he follows Kant in his maxim whereby "[t]houghts without content are empty, [whereas] intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant qtd. in McDowell *Mind and World* 87).

Rationality is also always involved in action inasmuch as human nature "is largely second nature" (87), given that "the way our lives are shaped by reason is natural" (88). Thereby, he reinterprets Kant's maxim from a dynamic stance applying it to action, as he goes on to say that "intentions without overt activity are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not extensions of agency" (89). In order to convey this point, he introduces the notion of education (*Bildung*) as actualizing "... potentialities we are born with" (88). He thus wants to "accommodate" Kant's maxim by further claiming that, insofar as "experiences are actualizations of our sentient nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated," then, "intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated" (90). This involves, though, distancing to an extent from Kant as he rather sees in the Aristotelian definition of the human being as a rational animal a source of reasonability:

> we can return to sanity if we recapture the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal, with its rationality part of its animal, and so natural, being, not a mysterious foothold in another [interior] realm. The way to do that is to realize that our nature is largely second nature. (91)

The importance McDowell gives to the social aspect of rationality is seen in the way he characterizes his naturalism by appeal to Wittgenstein (95), who thinks of "[g]iving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat ... as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (*Philosophical Investigations* § 25). McDowell thus conceives of his view as aligned with what Wittgenstein calls "our natural history," namely, "the natural history of creatures whose nature is largely second nature. Human life, our natural way of being, is already shaped by meaning" (*Mind and World* 95).

With this set of assumptions as a backdrop, McDowell characterizes his notion of 'self' by equipping Kant's 'Transcendental Subject' with the concept of a second nature (99), thereby redefining it in a way closer to Aristotle's concept of the human being. With Kant's Transcendental Subject in mind as "accompanying all my representations" (see Kant 1984 162), McDowell thinks of 'self-consciousness' as something that "can hold together, in a single survey, states and occurrences that are temporally separated; they are conceived as belonging to the career of a continuant, a thinking thing" (*Mind and World* 100). Significantly, this is possible without assuming that self-consciousness conforms to "a criterion of identity" (100), for the literal persistence of a substance to be named with 'I' is not presupposed when employing this expression: "[t]o put the point in Kant's terms: in the "I think" that can "accompany all my representations", the reference of the "I" is understood as reaching into the past and the future" without there having to be a "persistent referent for the "I" in the "I think"" (100). Therefore, for McDowell self-awareness does not imply a thorough account of personal identity because an individual need not keep track of the literal persistence of a substance picked out with 'I' in order to successfully conceive of the career of the human being he is: "Continuity of 'consciousness' involves no analogue to ... keeping track of the persisting self that nevertheless seems to figure in its content" (100).

That said, unlike Kant, he does not describe the notion of 'self' in a exclusively formal and subjective way: "[w]e can say that the continuity of "consciousness" is intelligible only as a subjective take on something that has more to it that "consciousness" itself contains: on the career of an objective continuant, with which the subject of a continuous "consciousness" can identify itself" (101). For McDowell the concept that an individual has of himself has also an objective value capable of being appreciated from a third-person

perspective, in the context of which the path of a person becomes intelligible from his first-person point of view:

> [e]ven 'from within', the subjective take is understood as situated in a wider context . . . The wider context makes it possible to understand that the first person, the continuing referent of the 'I'" in the "I think" that can "accompany all my representations", is also a third person, something whose career is a substantial continuity in the objective world" (102)

It is thus that, whilst distancing himself from Kant's formalistic conception, McDowell nevertheless characterizes his notion of the 'self' as an essentially self-conscious animal. The problem he sees with Kant's Transcendental Subject is that an appeal to "subjective continuity ... as part of what it is for experience to bear on objective reality, cannot be equated with the continuing life of a perceiving animal," for it ends up shrinking the continuity of this life to "a mere point of view: something that need not have anything to do with a body, so far as the claim of interdependence is concerned" (102). Thus, as a consequence of reinterpreting Kant's notion, he understands this 'self-conscious animal' as the ordinary self: "If Kant's connection between self-awareness and awareness: is for us to "regain the idea that the subjects of our experience are ordinary selves, then the merely formal persistence of the I, in the 'I think' that can 'accompany all my representations', had better be only an abstraction from the ordinary substantial persistence of the living subject of experience" (103). By this he means that this "had better not be a free-standing" idea—namely, something "we might hope to build on in reconstructing the persistence of the ordinary self" (103). We can thus take McDowell as contextualizing Kant's notion of the 'self' in the ordinary experience of living persons. This is clear from the fact that he understands the 'self' as taking part in the world and not merely as an entity causing a body to act in diverse ways (91 footnote). Accordingly, the notion we have of ourselves therefore cannot be a free-standing idea.

5. The Partial Use of Self-Conception: Two Types of Human Freedom

Focusing now on the utility of self-conception as a key point of disagreement, it might seem clear that Dreyfus and McDowell's differ as to the role of self-conception and rationality in human life. However, the exact way in which their views are opposed on this subject is not quite obvious. Accor-

ding to Dreyfus our conceptual capacities are instruments that can potentially interfere with our constant coping, which rather entails being absorbed in everyday life so as to immediately respond to solicitations of the world and environment, given the available affordances (2007 355). This explains Dreyfus' hostility to McDowell's all-embracing conception of language and mindedness, as he further accuses him of being subject to the so-called "myth of the pervasiveness of the mental" (355). He is not particularly attracted to the Gadamerian terminology used by McDowell to refer to rationality as a "free, distanced orientation" (354). Dreyfus indicates that rationality thus viewed leads to poor engagement, as "we are no longer able to act in the world" (354). Nonetheless, he concedes to McDowell that reflection in this detached fashion is a sort of human freedom. But he does not see this as our most relevant freedom since, although it is presumably found only amongst humans, reflection is not usually traced among human experts when successfully performing tasks: "I agree with McDowell that we have a freedom to step back and reflect that nonhuman animals lack, but I don't think this is our most pervasive and important kind of freedom" (354). According to him, when human experts perform at their prime, they need not reflect on their actions as they take form, and ultimately it is not through an appeal to such reflection that they account for the success of their performances. Thus, since they do not step back and revise their own capacities while they act, reflection becomes unrequired to proper functioning.

We also observed that Dreyfus claims not only that reflection understood as a 'distanced orientation' is unnecessary to action but also that it can work in its detriment: "when we are absorbed in everyday skillful coping, we have the capacity to step back and reflect but ... we cannot exercise that capacity without disrupting our coping" (354). Dreyfus' problem with (the overuse of) reflection is that it can negatively affect the quality of our performance His negative evaluation of reflection and deliberation comes from the idea that we are *always* coping with the world, or, in Heidegger's terminology, we are always beings-in-the-world (i.e., *Dasein*). This thought is expressed differently by saying that we are ordinary human beings living in direct contact with the world in a way that we need not step back that far to monitor our action and adequately respond to the world (355). Dreyfus still acknowledges that, when learning a new skill, monitoring the way the body is exercised is invaluable to the degree that it empowers apprentices with skills that required for them to

one day become experts. Yet, once expertise is secured, he argues that monitoring one's performance while engaging in a given activity can be impair it. Despite this, even when disrupted by reflection, the ability to competently cope is still operating in the backdrop (354). This explains how a trained driver can reflect on his motor skills while driving a car without crashing it.

For his part, McDowell targets the cases proposed by Dreyfus in which individuals act 'in the flow' to say that, even in those instances, the individuals' actions entail a notion of themselves. If we are to have experience at all, our conceptual capacities "must be operative in the experience itself" ("The Myth of the Mind as Detached" 42). This means that our conceptual capacities do not become operative "only when someone decides what to think on the basis of experience, with experience conceived as something she enjoys anyway, independently of any involvement of conceptual capacities" (42). Instead, he suggests in a Kantian vein that experience does not exist independently of the subject's articulation of it: "That things are a certain way can be there for a subject to know, in her experience, whether or not she has the resources for explicitly judging (or saying) that they are that way" (43). Indeed, experience must be readily available for our conceptual capacities to embrace it such that, in the end, whenever an individual makes the content of his experience "explicit—even if the subject first has to acquire means to do that—[that] does not make the content newly conceptual in any sense relevant to my claim. It was conceptual already" (43). There would not be successful deployment of our abilities (even while acting in the flow) without these being conceptual—after all, as human nature "is largely second nature" (*Mind and World* 87), these skills, being part of our nature, must be shaped by reason (87). Thereby, "[i]f a rational subject does not have yet the means to make explicit some way her experience ... it is always possible for her to equip herself with such means," because there cannot be a subject of experience wondering how to cope with a reality that is not conceptualized ("The Myth of the Mind as Detached" 43).

With regard to the role of a 'thinking subject' involved in the deployment of these conceptual capacities, McDowell objects to Dreyfus' claim that he is subject to the Myth of the Mind as Detached (44): "[n]ow Dreyfus thinks the very idea of conceptual capacities ... brings into my picture of experience a detached self, standing over against and contemplatively oriented towards an independent reality. But this has no basis in the way the idea of conceptual practices figures in my picture" (42). He rejects the notion that

"we are always distanced from the world of our experience," further emphasizing that mindedness does not bring about the type of detachedness of the 'self' from the world that Dreyfus alleges (45). It is of particular interest that his picture of the pervasiveness of the mental accommodates Dreyfus' notion of 'acting in flow', since in his view the 'self' is not detached as a "rational agent" who "is always at least marginally monitoring what she is doing, standing ready to intervene with full-blown monitoring if need be" (45). For even as Dreyfus claims that his model leaves no room for experts to perform with "total absorption," McDowell still agrees that "[t]his supposed connection of rationality with detachment is particularly damaging in the case of action" (45). His point is rather that such detachment does not follow from his view precisely because a notion of oneself is already present in the *form* of one's actions: "The presence of 'I do' ... marks the distinctive *form* of a kind of phenomenon, like the presence of the "I think," as at least able to accompany representations, in Kant's account of empirical consciousness" ("Response to Dreyfus" 367). Thereby, instead of following like Kant and thinking of 'I do' along the lines of 'I think' as a "representation added to representations," McDowell argues that "[s]elf-awareness in action is practical, not theoretical. It is a matter of an 'I do' rather than 'I think'. … Conceiving action in terms of the "I do" is a way of registering the essentially first-person character of the realization of practical rational capacities that acting is" ("Response to Dreyfus" 367).

To find common ground between these seemingly opposite views, the nature of the disagreement between McDowell and Dreyfus can be evaluated from a more general perspective. The two philosophers diverge on the type of freedom that they see as being essential to human beings. For Dreyfus, the primary human freedom consists in the ability to voluntarily immerse ourselves in the tasks we perform in a way that there is no deliberative subject guiding our action. Meanwhile, for McDowell the chief human freedom is the capacity to deliberate or reason, such that a notion of ourselves is always entailed in our action as this involves the actualization of our conceptual capacities. Now, McDowell could object to Dreyfus' assessment of which is the fundamental human freedom by saying that this 'voluntary immersion' is not a mark that we could discern in experts when they perform in their prime. From the behavioral signs they display, we have no criterion to account for how experts excel while performing tasks without having an operative, deliberative notion

of themselves. It seems that only through introspection *they* would be in the position to determine whether they are performing voluntarily immersed or rather reflecting on their own conduct as they go along. Indeed, if the way experts behave while acting in the flow is compatible with how they act when engaging in deliberated performances, it is not clear to what extent even they can tell when they are totally absorbed in their actions and when they are not. For if their behavior is one way or the other in accordance with the rules of the task they engage in, such 'voluntary immersion' could not ultimately be conceived as a complete departure from conceptuality.

By way of reply, Dreyfus would probably describe how Chuck Knoblauch, a second baseman for the New York Yankees, got 'out of touch' with his skills as soon as he over-intellectualized the way he was playing (2007 354). Although his performance was still far better than that of a competent player, after he tried to figure out the mechanics of throwing the ball, he could not retrieve the high level of his past performances. It is as if Knoblauch could not immerse himself again in the game. It follows from this example that, even though Dreyfus' voluntary absorption could not be positively taken as a trait of human experts, we can nevertheless tell indirectly, through noticing the counterproductive consequences appearing in its absence, that it is a relevant feature to human beings' endeavors. Still, assuming that we are always coping with the world, such 'voluntary immersion' would only be an asset for those who divert towards reflection and thereby compromise their immediate reactions to the influx of solicitations of the world. In other words, if complete absorption is the seen as the ability to avoid the temptation to step back and overanalyze one's current actions, then it would only count as an ability to exploit for those whose performance has been harmed by the interference of excessive monitoring. However, this implies that people normally do not require the capacity of immerging voluntarily since they involuntarily return to their instinctive responses to the world after occasionally having monitored their own behavior, since they would not usually undergo the type of disassociation that experts like Knoblauch went through. Knoblauch's case would rather be a rare example in which an individual could not return to plain action because he lost the ability to naturally avoid monitoring his own behavior while performing. If this is correct, then the 'freedom' Dreyfus considers as fundamental has no pervasive, adaptive role in virtue of which we could properly distinguish human beings from nonhuman animals. For even though

in some peculiar cases voluntary immersion can 'free' some individuals from their own thoughts and thus increment the quality of their performance, such immersion would not be a feature that could pass as the specific difference with which we could adequately distinguish between human and nonhuman animals.

It is thus that, depending on what we consider to be our essential 'freedom', we would come up with a different interpretation of the role of self-conception. If we suppose, following Dreyfus, that what makes us human does not essentially depend on engaging in deliberative processes, then we are not, at our core, 'thinking subjects'. From McDowell's perspective, though, there is always going to be self-awareness and conceptuality involved in action, so that experts cannot merely do without some degree of normativity ultimately guiding their behavior. They would not perform better by not reasoning through their actions, although, admittedly, by thus reflecting they would not act 'in the flow'. Then, for the sake of argument, we can assume that Dreyfus and McDowell's dispute is verbal to the extent that it leads to a false dichotomy: this is, either we always presuppose an operative concept of ourselves while acting or else there are types of intense absorption when there is no thinking subject deliberating and guiding our action. We can think of their disagreement as not being substantive inasmuch as it arises from different interpretations of the role of our conceptual capacities while performing a given task we are fully concentrated in, particularly, one in which we are not conscious of ourselves. Furthermore, if this is assumed, we can think of their views as complementing one another, thus providing a fuller picture of the matter that can help us explain the utility of self-conception. I now turn to offer this fuller view of the affairs.

The Two-Moment View

We can now respond to the issue of the utility of self-conception by noting that there are two types of moments associated to the sorts of freedom referenced by Dreyfus and McDowell, respectively, such that, depending on which moment an individual finds himself in, there would be a use to his self-conception or there would not be. In general, sometimes there is a beneficial, useful notion of oneself while sometimes there is not, given that it has been pushed to the background as it can be detrimental to action. Yet, it has not absolutely disappeared.

Sometimes, like when we remember a series of events, engage in counterfactual thought or are planning what to do in the future, a phenomenon or notion of oneself appears to consciousness: we are the ones who felt such-and-such, did this and that, will be liable if we commit such-and-such actions, and will be participating in such-and-such events. For example, when thinking about the future a projected notion of ourselves displays anticipated characteristics that we attribute to our 'future selves', and based on this anticipation, we can determine what would be the best course of action to take. We thus require a notion of ourselves to determine what will be the best way of moving forward. Moreover, when we presently interact with other persons, a notion of ourselves is implied in the form or character of our action, which embodies our agency, as McDowell argues. In these moments, there is a deliberative notion of ourselves which is indispensable in regulating our actions, as we are not only conscious of what we did, would do or will do, but further become self-conscious while attending to how our lives unfold from a present perspective—namely, as we reach into the past and the future (McDowell *Mind and World* 100). In these instances, a notion of ourselves steps to the foreground and becomes useful in planning for what is to come.

There are other times when our self-conception does not have a useful role in our activities but, on the contrary, can prove harmful. For example, when the emergence of a deliberative notion of ourselves can potentially disrupt the activity we are engaging in, it is best to push it to the backdrop. In effect, if being absorbed in the current action would help a person become sensitive to the solicitations of the world, whereas a deliberative self-conception could hurt his interaction with the world, pushing his self-conception to the background would be best. In this case, for the sake of performing properly a given task, it would make no sense to track the consequences of the decisions reached in our actions by emphasizing a deliberative notion of our person. Another case would be the one where our self-conception turns against us, producing a high degree of anxiety in us, which ultimately does not let us see beyond how we see ourselves. Canfield points out instances in which we are stuck with recurring self-centered thoughts (1990 223) that in the end are impractical, since they do not help us in directing our attention outwards to the world of life.

It could still be objected on behalf of Dreyfus that the McDowellian type of "moment" in our self-conception would appear to him just the point

he thinks is overintellectualized. If we always act with at least an implicit notion of ourselves, this notion can at some point interrupt the course of our action, especially when we act in the flow. For if we are precisely letting the notion we possess of ourselves go for the sake of improving our performance, what kind of control would we have over it? It rather seems that we could not prevent our self-conception from emerging all over again, so that it would consequently interrupt our action. Thereby, we can in this way unwillingly end up functioning as the type of 'thinking subject' that Dreyfus speaks about: our performance can become too mechanical, and, to that extent, we cannot enter 'the flow'. Moreover, when we project ourselves into the future, we can overintellectualize our action, say, by thinking too much about what we have to do in order to achieve a given result. This way, we can become anxious given the large number of things we have to do: although we may encounter several ways to achieve the desired result, the thought itself can overwhelm us and, in the midst of feeling anxious, we can become paralyzed as we do not know which course of action to pursue. Likewise, if we use too much time remembering what we have done to learn from our mistakes, we can unintentionally reinforce a potentially noxious self-conception we already possess, trapping us in the type of self-involved chains of thought Canfield refers to, so that anxiety would again take over and work in detriment of our action. However, this is not what McDowell intends. He recognizes that if, while performing in the flow, we monitor and reflect on our action to the point that we verbalize what we are doing, this can in fact disrupt its 'flow' ("The Myth of the Mind as Detached" 46). Thus, he concedes that in times like this overintellectualizing our action can hinder it, particularly when acting in the flow, which is a class of moment in which suspending a conscious awareness of ourselves can be advantageous to our action. As a result, it would not be times like this which would be included in the McDowellian "moment," as he seems to make a different point: that even while performing in the flow, we do not absolutely lose a sense of who we are, this is, that we still know ourselves, even if only implicitly, to be acting as agents. To be clear, McDowell's point is not that we cannot overintellectualize our regular action in a way that is harmful to it. He rather indicates that there is always an operative concept of ourselves working while we act, which is as much a part of our nature, which is mostly second nature, as walking and drinking water.

By the same token, it's true that spending too much time planning what to do or remembering what we have done can be overwhelming and potentially paralyze us. This is, however, not what McDowell intends to do. We do not regularly and under normal circumstances overthink our future plans, as we just picture what we have to do while admitting that we might not even get the chance to do such-and-such, so that we put a stop to a rabbit hole that could lead us to anxiety as soon as we realize that these are mere plans and several conditions must be in place for any of these to be pursued. Similarly, even if we can spend a lot of time remembering what we have done, there comes a point when we normally understand that there is no use to this and that we have to move on from our self-involved thought. In these cases, we usually turn to the second class of moment: we return to our current, practical affairs that require our attention not just because we do not want to be trapped by noxious self-involved chains of thought. Instead, it is because these affairs in fact demand our full attention that we naturally center our awareness in them, so that our self-awareness is in turn instinctively pushed to the back of our minds.

The disagreement in the Dreyfus-McDowell debate regarding the role of self-conception can thus be assessed by saying that both are right depending on which type of moment a person is presently in and what are his practical interests and needs. However, in another sense both are wrong insofar as we cannot exclude once and for all either type of moment, assuming then an inflexible attitude towards the role of self-conception, as if it involved an absolute benefit or cost regardless of what are the interests and needs of a concrete human being under specific circumstances. It follows that both types of moments constitute two modes of being a person, none of which can be sacrificed at the expense of the other. A way to further alleviate the tension between Dreyfus and McDowell in this aspect can be brought about the following way. First, there is the concern of whether we can perform successfully in a given activity without following or conforming to a rule—which is something we cannot do for, presumably, we can subsume any action under some rule (see Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* § 201). Following Wittgenstein, Alva Noë stresses that our actions always presuppose rules (i.e., a normative component), even in the case of experts excelling in their performances, since "[w]hat mastery (or understanding) of rules enables is for one's actions to involve the rules without needing to think about them in any

explicit, deliberative way" (2007 181). Secondly, assuming that conformity to rules is not the issue here, the question on behalf of Dreyfus is whether overthinking (i.e., monitoring in excess) decreases the quality of experts' actions. But then, the relevant problem for him could not be the presence of thought while acting in the flow; because understanding what it is to excel in a given practice and doing so involves some expectation on the part of the expert, that is, of what *should* be done, which entails a previous acquaintance with the rules of a concrete activity. Thereby, the issue is whether overintellectualizing an action can disrupt it in any significant way. It is true that 'overthinking' understood as hesitation or doubt in the face of solicitations that demand instant, opportune reactions can be disadvantageous. Yet, this does not imply that experts' actions are not rule-governed, although it constitutes a fair warning on their potential propensity to monitor in excess their behavior while performing.

While conceding to McDowell that experts do operate with concepts—that is, categories or rules with which they guide their actions (though not in a stringent, determinate way)—it could still be said that a weaker interpretation of the implications of Dreyfus' notion of 'voluntary immersion' can be taken as an asset for successful performance. If there is good reason to think that experts *choose* to be immersed in the class of uninterrupted state of spontaneous reactions to solicitations so as to remain sensible to unforeseen factors, avoiding reflection seems to be a useful guideline to expertise. Such susceptibility to the context arguably requires that one should not think too much.

6. A Dynamic Treatment of the Puzzle of Self-Conception

Lastly, to tackle the puzzle of self-conception, it will be helpful to draw from Mead's concept of the 'self'. By employing this concept, the utility of self-conception will be further accounted for. According to Mead, the 'self' comes down to a process of social control regulated by further social processes, so that a person acquires a notion of himself by internalizing social practices (1972 158). One has a 'self' in accordance with the multiplicity of roles one plays in society, such as being a father, a husband, a lawyer, etc. This way, he proposes a view of the self that takes its resources from the outside, namely, relative to the roles undertaken by other members of society: "[t]he individual has, as it were, gotten outside of his limited world by taking the roles of others" (xxix). Insofar as one has several social roles, one obtains a

'self' by coordinating these functions in consciousness, from which it can be said that 'the self' is formed by a constellation of roles (xxix.). 'The self', then, is a mechanism of social control (158), given that the roles people play are structured by the functions of other people in a community.

A person has a notion of himself in virtue of putting himself in the place of others, namely, by interiorizing and appropriating himself with their behavior, referring their conduct to his own person and life. Thereby, a notion of ourselves enters our experience to the extent that we become objects to ourselves, which is not possible in an immediate manner:

> [t]he individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only insofar as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved. (138)

We acquire self-conception by assuming the perspectives of others on us, i.e., by adopting the beliefs and attitudes that others have towards us, as we thereby become indirect objects of our own experience. The notion or image we have of ourselves is derived from how others see us, so that we only attain a grasp of who we are through interacting with other persons in the multiple activities that make up for the customary or habitual manner in which people conduct themselves, that is, according to the forms of life of a community. Consequently, we would not acquire a self-conception through introspection—as Hume intended—regardless of which are the attitudes that those around us have towards us. Quite the opposite, we obtain it due to our participation in the customs and habits of the forms of life of a community (see Consigny 2001 124). Indeed, we acquire knowledge of the particular human being we are only as we participate in the ways of life of a community, living amongst other human beings. Therefore, to the degree that we share the forms of lives of others we discover who we are, so that our self-conception would amount to a compound perspective on ourselves afforded by the standpoints that those around us possess about us (Mead 1972 138). It follows that

there can be no "privileged standpoint" from which we may observe who we 'truly are', this is, independently of the forms of life of a community in which we reside, since our self-conception is rather the product of our engagement with others (see Consigny 2001 124).

To address the puzzle of self-conception from a dynamic standpoint we must start by recognizing that, when we are to conceive of 'ourselves', we are not looking for an image of a 'self' or a 'human body'. It is rather about conceiving an ordinary human being in the context of a concrete life. And, as we stated in the previous article, it makes no sense to look for an immediate perception of ourselves because any perception must be mediated to take place. Mead appreciates this when he says that the individual does not enter his own experience "directly or immediately" (1962 138). Still, an immediate, complete perception of a particular human being is not really required to attain a self-conception, since we are not limiting the origin of our self-conception to a visual impression or image. Following Mead we have redefined our standards of 'self-conception' in terms of adopting the standpoints of other persons by assuming the beliefs and attitudes that they have towards us. Moreover, as we have assumed a dynamic approach, we have conceived of the human being as situated in a community, playing certain roles, engaging with other individuals from which he has acquired the beliefs and attitudes that make up for his self- conception. Consequently, there is no fundamental mystery about the source of a person's self-conception, since he is not isolated from his surroundings in a way that he could only obtain a self-conception through a contemplative perspective, seeking thus an impossible visual impression of himself. We can then attend to the specific issue of whether the individual enters his own experience as an *object* by appealing to Mead, as he believes that we become objects to ourselves as soon as we adopt the beliefs and attitudes of others towards us, seeing ourselves as others do and thus treating ourselves as an 'other'. We end up having a notion of the person we are by treating ourselves as objects of the attitudes that other human beings have towards us, taking their standpoints on ourselves. It follows that the ordinary human being indirectly enters his own experience as an object through the experience of others.

Despite Mead's position (138) we can argue that a notion of ourselves as a *subject* enters our own experience although, again, indirectly. Even as we enter our own experience as objects of indirect awareness by assuming the

attitudes that others have towards us, this does not exclude the possibility of simultaneously taking ourselves to be indirect subjects of our awareness while engaging in action. A notion of ourselves also becomes part of our own awareness to the extent that we take ourselves to be 'agents' from the first point of view. This is explained in the fact that our self-conception is entailed in the form of our actions, such that we have sense of who accompanies our actions as these occur (McDowell "Response to Dreyfus" 367). We are then subjects of our actions, beliefs and attitudes as these have real implications in the world. This way, it can be argued that the ordinary person we are becomes a part of our own awareness as a 'subject' by appeal to McDowell's concept of the 'self', which is not only implied from the first-person point of view but rather can be appreciated from a third-person perspective as an ordinary 'self' among persons. Then, from the first person perspective we can perceive the consequences of our actions even though we are not directly aware of ourselves. To put this differently: as we are the ones from which these actions emanate, we trace ourselves as their cause in a core sense. Even if we do not perceive ourselves while perceiving the world, from a dynamic perspective it can be said that we still assume that we are the ones acting, thus treating ourselves as subjects and not merely as objects. Therefore, while the notion we possess of ourselves plays the role of a mechanism of social control, it is nonetheless complemented by the sense we have of ourselves as a subject of action, in the absence of which we would not be able to attribute the actions we commit to the person we are from the first-person perspective. This 'sense' is in effect entailed in our action, as we can monitor our behavior from the first-person perspective — although, again, this would not be all that we require for attaining an altogether functional self-conception. We would still need to take ourselves as objects of our experience by assuming the attitudes of others towards us, thus being able to coordinate our action in relation to theirs by putting ourselves in their place. The idea that we can indirectly become subjects of our experience would not give rise to an infinite regress (see IV. 1) because, as we have established that the origin of our self-conception is social, this conception need not be based on an ulterior awareness. Instead, it only needs to be grounded on our social practices, as it is articulated in terms of the roles a person plays in his daily life and the attitudes others have towards him. Our self-conception is useful in showing us what our social roles are given the ways in which other social actors view us.

We cannot 'step outside' of ourselves and view ourselves 'completely' any more than we can view other people 'completely'. For how is this supposed to be accomplished? We can observe a person from several perspectives, but we cannot see him from *all* possible perspectives *at once*, which is what would have to be done, in a rigorous sense, to see someone completely. Then again, if we cannot see anyone from all possible angles at the same time, why would we need to see ourselves simultaneously from all possible points of view to acquire a self-conception? As this exigency seems out of place, this cannot be what it is meant when we say "completely," so we could reinterpret this expression more charitably if we read it as meaning 'as a whole'. In this sense, it is a matter of fact that we can see a whole person standing at a distance, and in virtue of that visual impression we can discern who he or she is, say, by recognizing the shape of that person. We can thus identify someone we have already made acquaintance with. Yet, we cannot ever do the same in our own case. But why would we ever need to do this? We need not identify ourselves, from the first-person perspective, by recognizing our silhouette as we do need to in the case of others. From the first-person point of view, we need not 'recognize' who we are if this means obtaining a visual image of our whole person. Why then assume that we must fulfill such a requisite to ever come up with a notion of ourselves? This seems to be a confusion produced by adopting a static standpoint, since, from a dynamic perspective, we are not looking for a direct visual image of our person to explain the acquisition or utility of self-conception.

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