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Affordances and Unreflective Freedom

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Bio Erik Rietveld

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Abstract

This paper investigates the phenomenon of freedom in unreflective decision making and action from the perspective of the philosophy of embodied cognition.

Phenomenological analysis suggests that in skillful unreflective decision and action we allow ourselves to be responsive to relevant affordances. Even though we respond to affordances with instinctive ease, we do not experience these actions as fully automatic, or beyond our control. I propose that if we want to understand the phenomenon of freedom in episodes of unreflective affordance-responsiveness, we should investigate it on its own terms and do justice to its specific phenomenology. I critically assess ideas on this type of freedom by Dreyfus and Kelly and show that their accounts still presuppose the possibility to reflect, which makes them inapt as accounts of the unreflective freedom in affordance responsiveness that adults share with children who do not yet have the capacity to reflect. I suggest that being bound by relevant affordances does not contradict freedom and sketch the outline of an alternative account of freedom in unreflective action.

1. Introduction

Inspired by Immanuel Kant, John McDowell (1996) discusses one way to look at freedom in both reflective and unreflective decision making and action: as mature human beings we are acting freely because we have the possibility to step back and reflect on our reasons for action. Following Charles Taylor (2002) I will call this type of freedom ‘spontaneity in the strong sense’ or, for the sake of brevity, ‘strong

spontaneity’.¹ Strong spontaneity is relevant even when one acts unreflectively because one could step back and reflect. I would like to stress that this claim of McDowell will remain undebated here. I fully acknowledge the reality of our possibility to step back and reflect as well as its importance for understanding human action.

However, I am interested in developing an account of freedom in skillful *unreflective* decision making and action (for the sake of brevity henceforth ‘unreflective action’) from the perspective of embodied cognition. My primary focus is on the phenomenology of freedom in unreflective action as shared by human adults and pre-linguistic children. In this type of activity we, in a sense, *allow* ourselves to be responsive to relevant affordances. Affordances (Gibson, 1979; Michaels, 2003; Chemero, 2003) are possibilities for action provided by the environment.² Even though we respond to affordances with instinctive ease, we do not experience our skillful unreflective activities as fully automatic or beyond our control. I propose that if we want to understand the phenomenon of freedom in unreflective action well, we

¹ Let me briefly sketch the context in which freedom (strong spontaneity) appears within McDowell’s (1996) framework. McDowell wants to place strong spontaneity steadfastly in nature. He argues that conformity to natural law does not exhaust the notion of nature. Second nature is nature too. The notion of *Bildung* (upbringing) clarifies how we acquire the conceptual capacities (second nature, again remembering that this really is nature) that belong to strong spontaneity and make it possible to step back and reflect. We acquire these conceptual capacities thanks to our being initiated into language (McDowell, 1996: 125-126). This account should make sure that such freedom is not considered as supra-natural or spooky.

² Both humans and non-human animals (henceforth ‘animals’) can perceive affordances. McDowell, for instance, recently wrote: “[R]esponsiveness to affordances, necessarily bound up with embodied coping skills, is something we share with other animals.” (McDowell, 2007a: 344).

should investigate that phenomenon *on its own terms* and not start by assuming that it is a derivative of the freedom to step back and reflect.³ By “on its own terms” I mean a phenomenological or descriptive account that sheds light on the characteristics of the pre-reflective experience of freedom as it shows up in unreflective action; i.e. a detailed phenomenological analysis that does more than just pointing to a capacity to reflect in the context of unreflective action without paying attention to the specific phenomenological richness of the kind of unreflective freedom that adults share with children.⁴ That McDowell (2002) would probably not deny the relevance of such a phenomenological investigation becomes clear in his discussion with Taylor (2002). Taylor gives the following example of unreflective action, or what he calls here ‘pre-understanding’ or ‘pre-conceptual’ responsiveness to affordances:

Dealing with things pre-conceptually can’t involve rational, critical reflection on world or action; it doesn’t exhibit Kantian spontaneity at its fullest. [...] Living with things involves a certain kind of understanding (which we might also call ‘pre-understanding’). [...] As I navigate my way along the path up the hill, my mind totally absorbed anticipating the difficult conversation I’m going to have at my destination, I treat the different features of the terrain as obstacles, supports, openings, invitations to tread more warily, or run freely, etc. [...] These things have those relevances for me; I know my way about among them.

³ Note that this leaves open the possibility that in the end the possibility to step back is relevant in unreflective freedom. I just want to avoid presupposing it, because that could easily lead to an over-intellectualization.

⁴ Thanks to Rasmus Thybo Jensen for helpful suggestions on how to make my approach explicit.

This is non-conceptual; or put another way, language isn't playing any direct role. (Taylor, 2002: 111).

That unreflective action is not a brute causal event shows itself in its responsiveness to relevance and norms (Rietveld, 2008a). Since in an episode of unreflective action one does not, by definition, reflect explicitly, we must refer to something other than reflective accounts of intentionality if we want to understand the phenomenon of freedom in unreflective action on its own terms. Although McDowell objects to calling unreflective action 'non-conceptual', he (2002: 283) does agree with Taylor that we need another, weaker, notion of freedom for understanding freedom in unreflective action.⁵ McDowell's response to Taylor (2002) was:

I agree with Taylor that there is something between spontaneity in what he calls 'the strong Kantian sense, turning crucially on conceptual, reflective thought,' on the one hand, and conformity to Galilean law, on the other. We need this middle ground for thinking about non-human animals, and it is what is supposed to be occupied by pre-understanding even in our case. (McDowell, 2002: 283)

However, as far as I know, neither McDowell nor Taylor develops such a *middleground*-notion of the phenomenon of freedom in unreflective action that would

⁵ It is crucial to see that strong and weak notions of freedom are not necessarily exclusive. Someone can hold that our understanding of freedom in unreflective action benefits from using a weaker notion of freedom, without committing herself to denying that mature human beings in unreflective action have the capacity to step back and reflect (that is, strong spontaneity).

be relevant for understanding a specific kind freedom that is shared by non-human animals, pre-linguistic children and humans who are simply unreflectively responsive to available affordances. For me the point of developing this middleground-notion of freedom is certainly not to argue that McDowell of strong spontaneity is wrong – I do not believe that it is –, but rather to develop a *complementary* account of freedom for a different purpose than his, namely understanding better the rich and complex phenomenon of unreflective action that adult human beings (henceforth “humans”) and pre-linguistic children share.

From a phenomenological perspective, both Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly have developed some new ideas on this issue. Given their expertise in the phenomenology of unreflective action it makes sense to investigate in their positions on this matter.

Dreyfus has since his (2005a) *APA Pacific Division Presidential Address* been engaged in a debate with McDowell (Dreyfus 2007a, 2007b; McDowell 2007a, 2007b). McDowell, as mentioned above, characterizes human freedom in terms of the capacity to step back and reflect. According to McDowell, such strong spontaneity is the freedom ‘rational animals’ (mature human beings) enjoy and ‘mere animals’ lack. As far as ‘absorbed coping’⁶ is concerned, Dreyfus generally stresses the similarities

⁶ Merleau-Ponty gives a good description of an episode of absorbed coping: “For the player in action the football field is [...] pervaded with lines of force [...] and articulated in sectors (for example, the ‘openings’ between the adversaries) [...]; the player becomes one with it and feels the direction of the ‘goal’, for example, just as immediately as the vertical and the horizontal planes of his own body. It would not be sufficient to say that consciousness inhabits this milieu. At this moment consciousness is nothing other than the dialectic of milieu and action. Each maneuver undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes in it new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1983/1942: 168-169).

rather than the differences between animal behavior and human behavior, for instance that both types of behavior are responsive to affordances (see for example Dreyfus, 2005a). Nevertheless, Dreyfus (2007a) agrees with McDowell that human freedom is of a special kind. However, according to Dreyfus (2007a: 354), the “most pervasive” type of human freedom is not the strong spontaneity emphasized by Kant and McDowell. Dreyfus (2007a: 355) argues that another type of freedom, which he characterizes as “pervasive human freedom” (henceforth ‘pervasive freedom’), is more important. Pervasive freedom is the freedom to let oneself be bound by the world’s solicitations (Dreyfus, 2007a). Kelly develops this idea in a lecture and unpublished draft manuscript titled ‘Perceptual Normativity and Human Freedom’ (henceforth Kelly, 2006).⁷ The issue of freedom in skillful unreflective action is important for Dreyfus and Kelly because they both emphasize that in such action we are bound by the solicitations of the world, which immediately draw us to act in a certain way. Such an immediate responsiveness to the experienced demands of the world may seem to leave no room for agency (precisely because of being bound by these solicitations), but that is not what Dreyfus and Kelly want to say. They hold, rightly I believe, that there is a kind of agency inherent in this responsiveness to solicitations. However, ultimately they do not manage to account for that in a satisfying way, as we will see.

Dreyfus’ and Kelly’s accounts of freedom are ambitious because they try to characterize at once the distinction between human and animal freedom as well as the freedom humans have in unreflective action, for example when drawn by a

⁷ Sean Kelly gave a lecture on this topic at Cornell University’s ‘Perception and Action Symposium’ on May 7, 2006. I would like to thank him for allowing me to discuss a text that is only a draft manuscript. The draft is available online: <http://philpapers.org/rec/KELPNA>.

solicitation. I have a more limited ambition. My starting point is the sole wish to give a rich account of human unreflective action as shared by adults and pre-linguistic children, including the freedom involved in this. This methodological move allows me to postpone the discussion of issues related to animals to another occasion and scales down the complexity of the issues we encounter in this paper.

My *central question* is simply: what is freedom as experienced pre-reflectively by an individual *in* an episode of unreflective affordance-responsiveness (henceforth ‘unreflective freedom’)?

Even though I am focusing on unreflective freedom, it will not be possible to ignore completely what Dreyfus and Kelly have said about the distinction between human and animal freedom, because, as we will see, their accounts of freedom in unreflective action presumably run into trouble as a result of their acceptance of their Heideggerian assumption that animals are ‘captured’ or ‘enslaved’ by their world. I will focus my discussion on human unreflective responsiveness to affordances, which is a paradigmatic form of skillful unreflective action and is shared by adults and pre-linguistic children.

In the first part of section 2 I will present Dreyfus’ alternative to McDowell’s notion of freedom. Kelly’s ideas on perceptual normativity and human freedom are the topic of the second part of that section. I will raise some issues regarding their respective accounts in section 3. Despite their goal to arrive at an account of (pervasive) freedom that precedes the freedom to step back and reflect, we will see that they are ultimately committed to an account of freedom that presupposes the possibility of stepping back. They do not succeed in their goal of differentiating their accounts from McDowell’s (which is an aim I do not have). In section 4 I will sketch my own proposal.

2. Dreyfus and Kelly on freedom in unreflective action

Human freedom in McDowell's strong sense (strong spontaneity) is the capacity to step back and reflect on reasons for action as such. Dreyfus (2007a: 354) agrees with McDowell that we possess that type of freedom. Dreyfus, however, suggests that another important kind of freedom plays a role both in reflective and unreflective action, as we will see in section 2.1. Dreyfus' notion of pervasive freedom contains an aspect that is a good starting point for developing a phenomenological account of freedom in unreflective action. Kelly (2006) further develops Dreyfus' insight, which I will discuss in section 2.2. As mentioned in the introduction, in section 3 I will assess their Heideggerian accounts of freedom. I will sketch my own proposal in section 4.

2.1. Dreyfus' notion of human freedom: the freedom to let oneself be bound

According to Dreyfus, humans have two types of freedom: strong spontaneity and what he characterizes as pervasive freedom. In this section I will present Dreyfus' account of this latter kind of human freedom. In section 3.1 I will evaluate its relevance for understanding the freedom inherent in unreflective action.

Pervasive human freedom, in Dreyfus' Heideggerian account, is allowing oneself to be bound:

I claim that the freedom intermittently to step back presupposes a truly pervasive human freedom not shared by mere animals. We have a freedom not to exercise our freedom to step back but rather to let ourselves be involved. [...] Heidegger sees as essential the fact that human beings are *free to open themselves to being bound* – a freedom that animals lack because they are constantly captivated by their current activity and can never step back [...] (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355, my italics).

I will not go into Martin Heidegger's ideas on animals here and focus on humans. What is it exactly that humans can let themselves be bound by in an episode of unreflective action? By the solicitations of the rich world which immediately draw us to act in certain ways. Dreyfus uses the notions of 'letting' or 'allowing' oneself to be bound presumably to emphasize that this responsiveness to solicitations is free rather than un-free or automatic, but these notions do not themselves clarify why such an unreflective act is free. Clarifying this is precisely a task of the phenomenological account of unreflective freedom Dreyfus, Kelly and I are trying to develop. Note moreover, that terms like 'letting' or 'allowing' are used without any intention to suggest a temporal succession of events. So it is not the case that there is first a solicitation and then one's allowing to act on the solicitation. Dreyfus' use of, for example, the words "*letting ourselves be drawn*" (2007a: p. 355, my italics) aims to stress the agency *inherent* in the immediate and unreflective response to the solicitation.

An example of being bound by the world is the way we are drawn to move to a greater distance from a painting we are looking at, the phenomenon of the tendency towards an optimal grip (Merleau-Ponty, 2002/1945; Dreyfus, 2005b; Dreyfus and

Kelly, 2007; Rietveld, 2008a, 2012). The painting, in a sense, *demand*s this greater distance from us and we normally immediately give in to this demand. However, although one is bound by this solicitation to act, we can say that one ‘freely opens’ oneself to being bound, so one is not enslaved by the solicitation (Dreyfus, 2007a). In what sense is this letting or opening a form of agency? According to Dreyfus, one is in control in the sense that one is able to interrupt or “break off” responsiveness to solicitations (Dreyfus, 2007b: 375). He suggests that one’s unreflective response to the solicitation *could be stopped*:

Of course, the coping going on *is* mine in the sense that the coping can be interrupted at any moment by a transformation that results in an experience of stepping back from the flow of current coping. (Dreyfus, 2007a: 356).

The human freedom to let oneself be bound is “truly pervasive” (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355) because it is inherent in both unreflective action and reflection. Crucially, while engaged in reflection, pervasive freedom is what makes it possible to switch back from an intermittent episode of reflection to a new episode of absorbed coping. In Dreyfus words:

Our involved freedom makes possible on some occasions finding ourselves becoming detached and *choosing* a course of action which, like all willful actions, we can perform at best competently, while on other occasions, letting ourselves be drawn to *reenter* [emphasis added, ER] our involved expert coping. (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355).

How does such a switch from reflection to absorbed coping come about? Dreyfus does not explain this, but we can quite easily imagine ourselves how the change from detachment to involvement happens (for example by allowing oneself to respond to an attractive solicitation on the horizon of one's current reflective activity, similar to being attracted by a cup of coffee during an episode of explicit deliberation). More important is that Dreyfus also does not make clear how the transformation that results in the movement from absorbed coping to detached reflection happens, although he suggests that it happens as the result of "analytic attention" (Dreyfus, 2005a: 61). (Note that he does not claim that he has clarified this transformation. On the contrary, Dreyfus (2005a: 61) sees this as an important open question. Below we will see that Kelly is working on this issue.) As mentioned above, I will evaluate Dreyfus' ideas in section 3.1. Let me first introduce Kelly's ideas on freedom in unreflective action.

2.2. Kelly on freedom in unreflective action

Like Dreyfus, Kelly holds that solicitations have a directly motivating force, they immediately draw us to act in a certain way. A question Kelly (2006) wants to answer is how we can resist solicitations, given that they have this directly motivating force in absorbed coping. As far as normativity is concerned, Kelly's focus is on experienced normativity, which is what I have called 'lived normativity' elsewhere.⁸

⁸ The role of such lived normativity (Rietveld, 2008a) becomes, for instance, clear in Dreyfus' and Kelly's elaboration on Sartre's (1954) example of running to catch a streetcar: "[T]here is no ego [...] in the runner's mind when he is absorbed in reaching the streetcar [...] But [...] the experience of chasing a streetcar *does not leave the mind empty*. It essentially involves a *felt solicitation* to act in a certain way with respect to the streetcar." (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007: 53, my italics). This "felt

Kelly understands “a *norm* as that from which one immediately feels oneself to be deviating – to a greater or lesser extent – in performing the activity regulated by it” (Kelly, 2006, my italics). He wants to explain how the world can solicit us to act normatively and, moreover how, even though we are *bound* by the world, we can nevertheless understand ourselves as free agents. The aim of this section is to present Kelly’s account of freedom in unreflective action. In section 3.2 I will critically assess his account.

2.2.1. *Humans allow themselves to be lured by solicitations by not resisting them*

Kelly says that an essential aspect of our skillful activity in for example distance standing is that “one immediately feels compelled to perform it in a way that, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, lessens a certain tension” (Kelly, 2006: 4). So there is an immediate tendency to lessen the experienced tension of this specific situation by means of some activity. Importantly, there is no representation of the goal; no “pre-existing sense” of the appropriate distance before the actual performance (Kelly, 2006: 4). What is the nature of agency here, given that we are bound by the world, motivated directly to respond to its affordances? We will see that Kelly tries to answer that question by answering another one, aiming to understand the freedom involved: What is the nature of the *freedom* humans have in this type of skillful activity?

solicitation” contains a normative tension. The mind is not empty in absorbed coping because we “experience our current bodily situation as a tension away from the optimal stance” (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007: 53), and are immediately drawn to improve, running faster and getting closer.

Both animals and humans are bound by the world and as such “immediately motivated to respond to its solicitations” (Kelly, 2006: 6). According to Kelly, the nature of this bond is different, however, for humans than for animals. He writes:

We [humans] are not enslaved by environmental solicitations, but rather we ‘freely hold ourselves open to be bound’ by them. There is an important question what this free choice amounts to. (Kelly, 2006: 7).

According to Kelly, the answer to this question is that our freedom resides in having “a check” on our tendency to respond immediately to solicitations. (Kelly, 2006: 8). The core of this difference is that, thanks to this capacity to stop responding, one allows affordances to steer one’s activity. Our human freedom

consists always in *letting ourselves be* bound, simply because whenever we *are* bound by the environment it is a result of our *not having resisted it*. (Kelly, 2006: 7).

This ‘check’ is a type of “negative freedom” (Kelly, 2006: 8). The freedom to resist or not to resist the lure of solicitations is at the core of our control over the situation, according to Kelly.

So by not resisting, humans can freely be bound by the world. This state of being bound

is a matter of being immediately motivated to respond to [the world’s] solicitations. The worldly environment, in other words, is a *normative*

environment – I immediately experience it in terms of how *well* it allows me to engage in my activities. (Kelly, 2006: 6).

I sense immediately that by moving to that other position over there I will have a better view on the painting. Or as I would formulate it myself, the experienced solicitations to which I am unreflectively responsive already reflect an appreciation related to how things can be improved.

2.2.2. On resisting solicitations: noticing them is a precondition

Freedom is an essential part of normativity in perception-action cycles for humans according to Kelly (2006). Unreflective human action might be unmediated by a choosing subject, but it does not lack freedom:

To take an example, I can, in the midst of unreflectively reaching out to grab the doorknob to open the door, all of the sudden resist the continuation of the action, stopping my arm in mid-flight. This capacity arbitrarily to resist what the world solicits us immediately and unreflectively to do seems to me an essential feature of the way we experience perceptual norms.
(Kelly, 2006: 8).

This suggests that Kelly holds that our responsiveness to solicitations possesses a certain kind of freedom (namely to resist/stop).

Solicitations normally simply pull us. But this does not mean that they cannot be resisted. Indeed, Kelly argues that in order to be resisted, *noticing* a solicitation is a necessary precondition. He writes:

After all, how is one to resist a solicitation to act that one doesn't even recognize? To resist something, in other words, it must be something that one can *identify*, for otherwise it is nothing that one can stand against. (Kelly, 2006: 8; cf. Kelly, 2005: 20).⁹

Humans have the ability to identify solicitations as something that motivates one to act and that can be resisted. So resisting in Kelly's sense is characterized by 'noticing', that is identifying a thing using attentive observation, which is the same detached form of attention that characterizes attention in the case of a worldly breakdown, for example when a keyboard stops functioning while one is typing a text.¹⁰ This noticing "*reifies*" (Kelly, 2006: 9) the solicitation and is itself immediately able and sufficient to break its "motive force" (Kelly, 2006: 9; cf. Kelly, 2006: 20) so that it is no longer a normative power that immediately motivates us to act, according to Kelly.

⁹ Note that this seems to presuppose that resisting an affordance is something that *I* as a reflective subject must do.

¹⁰ Kelly models his account of a change in the nature of attention (from engaged to detached) on Heidegger's (1927) account of a worldly breakdown: "The phenomenological story I've sketched so far involves moving from the kind of sensitivity to environmental norms that is involved in skillful absorbed coping to the kind of *detached* experience of an independent world that one can have when one is paying attention to it. In the metaphor from the introduction, it involves the crystallization of self and world." (Kelly, 2006: 14, my italics).

Noticing, understood as “attentive observation” (Kelly, 2006: 15), reifies some *thing* as the source of the solicitation or reifies the motivation as a desire (Kelly, 2006: 9).¹¹ In both cases the immediate hold of the (attractive or repulsive) environment on behavior is broken. According to Kelly, noticing a solicitation is not only a requirement for resistance of this solicitation, it is also “constitutive” of this resistance (Kelly, 2006: 10; cf. Kelly, 2005: 19-20).

2.2.3. *Solicitations cannot be attentively observed but can be experienced*

As far as the experience of affordances is concerned Kelly holds an interesting position:

[E]nvironmental solicitations and agential motivations cannot, even in principle, be noticed. For to notice a solicitation or a motivation is to turn it into an *entity that* solicits or motivates, and to do this is *ipso facto* to strip its motive force. (Kelly, 2006: 11; cf. Kelly, 2005: 20-21).

Solicitations cannot be noticed, because noticing, for Kelly, implies a form of detached attention that is incompatible with being sensitive and responsive to the attraction of the solicitation. In the absorbed type of normative sensitivity, environment and agent are not relevant *as* environment or agent:

¹¹ Note that sometimes Kelly (2006) uses the word ‘attention’ as shorthand for this attentive observation or detached attention.

[F]or the phenomenologist the essential point is that knowing myself as the agent of the act is not required. (Kelly, 2006: 13).

But the fact that we cannot ‘notice’ (attentively identify) solicitations does not preclude the possibility that we can *experience* them, for example as tensions drawing us to improve. In other words, solicitations do not have to be fully transparent. For instance, in the distance standing example presented above, it is clear that, according to Kelly, there is an experience involved when someone stands too close: namely an experience of tension (see also Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007).

Crucially, in the case of normative motivation in absorbed coping, one cedes authority to the world and without paying actual attention to one’s actions one still has the *capacity* for attentive observation.¹² Notwithstanding this lack of detached attention, this is, according to Kelly, a case of freedom because “I am the type of animal that *could have* paid attention [...]” (Kelly, 2006: 12). Human freedom in his account is to be found in someone’s *allowing* that his or her comportment is solicited by the environment.

This allowing does not involve any choice or decision, but is simply a matter of not resisting by someone who *could*. So Kelly’s perspective is that the world is the basic motive force in which humans nevertheless have the freedom to allow it to have this effect on them (Kelly, 2006: 14).

¹² Note the analogy of this aspect of Kelly’s proposal with McDowell’s account of strong spontaneity, which is based on the *capacity* to step back and reflect. A difference is that, as we will see below, Kelly stresses that the individual cannot exercise this capacity for attentive observation willfully in absorbed coping.

It is important to note that the person's autonomy, rooted in the type of being that she is, remains crucial in Kelly's account. In absorbed coping one has a sensitivity to the norms of one's world and one is free to be switched from absorbed coping to the detached experience of paying (detached) attention to the solicitations. This switch does not result from being pushed into detachment by a breakdown in the world, nor, according to Kelly (2006: 14-15), is it done willfully or reflectively. Still it is done freely by the coping agent. A consequence of the switch is that self and world are '*crystallized*' (Kelly, 2006: 14). Kelly calls his perspective an account of human freedom precisely because not a worldly breakdown but the individual is the source of the switch (Kelly, 2006: 15).¹³

2.2.4. On the transformation from absorbed coping to noticing

Kelly finally stresses an important subtlety: since in absorbed coping there is no reflective subject, ego or (reflective) I involved,¹⁴ there is nobody who could

¹³ “[T]he source of the movement [from absorbed coping to attentive observation is] not the world but the coping agent himself. That is why it is a story about human freedom, rather than a story about worldly breakdown.” (Kelly, 2006: 15).

¹⁴ Dreyfus and Kelly convincingly make this point by means of Sartre's (1954) streetcar example: “When I run after a streetcar...there is no I... I am plunged into the world of objects...which present themselves ...with attractive and repellant qualities – but me, I have disappeared.” (Sartre, 1954: 48, as quoted in Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007: 46). This description suggests that we should not speak of a reflective subject or ego in absorbed coping: “[T]here is no ego [...] in the runner's mind when he is absorbed in reaching the streetcar [...]” (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007: 53). Note that this example does not exclude the possibility that there is *pre-reflective* self-awareness in such an episode of absorbed coping. Even though *in* this episode of absorbed coping we do not experience ourselves as a reflective subject,

(willfully) *decide* to notice. So it just happens without anticipation, just like a flat tire just occurs. Attentive observation in unreflective action just happens to one and is not something under the ego's control. Kelly therefore likes to say that noticing is "given to one":

[W]e move from immediately being motivated to act by environmental solicitations to *noticing that* we are being so motivated. [...A]ll of a sudden *I find myself* noticing my activity and the environment towards which it is directed. [...T]here is nobody who *decides to notice*, just noticing being given to one. Only after the movement has been made out of motivated agency is there any sense in talking about someone who decides to act. (Kelly, 2006: 15-16).

We encountered a similar point earlier in Dreyfus' account of basic freedom: we "find" ourselves stepping back (2007a: 6). It is not a reflected choice I make, but, as a human, I am "the kind of being to whom it could be given that I find myself no longer being bound" (Kelly, 2006: 16). Suddenly, without anticipation, without having to choose or having had any other active influence, self and world are crystallized and I find myself noticing a thing in the environment or my desire (Kelly, 2006: 15).

on the basis of this example we cannot say that there is no self-awareness at all. We have to understand what it means that the mind is not "empty" (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2007: 53). Minimally this type of skillful engagement with the world includes an experience of the lived body being drawn by solicitations.

According to Kelly this means that our most basic form of freedom is not controlled by us:

The picture one ends up with, then, is one in which our spontaneity, our freedom, is in the most basic case completely outside our control. But because we are the kinds of beings to whom this freedom is sometimes given, we are not only responsive to the world's demands, but also capable of seeing them as such. (Kelly, 2006: 16).

Of course this reference to what he calls spontaneity being given to one or "The Gift" (Kelly, 2006: 16) does not illuminate the transformation from unreflective action to reflection very much, because of the opaqueness of the term 'noticing being given'. But at least Kelly sheds light on how we can recognize that the transformation has happened: the difference is made by attentive (detached) observation of an aspect of the situation, be it the noticing of a thing or a desire.

2.2.5. Concluding remarks with respect to Kelly's account

Let me summarize Kelly's account. The world is the basic motive force and binds our actions. Together with an account of the acquisition of skills this explains how we can be motivated directly to act in a normative way. But we consider ourselves to be free agents. How does this freedom fit with being bound by the world? Kelly's answer is that we freely allow the world to effect us. By *not resisting* the pull of the solicitation, at once we allow ourselves to be bound and the world to bind us. In this lies our basic freedom. Noticing, like stepping back, is not something that we can choose when we

are absorbed in a flow of activity, according to Kelly, but is something that can be given to us. Freedom in unreflective action is not a choice, but the result of noticing given to us.

3. Assessment of the accounts of Dreyfus and Kelly

In the former sections I have presented Dreyfus' as well as Kelly's account of freedom. In this section I will evaluate their relevance for understanding unreflective freedom. We will see that both Dreyfus' account (3.1) and Kelly's account (3.2) are unable to characterize this type of freedom on its own (unreflective) terms.

3.1. Two problems with Dreyfus' account of freedom in unreflective action

In his debate with McDowell, Dreyfus makes, as we have seen, a crucial point for understanding freedom in unreflective action: human beings are free while being bound. However, in this section I will argue that, notwithstanding the importance of this insight, Dreyfus' account of freedom as it emerges in his debate with McDowell is not fully satisfactory for the case of absorbed coping, because ultimately his account makes freedom in a flow of absorbed coping dependent upon the possibility to step back and reflect. This means that he does not succeed in his aim of developing an alternative to McDowell's account. For my own purpose it is more important that Dreyfus' account does not characterize the freedom in unreflective action on its own (unreflective) terms. For given that we aim to do justice to the freedom inherent in the responsiveness to solicitations manifested also by pre-linguistic children, on its own

terms would imply that neither language nor reflection plays a role in the account given.

3.1.1. Dependence upon detached reflection

Dreyfus' (2007a) attempt to account for the distinction between human and animal coping by pointing to a difference in the nature of their freedom, in particular by accepting the Heideggerian assumption that animals are constantly 'captivated' by their current activity, brings him into difficulties because it makes his notion of pervasive human freedom dependent upon the possibility to step back and reflect, which is exactly the McDowellian position he was trying to avoid.¹⁵ Let me explain this.

In Dreyfus' (2007a) account, both animals and humans are bound by the world, but, assuming that animals do not step back to reflect, the latter can never be free to 'open' themselves to be bound; to "reenter" (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355) being bound. A first consequence of this position is that the distinction between humans and animals is first and foremost related to the human possibility of detached attention and reflection. Only this supposedly uniquely human possibility allows us to move somehow from our absorbed coping to an intermittent episode of deliberation, for example about properties of objects (Dreyfus, 2005a: 60-61). In this type of reflective situation we willfully choose our actions.

¹⁵ Just to be clear: this is an aim my paper does not share with Dreyfus.

But, ironically, and this is the second and presumably most unwanted consequence given Dreyfus' aims, it is only because we humans can be in such an episode of detached *reflection*, that we are free to '*reenter*' unreflective action, that is, that we are free to let ourselves be bound again by solicitations.¹⁶ Animals cannot make this switch from reflection back to absorbed coping, because they "can never step back" in the first place (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355). The result of such a position is that their being bound by the world is better characterized as a being always 'captivated' in a state of unreflective coping, whereas human freedom in unreflective action, which for Dreyfus is the possibility of *re-entering* being bound, *depends on the possibility of making a detour via reflection*. But this latter position was exactly McDowell's position for which Dreyfus wanted to offer an *alternative* for with his notion of pervasive freedom. I will now explain how this presumably unwanted result also undermines a related claim made by Dreyfus.

3.1.2. Does pervasive freedom have priority over strong spontaneity?

Dreyfus makes a claim about the priority relationship between pervasive freedom and strong spontaneity. He suggests that freedom in his sense is "our most pervasive and important kind of freedom" (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354), because McDowell's strong spontaneity "presupposes" (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355) our pervasive freedom, the freedom to let ourselves be involved. When absorbed, we do not *choose* to step back since

¹⁶ To repeat Dreyfus' own words: "Our involved freedom makes possible on some occasions finding ourselves becoming detached and *choosing* a course of action which, like all willful actions, we can perform at best competently, while on other occasions, letting ourselves be drawn to reenter our involved expert activity." (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355)

there is no reflective “I” or ego steering one’s actions, but we are “finding ourselves” stepping back (Dreyfus, 2007a: 355). This means that the movement from an episode of absorbed coping to an intermittent episode of reflection is not triggered by any explicit thought or conscious willful act, but occurs in some other way. (As mentioned above, Dreyfus does not say much about how this transformation occurs.) The problem with Dreyfus’ priority claim is that, based on Dreyfus’ (2007a) own characterization of human freedom, presented above, one could also argue that pervasive human freedom presupposes the capacity to step back and reflect. Without such a possibility for reflection humans would, just like animals, not enjoy the freedom to be bound in Dreyfus’ sense, but have the same lack of freedom as animals and be enslaved by solicitations.

To conclude, Dreyfus has the important insight that there is no contradiction between being bound and freedom. But he (2007a) does not succeed in characterizing freedom in unreflective action on its own terms. Presumably without wanting it, his account hinges on the possibility to “reenter” coping from *reflection*. Why does he run into these difficulties in his response to McDowell? I suspect because he tries to deal with two complex problems at once: the issue of unreflective freedom and the issue of the distinction between human and animal coping.

3.2. Assessment of Kelly’s account of freedom

Kelly’s (2006) account is innovative in that it links freedom and normativity in unreflective action by asking how our unreflective responsiveness to norms can be free. Just like Dreyfus’ account it is also highly ambitious in trying to account at once for both the crucial distinction between human and animal coping and the freedom we

have in our unreflective responsiveness to solicitations. He locates the freedom of unreflective action in the possibility to resist solicitation by noticing it. Noticing requires a detached form of attention, ‘crystallizes’ subject and object, and ends the flow of coping. Kelly’s proposal, however, is also not fully satisfactory as an account of both adult and pre-linguistic human freedom *in* an episode of unreflective action as I aim to develop.

The most important shortcoming of his account for that purpose is that it effectively includes a detour of (potentially) stepping back from the flow of skillful action, because his technical term ‘noticing’ introduces a switch from absorbed coping to detached attentive observation in which subject and object are ‘crystallized’. Kelly’s account of freedom in unreflective action is dependent upon the possibility of an attentively observing ego. Such a position is similar to McDowell’s, but now with detached attention taking the place of reflection. In both cases terms are introduced that are characteristic of strong spontaneity and that are not limited to the investigation of what happens *within* the flow of unreflective activity. This is the same problem we encountered when evaluating Dreyfus’ account. This means that both of them are unsuccessful in their attempt to differentiate their accounts from McDowell’s. (Recall that I do not share that aim, because I consider my account to be complementary to McDowell’s.) More importantly for my purpose, their accounts does not fit with the aim of developing a middleground-account that sheds light on the kind of freedom *inherent* in the unreflective actions of both adults and pre-linguistic children.

A second important shortcoming of Kelly’s proposal is that it is hard to see how Kelly could account for a *sense* of freedom *in* unreflective action, that is, a sense

of freedom that precedes the arrival of an intermittent episode of detached noticing.¹⁷

According to him, noticing is wholly unanticipated and occurs as suddenly as a breakdown in the environment, for instance, like being disturbed by a flat tire:

It is as if the noticing is given to one from nowhere, created *ex nihilo*, just as the breakdown in the environment was. (Kelly, 2006: 15).

Although in absorbed coping there is indeed neither a reflective I who decides anything, nor someone who notices the solicitation, I wonder how Kelly could make the phenomenological claim that we “freely” (Kelly, 2006: 7) allow ourselves to be bound by solicitations if there were not some (perhaps only minimal) experience of this freedom present in the episode of unreflective action itself. Notwithstanding its many excellent phenomenological descriptions and analyses, this problem makes Kelly’s (2006) account sometimes appear to be more like that of a theoretical inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of freedom, than an account of actually *lived* freedom *in* unreflective action.

A third limitation is that Kelly’s exclusive focus on negative freedom (interrupting the response to solicitation) leaves one wondering if there is no positive freedom involved in unreflective action. Does positive freedom (in the minimal sense

¹⁷ He writes for instance the following about such an experience in absorbed coping: “My experience of environmental norms is always such that resistance could occur, and this differentiates me from the animals. And to the extent that the norms continue to hold me, there is a sense in which I have allowed them to do so.” (Kelly, 2006: 16). Kelly describes the experience of freedom in unreflective action well here, but the account he gives in terms of “noticing” does not do justice to this phenomenon.

of the possibility to do one thing rather than another) require detached reflection, according to Kelly?

I would also like to articulate a doubt. Is it really productive for our understanding of freedom in unreflective action to assume too easily that non-human animals are completely enslaved or captivated by their current activity? Kelly and Dreyfus seem to share this attitude with McDowell who writes that what characterizes the lack of freedom of animals is “enslavement to immediate biological imperatives” (McDowell, 1996: 117).¹⁸ Kelly writes that the “dog who is solicited by the bone, or by the running cat, immediately finds himself running after it” (Kelly, 2006: 7). But we could easily come up with descriptions of other episodes of animal behavior that do suggest at least some degree of freedom. For example, are we sure that there is no freedom in the behavior of a chimpanzee who, on seeing a distressed chimpanzee friend, comes over, puts an arm around the other and calms the friend down?¹⁹ And what about the observation that this chimpanzee does not console a distressed enemy? My point is that when we inform ourselves well on the results of the various sciences

¹⁸ However, we have seen also in the introduction that McDowell (2002) acknowledges in his response to Taylor (2002) that it is important to develop a better understanding of freedom in animal behavior.

¹⁹ This example comes from the work of primatologist Frans de Waal (2004). This example is also interesting because it reminds us of the importance of the network of social relationships for understanding freedom, the crucial link between care and freedom, emphasized in the closing sentences of Merleau-Ponty’s (2002/1945) chapter on freedom. Moreover, De Waal quotes Jane Goodall (1990: 213, in De Waal, 2004: 389) saying: “In some zoos, chimpanzees are kept on man-made islands, surrounded by water-filled moats... Chimpanzees cannot swim and, unless they are rescued, will drown if they fall into deep water. Despite this, individuals have sometimes made heroic efforts to save companions from drowning – and were sometimes successful.” De Waal (2004: 389) notes that studies of animal behavior show that dolphins and elephants have similar powerful tendencies to help others.

investigating animal behavior, it may become difficult to accept the Heideggerian denial of the freedom of animals as self-evidently correct. However, given the trouble Dreyfus and Kelly run into with respect to doing justice to the freedom involved in unreflective action, I prefer for methodological reasons to postpone treatment of the issue of the distinction between human and animal freedom until we have developed a good understanding of the freedom in human responsiveness to solicitations. As mentioned in the introduction, this scales down the level of complexity and avoids projecting aspects of reflective action (detached attention or the possibility to reenter unreflective coping) back into human unreflective freedom, covering adults and pre-linguistic children only.

A final observation is that both Dreyfus and Kelly leave the affective component of absorbed coping implicit. But why is it so important that absorbed coping or attention is not detached but *engaged*? What difference does this engagement make? Could it be that neglecting affective engagement not only conceals an important aspect of the phenomenon of absorbed coping, but also blocks sight on what is crucial with respect to freedom in unreflective action?

In the final section I will sketch an alternative account of freedom in skillful unreflective action.

4. Freedom in skillful unreflective action: Sketch of an alternative

In this section I would like to sketch an alternative account of freedom in episodes of adequate unreflective action that neither directly nor indirectly grounds this freedom in the possibility to step back or in the possibility to use language. For McDowellians

this may seem like a merely theoretical exercise at first sight, because, as they rightly point out, we actually always have the possibility to step back and reflect. However, as we have seen above, it was McDowell (2002) himself who agreed with Taylor that an account of freedom in unreflective action would improve our understanding of responsiveness to relevant affordances in the case of humans, pre-linguistic children and animals. Moreover, for phenomenologists like Dreyfus and Kelly this endeavor is important because of the need to understand how we are able to switch freely from unreflective action to reflection when there is no reflective subject present to willfully choose to step back.²⁰

As mentioned in the introduction, my point is not to sketch an alternative to McDowell's strong spontaneity, but rather to present a complementary perspective on the nature of unreflective freedom in action for a different purpose, focusing on the affordance-responsiveness that human adults and pre-linguistic children have in common. This does not exclude the possibility that for understanding the freedom of adult human beings in all its complexity we also need to take strong spontaneity into account. What I present here is not supposed to be incompatible with that. McDowell, for instance, could thus simply accept what I say and integrate it by adding that there are other important characteristics of freedom that are specific to mature human beings.²¹

²⁰ Dreyfus (2005a, p. 60) calls the question about this transformation an "urgent" one.

²¹ On the other hand, we should not presuppose that intuitive responsiveness to possibilities for action does not also play a role in the activity of explicit deliberation. It might well be the case that explicit deliberation, as a form of skillful action, shares more characteristics with skillful unreflective action than is generally assumed at the moment. Moreover, the balance between reflection and unreflective action is typically maintained unreflectively (De Haan, Rietveld & Denys, in press).

Recall that the central question that guides my investigations here is: what is freedom as experienced pre-reflectively by an individual *in* an episode of unreflective affordance-responsiveness? My proposal for answering this question is simple at its core: we experience freedom in a flow of unreflective skillful action because in such an episode we are always situated in a *field* of multiple relevant affordances soliciting us, which makes it always possible to allow oneself to begin something new, to be bound differently. In other words, we are not only drawn by the one affordance we are currently dealing with, but we are also affected to some extent by other significant affordances in the background. This field of affordances is not some amorphous sum of affordances. This field is structured and reflects the dynamically changing concerns of the individual (some affordances stand out and are privileged over others in the particular situation because of these concerns). In sum, I propose that the freedom characteristic of unreflective action *is* being responsive to a field of relevant affordances.

This proposal builds upon a foundation I have developed elsewhere (Rietveld, 2004; 2008b, 2012). An aim of these papers was to increase our insight into the way we switch from doing one thing to doing another thing without explicit deliberation. Using primarily Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002/1945) I argued that a flow of unreflective action contains perturbing affective influences as a result of the fact that a multiplicity of affordances in our surroundings attract or repel us.²² Their affective

²² A Wittgensteinian case of such a transition in a flow of unreflective action could be the situation in which the lapels have adequately been dealt with by the tailor and now he is moved to improve by another part of the same suit.

allure is often strong enough to induce a switch from our current activity to another ‘I can’ *while staying within the flow of skillful coping*. I concluded there that,

affective perturbations by attracting or repelling objects seem to be able to clarify how within a flow of [absorbed] coping we are able to switch from ‘I can’ to ‘I can’ [...] (Rietveld, 2004, p. 18).

This means that thanks to the presence (in the background of our current activity) of a multiplicity of affordances affecting us, we can switch activities, say from typing to eating an apple, without making a detour via detachment or explicit deliberation.

In his reply to a paper by Komarine Romdenh-Romluc (2007) Dreyfus (2007d) develops a similar interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on this issue. His interpretation is more refined than mine (2004) in that it also makes two relevant distinctions. Dreyfus’ (2007d) reading integrates the Husserlian notions of the inner and the outer horizon and, more over, distinguishes between switching tasks and switching situations:

Merleau-Ponty as I read him has an answer to Romdenh-Romluc’s [...] hard question: How do we shift tasks while staying fully involved? We do so by turning to a potential task already summoning us from the inner horizon of the current task in which we are absorbed, or else by turning from the current situation in which we are engaged to some other situation

already summoning us from the current situation's outer horizon. (Dreyfus, 2007d, p. 67).

So while engaged in one activity other affordances, tasks and situations present on the (inner or outer) horizon are sensed and summon or invite the skillful body. One's giving in to such a solicitation generates an unreflective transition to another activity.

What do these Merleau-Pontian ideas on the phenomenology of unreflectively switching activities mean for our understanding of *freedom* in unreflective action? Whether or not an actual switch occurs is less important for understanding this than the observation that the very presence of these solicitations in the background constitutes a *field* of relevant affordances and allows one to commit elsewhere without having to make a detour via reflection. In my opinion these possibilities for action constitute a basic form of freedom, the freedom characteristic of unreflective skillful action.

To avoid misunderstandings, it is important to note that these possibilities in the background are not *mere* possibilities or possibilities in some abstract sense, for example as counterfactuals. On the contrary, the type of possibilities I am talking about are affordances, possibilities that exert a direct influence on our unreflective activity, perturb us, attract us or repel us, and 'awake' or 'ready' *our potentialities for interaction with the affordance*. To use Dreyfus' (2007d, p. 65) words, "one's body is already being drawn (not just prepared)" to do something. These affordances show up, albeit often only indeterminately, in our field of perception and action, because they are relevant to our concerns. But they are not only relevant for understanding our first-person experience because, simultaneously they impact and involve also the physically active body by inducing 'changes in action readiness' (Frijda, 1986).

According to Nico Frijda (1986), emotions are *changes in action readiness* that are generated as a reaction to objects or events that are relevant to the individual's concerns. These "states of action readiness [...] flexibly motivate flexible actions" (Frijda, 2007, p. 115). He makes the following important observation:

Emotions should not be primarily understood as reactions. They are best viewed as modulations of a prevailing background of continuous engagement with the environment. (Frijda, 2007, p. 38).

Frijda's eye for the background of continuous bodily engagement with the world dovetails nicely with my efforts to call attention to the importance of not only figure-affordances but also ground-affordances.

By way of summary, let me give an example to clarify this position of mine in relation to the various accounts of freedom we have encountered in this paper. Imagine a brief episode in the life of an excellent Brazilian tailor at work. This excellent craftsman is able to unreflectively switch from cutting, to sewing, to taking a bite from his apple, to answering the phone. In McDowell's account this tailor's unreflective action is free because he could step back and reflect on his reasons for, say, sewing or being a tailor. In Dreyfus' account the tailor's unreflective action is free because were he to find himself reflecting on his reasons for sewing, he could let himself be drawn back into unreflective action; he could reenter absorbed coping. In Kelly's account the tailor's unreflective action is free because he has the possibility of noticing being given to him, in which case he would notice in a detached way (i.e.

become reflectively aware of) his desire to sew this piece of fabric and thereby he could, as a reflective subject, effectively resist this desire.

In my account, freedom in unreflective action does not require that one ends the flow of skillful unreflective action. The tailor's unreflective action is free because, while sewing for instance, he is situated in a field of multiple relevant affordances affecting him, attracting or repelling him. These other affordances on the horizon, which are more or less indeterminate and experienced pre-reflectively, could for instance be: sewing something else, eating an apple, stopping working and going to the beach, drinking water or turning on the radio. The field of relevant affordances is a field of freedom.

It is important to note that resisting an affordance presupposes the possibility to begin something new; resisting an affordance can only be done by committing elsewhere. But starting such a new activity can be done *unreflectively* by allowing oneself to be solicited by possibility for action on the horizon. More generally, the central activities emphasized in the accounts of McDowell, Dreyfus and Kelly, respectively the possibility of stepping back to reflect, switching to another activity, and stopping and resisting a response, are all possibilities for action that can solicit mature human beings while being engaged in an unreflective flow of actions. As such they are action opportunities that can be integrated in the field of relevant affordances, which is the central notion in my account of unreflective freedom.²³ Seen from *within*

²³ Note that in the case of mere movements that are not actions, for example when we are unexpectedly pushed by someone, the initial movements we make are not instances of responsiveness to relevant affordances. On the other hand, the way we respond briefly after being pushed, for example by grasping someone's arm (but not her breasts or hair) to avoid falling, and the way the compensatory

an episode of unreflective action of adult human beings a possibility for reflection can be lived as one of the affordances in the field of possible actions.

Pre-linguistic children by definition lack the ability to reflect explicitly and do not have this particular possibility for action. Nevertheless, it makes sense to say that they possess unreflective freedom in so far as they are situated in a field of multiple solicitations to act as well. This simultaneous responsiveness to multiple affordances is something that can be investigated empirically.

Due to their idiosyncrasy the examples of eating an apple or turning on the radio may seem to omit the observation that the socio-cultural environment is also crucial for understanding how humans are freely responsive to *relevant or appropriate* affordances. But we can distinguish conceptually between, on the one hand, the *normativity*²⁴ inherent in unreflective action and, on the other, the *freedom* inherent in this type of action. The aim of this example of the Brazilian tailor (and of this paper) is to shed light on the aspect of freedom, not on the aspect of normativity (for a discussion of this latter aspect, see Rietveld, 2008a).

Given the possibility of making this distinction, an interesting open question is: how are these aspects of freedom and normativity in unreflective action related? A detailed discussion of this complex question will have to wait for another occasion. For now I can say that I believe that the aspects of freedom and normativity are internally related. These notions stress different aspects of one and the same

movements develop over time after the initial automatic reaction, can be understood in terms of such responsiveness.

²⁴ I mean here situated normativity in the basic sense of distinguishing in the context of a particular situation between better and worse, optimal and suboptimal, appropriate and inappropriate, what is significant and what is less significant, etc.

phenomenon of *allowing oneself* to be moved to *improve* by relevant affordances. So it is *not* the case that no matter what the craftsman does next, his unreflective action is free as long as he acts in response to one of the affordances in his field of affordances. That would neglect the particular and rich socio-cultural context in which the action is situated (see Rietveld, 2008a, 2010).

One important objection to my proposal that the freedom characteristic of unreflective action *is* being responsive to a field of relevant affordances, could be that it is not an account of freedom but of being captivated or enslaved by solicitations in the world since there is no willful choice made by the individual. I do not believe that this objection provides a real problem for my account. First of all my focus on unreflective freedom does not imply any underestimation of the importance of willful choice or reflective freedom. It is simply another topic. I will not elaborate on this because this should be clear by now thanks to the presentation of my account as complementary to McDowell's one.

Secondly, this objection neglects the fact that we are embodied and situated beings. Being embodied and situated implies being constrained. As Merleau-Ponty (2002/1945) and Hannah Arendt (1958; 1977/1961) have shown, being bound by the world does not contradict freedom. Invoking Arendt may come as a surprise in this context of studying freedom in unreflective skillful action. However, I think that her (1977/1961) account of situated freedom is exemplary in that it avoids an overly individualistic conception of freedom while at the same time stressing that freedom is inherent in action, even in unreflective action (see Rietveld, 2008c for a discussion).

Thirdly, even though there is no willful choice by a deliberating subject, that which the individual cares about nevertheless motivates the way she acts freely. The

structure of the field of affordances, with relevant affordances that solicit action right now and other possibilities for action that are on the horizon, reflects the individual's dynamically changing concerns. The sensitive body, which is a dynamic structure of affective engagement, plays a crucial role for our selective openness to relevant solicitations. These sensitivities should be understood in the context of our histories in a natural and socio-cultural world in which we have developed our skills and concerns, including our bonds with others. What we care about in the concrete situation is reflected in the structured field of relevant affordances that draws us to act unreflectively.

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