From Disembodied Intellect to Cultivated Rationality
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The issues that Paul Standish alerts us to are significant since they situate McDowell's argument in reference to works lying outside the mainstream tradition of philosophy, works that reject epistemology and its bedfellow scepticism. Standish brings to the fore a way of thinking that is relevant to contemporary educational practice. Those who work in the field of education cannot help but be struck by the mismatch between the pervasive managerialism, obsessed by targets and objectives, and the hankering after 'something more' amongst those who believe it possible to subscribe pragmatically to the demands of such an approach yet claim to reject them in principle. Responses to the failures of utilitarian approaches in education, rather than seeking a richer account of rationality, have turned instead to affectivity and to embracing ways of being in the world that avoid what they take to be the excesses of abstract reason.

In *Back to the Rough Ground* (1993), Joseph Dunne addresses precisely this issue through the practice of teaching. Specifically, he asks how administratively set targets and objectives can achieve the professional development of teachers; how an artistic and expressive endeavour such as educating can be administered and, by implication, instrumentalised. He argues that when education is conceived instrumentally there is 'no sense of the pedagogic relationship setting a field of psychic tension', or of the possibility that, 'something might be at work in the pedagogic situation which cannot simply be made the object of analysis but must rather be lived through'. He writes of 'a kind of subsoil which nourishes the fruit of explicit purpose but which is not itself the fruit'. Referring to Wittgenstein, he makes the point with which McDowell is also concerned—that we want constraint on our freedom to deploy concepts. Concepts are not detached from what they conceptualise or indeed from the ground in which they arise, and so, Dunne concludes, '…one might teach by this model on ice but hardly on the rough ground of the classroom' (1993, p. 5).

Standish refers to Putnam's critique of the separation of fact and value, epitomised in the positivism of economic thought, to underline the failures of policy and practice premised on such a separation. He adopts Putnam's terms of 'entanglement' and 'the disentangling manoeuvre' to focus our attention on what any attempt to re-enchant the world must involve. His reading of McDowell alerts us to the danger of 'false re-enchantments' and leads him to argue against what he takes to be McDowell's overly rationalist conception in favour of a 'muted re-enchantment' where we can credit ourselves with knowledge even though we may, in Cavell's words, be 'disappointed with criteria'. Standish's Heideggerian informed critique is not unfamiliar in the literature on McDowell where it has become a significant counterpoint to McDowell's conceptualism.

However, more is at stake here than an epistemological controversy about conceptualism. Education, by its nature, is always knee deep in concepts. But in recent years there has been a move away from what is seen as an emphasis on the conceptual towards other aspects of education. The importance of interrogating the space opened by McDowell's intervention cannot be underestimated for more is involved than the transcendence of a conception of concepts and rationality that is supposedly at odds with the phenomenology of our experience. While it may have been necessary to overcome the characterisation of education as an abstract activity predominantly concerned with

conveying concepts that represent aspects of the world, the result has been the neglect of the role that concepts play and this distorted our understanding of other aspects of the complex process we call education (Derry, 2008, 2014). It is for this reason that we need to take more care over the conception of rationality that we understand to inform the educational process.

As Bakhurst tries to bring out throughout *The Formation of Reason*, McDowell casts a distinctive light on rationality and reason. His concepts of these are quite different from those of a philosophical tradition associated with Descartes, Locke, Hume and with particular analytic readings of Kant. In the barest outline, there is an influential, if not orthodox, position that presents rationality as abstract and decontextualised. It relies on the idea that reason is separated from the world and then has greater or lesser degrees of adequacy in its application. When applied to education this type of abstract rationality can lead to extreme forms of formalised teaching, and so it is often rejected by those who advocate the individual meaning-making of learners. Rationality, interpreted as detached and abstract, has been named as the culprit for the poverty of educational practice in mass schooling. At first sight, it may therefore seem that McDowell's claim that receptivity is already 'conceptual' is vulnerable to this criticism. However, since it involves a conception of 'reason' quite different from that with which critics take issue, this is not the case. Rather than adopting a conception of abstract rationality, McDowell opens the way to a conception of reason that is fundamentally different and which, thanks to the liberating influence of the concept of second nature, stands 'a chance of making traditional philosophy obsolete' (McDowell, 1996, p. 111).

Standish raises questions that assist us in getting to grips with McDowell's distinctive conception of rationality. It is helpful here to consider issues that have emerged since *Mind and World* was published, particularly as they are relevant to education. Standish claims that while 'the space of reasons' is pivotal to McDowell's argument it suffers from the weakness that it is excessively cerebral with its 'over-emphasis on the *use of concepts* and an under-sensitivity to other ways in which human behaviour can be rational'. He uses the example of sitting on a chair as a practice which, though rational, is not 'well described in terms of the application of concepts or of the space of reasons… [I]n special circumstances… it can be something we reason about, but normally such activity is woven into the background'. McDowell's conception of the space of reasons has been criticised in precisely this way by Hubert Dreyfus, who is particularly taken with the Heideggerian idea of *coping* and as a result sees similar problems in McDowell's work as Standish.

Standish's point is that 'the nomenclature of "concepts" and "reasons" is overplayed', with the result that 'an excessively cerebral emphasis is given to what is at the heart of human experience'. Dreyfus levelled precisely this charge at McDowell in his presidential address to the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in 2005. Like Standish, he questioned McDowell's claim 'that perception is conceptual all the way out' and asked 'can philosophers describe the conceptual upper floors of the edifice of knowledge while ignoring the embodied coping going on on the ground floor, in effect declaring that human experience is upper stories all the way down?' (Dreyfus, 2005, p. 2). However, while Standish's criticisms follow similar lines, he distances himself from the 'Californian' Dreyfus for his neglect of the existentialist passages in the later chapters of *Being and Time*. These display a different emphasis from

the idea of a background or 'ground floor'. While there appears to be a similarity between Standish and Dreyfus in their concern to give weight to a phenomenological account of non-conceptual coping, Standish's interest in rejecting an excessively cerebral view stems from an affinity with Cavell's critique of the claim of reason to transcend the never-ending and unsettled engagement which is the mark of being human.

Where does this leave us as educationalists? In particular how should educationalists conceive the conceptual? What has now become known as the McDowell-Dreyfus debate is instructive for these questions. The debate, most recently continued in a collection edited by Joseph Schear (2013), allows us to see just how much hangs on the way concepts, and the roles they play, are understood. In a similar vein to Standish's remarks about language, it is clearly important in an educational context to recognise that we do a great many things with concepts.

Dreyfus, for his part, does not recognise this multiple use of concepts in McDowell's work. He believes that: 'For McDowell making judgments requires operative concepts that correspond to a propositionally structured totality of facts' (Dreyfus, 2013, p. 21). He rejects what he takes to be the pervasiveness of concepts in McDowell's approach wanting instead to emphasise that we can act intelligently without any mediation of concepts. Providing examples of footballers and chess players to support his anti-conceptualism, he maintains, following Heidegger, that:

> … we are not subjects striving to get it right about an independent
> objective reality, but rather we are absorbed into a field of forces drawing
> us to keep up our ongoing coping like a pilot staying on the beam. Since
> there is no mind/world distance in such activity, there is no need for
> conceptual content to mediate a mind/world relation (Dreyfus, 2103, p. 21)

In a paper that followed his initial intervention, Dreyfus targeted what he took to be the source of McDowell's excessive concern with concepts; *the Myth of the Mental* (Dreyfus, 2007). According to Dreyfus, the problem with McDowell's approach is the lack of attention to the phenomenology of bodily coping as a background to, rather than as subsumed by, conceptual capacities. Dreyfus is not alone in this criticism, the same point was made by Charles Taylor who bemoans the lack of attention to 'everyday coping', arguing that 'ordinary coping' is not conceptual (Taylor, 2002, p. 113). McDowell's position, by contrast, is that 'our perceptual relation to the world is conceptual all the way out to the world's impacts on our receptive capacities' and thus he sees perception and rationality as inextricable: 'our perceptual experience is permeated with rationality' (McDowell, 2007, p. 338).

The conception of rationality here, however, is not the one targeted in Dreyfus's claim that McDowell has replaced *the Myth of the Given* with *the Myth of the Mental*. In his response to Dreyfus, McDowell argues that, on his view, rationality is not 'detached [and] brought to bear on practical predicaments from a standpoint other than one of immersion in them' (McDowell, 2007, p. 338). The real myth in question is not that of the Mental but the *Myth of Disembodied Intellect*, i.e. the real source of the problem is the idea of an abstract or detached rationality. And so we are brought back to educational issues, for the idea of abstract rationality has, for example, been associated with the traditional disciplines. This association has played a decisive role in the rejection of the

sort of curricula content which is perceived to exemplify a rationality of the kind that is detached and then brought to bear on individual situations (Derry, 2008). However, the presupposition underlying this rejection concerns not so much matters of conceptualism but rather the way in which access to knowledge is made possible by processes of teaching and learning themselves. How rationality may be (re)conceived is taken up in McDowell's reworking of our relation of mind and world made possible by his exorcism of existing philosophical anxieties about the very possibility of thought.

McDowell's claim that 'mind is pervasive in our perceptual experience' (2007, p. 339) does not force him to neglect embodied coping, as Dreyfus believes when he maintains that embodied coping skills are non-conceptual. The target of Dreyfus's attack is 'a picture of rationality as situation-independent' and while McDowell can agree that the skills exercised in embodied coping cannot be characterised in terms of situation-independent rationality, this is not to deny that responsiveness to reasons is involved. McDowell's response to Dreyfus centres on a discussion of their respective readings of Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* and how this involves reasons. McDowell's point is that these reasons are not in advance of the particular situations that the *phronimos* encounters and that 'the practical rationality of the *phronimos* is displayed in what he does even if he does not decide to do that as a result of reasoning' (McDowell, 2007, p. 341).

Taylor, again invoking a Heideggerian background, also takes issue with McDowell's rejection of a non-conceptual form of experience. And again McDowell's response rejects the notion of conceptual capacities evident in Taylor's discussion as one in which such capacities 'are in play only when things come into focus'. McDowell counters with the argument that 'Taylor does not emphasize my insistence that actualizations of conceptual capacities must be seen as manifestations of life, as opposed to operations of pure intellect' (McDowell, 2002, p. 283).

For McDowell's part, Dreyfus's starting point of the 'Myth of the Disembodied Intellect' puts their positions at cross-purposes. He resists the idea that concepts can only be realised in discursive activity as concepts are in play in various ways, a point Bakhurst consistently emphasises in his book (see, e.g., pp. 14-16, 125-126). What remains is that we act for reasons and according to McDowell 'cultivated rationality is at work' in the spontaneous response of the kind person drawn forth by the needy person's plight as much as in the actions of the chess player (McDowell, 2013, p. 47).

Actualisations of conceptual capacities are part of the process McDowell attempts to capture with the term *Bildung*, bringing a developmental aspect to the fore. Dreyfus criticises McDowell for failing to give an account of 'just how, thanks to *Bildung*, our instinctual first nature becomes socialised into second nature' accusing him of 'restricting second nature to rational behaviour… limit[ing] *Bildung* to the development of our conceptual capacities' (Dreyfus, 2013, p. 23). On the surface, this appears to coincide with a similar charge made by Rödl who takes issue with Bakhurst's efforts to defend and develop McDowell's idea that *Bildung* effects a change from 'mere' animal to person, arguing that such a change is incoherent. However Rödl shares Bakhurst's convictions about the significant contribution to reason that education makes, but rejects the idea that education is reason's source. By considering these matters in Aristotelian as opposed to psychological fashion Rödl is able to maintain that 'Education, instead of being the source of reason in the child, is the source of habits of reason in the child…for reason is

actual only in habits'. This brings back into the picture the idea of reason as the very opposite of detached or disembodied; that is to say 'reason is actual in the human being and can only be actual in the human being, as a social and historical reality'. Rather than this 'conceptual adjustment' undermining Bakhurst's overall argument, Rödl believes that he in fact reinforces Bakhurst's insights regarding the depth of the socio-historical.

Where does this leave education? As Bakhurst stresses 'thinking, reasoning, and uttering intelligently are norm governed activities…they are governed by reasons'. However, what this entails for educational practice has to be carefully worked out. Although these matters are only lightly touched on here, it should be clear first that a richer conception of rationality is badly needed in the field of education; and second that the importance to such a conception of the idea of *Bildung* puts educational concerns at the heart of contemporary philosophical discussion of these matters.

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