Skillful-Attention and Absorbed Coping: A Buddhist Phenomenology Perspective on Expertise

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Abstract

Hubert Dreyfus introduced the concept of "absorbed coping," or "skillful coping," to explain self-awareness and practical wisdom. He categorizes human performance based on knowledge and experience into five stages, with "Expertise" as the most advanced. Experts, according to Dreyfus, can intuitively and immediately respond to situations without self-aware reasoning or the need for reason-giving. This notion has sparked significant debate within analytic philosophy, which has struggled to fully account for the concept of expertise. Dreyfus argues that skills are embodied and cannot be understood as mental representations, asserting that attention plays no role in absorbed coping since it is most effective when the individual is not consciously focused on the activity. In response, James M. Dow introduces a new framework that challenges Dreyfus' view. Dow offers the example of a Yogi, whose practice, he claims, is not disrupted by self-awareness but rather requires "attention" to perform effectively, while still recognizing areas for improvement. This paper aims to support and expand Dow's perspective by incorporating Buddhist phenomenology and the concept of Vipassana into the discussion. It further explores the possibility of cultivating "skillful attention" through Vipassana practice. Ultimately, detailed accounts of skilled bodily actions by advanced Vipassana practitioners may challenge Dreyfus' assertion that experts lack the capacity for reason-giving.

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Introduction

Hubert Dreyfus introduced skillful "absorbed coping" to describe the concept of practical wisdom. This topic became central for debates related to the nature of perceptual content in action. According to Dreyfus, skillful absorbed coping involves a non-conceptual form of experience, much in the way professional athletes are not able to report their mental content while performing skillful actions. (Dreyfus, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008) This early debate between Dreyfus and McDowell gives rise to the need to explain how action can be constituted by both agency and situations.

Dreyfus' later position (Dreyfus, 2005 & 2007) often draws from new studies in neuroscience, particularly from Walter Freeman's neural network, to substantiate Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "intentional arc." For Dreyfus, the fact that patterns of neural networks are generated supports Merleau-Ponty's claim that skillful action is actually a refined-form of action that responds to the world of solicitation. If Dreyfus is right, then we will have to live with the unsolved myth of the mental. But if McDowell is right with his situation-specific mindedness, then why would the sports scientist not be able to improve on a professional athlete's reportability?

James M. Dow (2015/2017) focuses on the self-awareness of agency to elucidate the theory of absorbed bodily coping. Dow uses Yoga as an example of a "telic" or intentional awareness to challenge the terms of the Dreyfus-McDowell debate regarding what kind of awareness is involved in agency. He begins with G. E. M. Anscombe's telic account of awareness, which privileges intentions over agential, self-conscious reflection. According to Anscombe, that we become aware of our actions and view them as the source of movement does not necessarily, nor thetically, have to involve the self-awareness of one's movement. In other words, when an agent acts upon something, she is rarely self-aware of her actions. There are times, Anscombe claims, that she has a "lapse of consciousness," where her actions become closer to being absorbed in her environment. This can be seen as an answer to the

problem of vanishing self-awareness. Dow begins here by developing his own account of the telic awareness of agency as a form of self-awareness. (Dow, 2017, pp.165-166)

In this paper, I argue that we can strengthen Dow's account of self-synthesis by drawing from the traditions of Buddhist Vipassana meditation. This will enable us to make sense of a form of self-awareness involved in expert bodily action that does not interrupt the expertise's immersion in the experiential flow. I also argue that through what Heidegger calls the structure of care (Sorge) we can explain why professional athletes do not have reportability. Further, I will introduce the concept of "infinitesimal action," which I take to be a more refined version of the structure of care, in order to open up the possibility for professional athletes to be able to report their skilled actions without any disruption and need to emerge out of the flow of their actions. I claim that this process can be seen as equivalent to Dreyfus's Five stages of expertise, which could be improved upon if we take up the Buddhist practice of Vipassana.

The first section of this paper elucidates the debate between Dreyfus and McDowell. The second section explores Dow's account of self-synthesis. And the third section is dedicated to Buddhist phenomenology and Vipassana meditation.

Skillful Absorbed Coping: The Debates

The early debate between Dreyfus and McDowell emerged out of the issue of the nature of absorbed skillful coping. Dreyfus is an advocate of an account of absorbed skillful coping that involves neither reason-giving nor the representation of mental content, while McDowell is an advocate of the position that action always involves processes of conceptualization and representation through which we are able to accumulate and develop absorbed skillful coping.

Dreyfus argues that skillful absorbed coping must not involve conceptualization at all, since the sole criteria of being an expert is that one can act without having to self-reflect. Consequentially, to achieve maximal coping, one must act without any thinkable objective, that is, with a non-conceptual form of experience. (Dreyfus, 2005) We can find here a similarity with Jean-Paul Sartre's (1957) idea of object-present phenomenology, in which "[t]here is no I, I am plunged into the world of objects." (Sartre's, 1957, pp. 48-9) According to McDowell, language enables us in mundane actions to reidentify experiences, even in the case where words are limited; that is, even when we cannot describe our experiences in the form of language, we can

still store objects of experiences in our memory in a definitely conceptual manner. McDowell argues, is not something that needs to be brought in by reflective thinking; it's already presents in the way the world is disclosed to us.

Dreyfus uses Merleau-Ponty to explain how our skills are acquired by dealing with situations, and how our relations to the world are transformed as we acquire skills. Dreyfus sees skillful actions as "stored." They are acquired without being representations. Expertise, or a so-called maximal grip (2002, 2008),[2] needs to be built up as a bodily coping with the world. The connection is bonded by an intentional arc, that is, by an ability which allows the agent's body to respond to the solicitations of perception involved in her current situation, such as when the professional basketball player passes the ball to teammate without looking. For Dreyfus, skillful-coping is skill acquisition. It develops through time and according to the body's tendency to respond to more refined perceptions and situational solicitations.

Dreyfus then categorizes five stages of expertise: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competence, Proficient, Expertise. These abilities range from following instructions to the an almost automatic response in relation to a goal.

Dreyfus claims that many of our skills are acquired at an early age either by trial and error or by imitation. Novice is a stage that requires fully focused attention. When the novice acts, she acts like a computer following a program, that is, by following certain sets of rules. As one gains experience by coping with situations in the world, one learns how to adjust – or to fine tune one's skills – and thus becomes more and more proficient. Simultaneously, the self-awareness of one's actions is increasingly abandoned throughout the process until one enters the stages of Proficient and Expertise. The significant difference between a proficient performer and an expert is that the former still mentally "decides," while the expert acts "straightway". Skilled action does not require mental representation. The Novice relies on rules and facts to make decisions. The expert, normally, just does and works out what works. For Dreyfus, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "intentional arc" is useful for understanding this process of learning, which can also be supported by and further developed with the aid of research in neuroscience.

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[2] Sometimes Dreyfus also refers to this phenomenon as maximum grip.

For Merleau-Ponty, this phenomenon is all about refining one's action. It is completely between the agent and the situation. If the situation does not solicit a response that produces a satisfactory result, then the agent has to further refine her discrimination, which in turn solicits more refined responses to further situations. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls an intentional arc. (Dreyfus, 2002, p. 200) According to Merleau-Ponty, "motor intentionality" is stored up and can be unfolded when it is solicited by the world. When stored experiences are repeated, our activities enter more refined stages. Thus, through the activities themselves, we gain a better grip on our situations. This process, Merleau-Ponty claims, does not require any mental representation other than that it is goal-related.

Motor intentionality is an agent's ability to fine-tune itself to the world, and to thereby achieve a better grip on situations. Expertise is the level where actions do not require mental representation of bodily action at all. The agent is allowed to focus solely on the goal. To this extent, bodily actions become more and more efficient. (Dreyfus, 2007, pp. 359-61)

Merleau-Ponty does not base the human being's understanding on mental acts of reason nor on bodily empirical evidence. Human knowledge is the agential-coping with situations, the constantly changing loops of an intentional arc. Here, an important question arises: If absorbed coping involves neither reasons nor experiences, and also cannot come with mental representations, then how can we come to the stage of responding to the world? Merleau-Ponty describes this ability as "magical." (Dreyfus, 2002, p.14) Still, the problem is, how can the brain operate as a dynamical system that causes a series of movements towards achieving a goal when, for the most part, it is without any representation of that goal? Merleau-Ponty calls this a commonsense assumption. (Dreyfus, 2002, p.14) Our relation to the world is more basic than our mind's ability to be flexible and to apperceive categorically unified facts. According to Merleau-Ponty, at the most basic level of being in the world, it is not the mind but the body, with its non-conceptual coping skills, that grasps. Moreover, what is grasped is not a set of unified propositional structures that one can observe and entertain in thought, but, instead, a more or less indeterminate solicitations to act. (Dreyfus, 2007, p. 359)

Dreyfus then proposes the importance of neural networks for understanding this problem. He uses Walter Freeman's Societies of Brains, an experiment based on an electroencephalogram (EEG), to elaborate and to fill in the gap left by what Merleau-Ponty calls

"crypto-mechanism." (Dreyfus, 2002, p. 58) The so-called natural intuition[3], according to Dreyfus, could be applied to the concept of feed-forward simulated neural networks. Dreyfus thus claims that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the crypto-mechanism can be explained via the study of neuroscience. Freeman builds a model to describe how an intentional arc is developed when an agent is active in the world. Dreyfus states that Freeman has worked out a model of learning that can be adapted to show how the brain, operating as a dynamical system, could cause a series of movements that achieve a goal without the brain in any way representing that goal in advance of achieving it. According to Freeman's model of learning, after an animal has repeatedly encountered a situation in which a particular response has produced results that are useful or harmful to the animal, it forms neural connections which, when the animal encounters stimuli from a similar situation, causes the neurons to produce a burst of global activity whose energy state occupies a point in an energy landscape. An energy landscape is composed of several attractors. In Freeman's model of learning, the animal's brain forms a new attractor each time the animal learns to respond to a new type of situation. (Dreyfus, 2002, p.14)

This form of skillful coping therefore does not require a mental representation of its goal. It can be purposive without the agent entertaining a purpose. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "[T]o move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation." (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 139)

Dreyfus' idea of skillful absorbed coping has evolved through time. It has received many critiques. One of the most important of these focuses on the consequence of vanishing self-awareness. In the next section, we will examine this issue.

Thetic and Telic Awareness of Fluent Agency: An Account of Self-Synthesis

James M. Dow argues against Dreyfus on the basis of vanishing self-awareness. He states that a subject can be aware of herself in absorbed bodily coping, and that this form of self-awareness does not interfere, slow down, or interrupt the fluent agency.

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[3] the term "crypto-mechanism" used by Merleau-Ponty refer to latent, hidden, or implicit mechanisms that shape experience or perception, consistent with his focus on the pre-reflective, embodied nature of human existence. For Dreyfus he refers to such hidden activity as natural intuition or human intuition.

In his critique, Dow (2015) takes Dreyfus' position in the extreme case to suggest that the flow of expertise in absorbed coping does not involve even minimal forms of self-awareness. (pp. 156-7) He isolates the critiques of McDowell and Dan Zahavi as two ways to challenge Dreyfus' position on vanishing self-awareness, both of which argue that self-awareness must be present using transcendental arguments.

Dan Zahavi (2013) argues that Dreyfus is incorrect to assume that self-awareness is reflective and detached. Dow also emphasizes Zahavi's critique that it is questionable if Sartre, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty would agree with Dreyfus' interpretation of their accounts of self-awareness. It is clear that, for Dreyfus, since expert bodily action involves flow experience, then it cannot and does not involve self-awareness.

According to Dow, flow experience is heterogenous. (2015, p. 161) There are at least three different flow experiences: merging into flow, immersion in flow, and emergence from flow. Each of these divisions has a form of self-awareness that is ruled out in certain stages of experience: merging into flow rules out detached awareness; immersion in flow rules out consciousness of self; and emergence from flow, lastly, rules out monitoring intentions. (Dow, 2015, p. 162) Dow goes on to claim that all types of awareness involved are purely thetic forms of awareness. By "thetic" he means, citing Tim Bayne (2011), "states [that] are satisfied when they fit the world; they have a mind-to-world direction of fit. Judgments are a paradigm of thetic states, for they are true (or veridical) when they fit the world and otherwise false (or non-veridical)." (Bayne cited in Dow, 2015, p. 163)

Dow then challenges the assumption that awareness of fluent agency must be thetic, and proposes alternatively a telic account of awareness. The telic account of the awareness of agency suggests that representational accuracy cannot be all there is to success in the awareness of agency. To be aware of one's agency, the telic account is made possible by a process successfully carried out. (Dow, 2015, p. 166) Dow then gives an example of awareness that does not depend upon thetic awareness, following Anscombe's claim that "our agency is known without observation." (ibid.) This account distinguishes between the thetic stages of agency in different activities such as when we look back upon our actions, such as reflecting upon, thinking about our thought, or observing our bodily movements in action. Interestingly, according to Anscombe, these activities are not necessarily thetical in order for us to become aware of ourselves as the source of our movements. Being aware of agency in this sense is to

be aware of one's goal, in the sense that the awareness is possessed by a guidance control mechanism. The mechanism does the job for one's bodily coping and allows one to act without mental representation of the body. What shows in action is one's aim, as is manifested, for example, in the forms of shouting or yelling that are often found in sports.[4] It seems that now we have an alternative explanation of the problem. It is in this vein that Michael Browstein (2014) questions Anscombe's account of self-awareness. He points out that while it is obvious that Anscombe's account of telic awareness is able to answer the "who" question, it is less obvious that is can answer the "what" and "why" questions. This is where Dow left the question unanswered, since he agrees with McDowell (2013) that subjects or agents do not need to be able to answer these questions accurately; Dow (2015) ultimately defers to Anscombe's claims that "subjects can misrepresent what they did and can provide reasons as simplistic as for no particular reason." (Dow, 2015, p. 169; see Anscombe, 1963, p. 25)

I disagree with Dow here. We cannot leave the question unanswered. If the sole responsibility of an agent, in order to claim their self-awareness of expert bodily action, is to answer the "who" question, then this will lead us to an infinite regress of justification. No matter which side we take between Dreyfus and McDowell, we are left with a certain type of myth[5] to address. There will be claims that directly demand the answer of "what" and "why." For instance, when a professional golfer shapes the shot into a slicer or a hook, it is necessary to be able to say which bodily movements make the difference to the straight, slice, and hook shots. Otherwise there will be no room for improvement.[6] In the next section I will try to offer an account that enables capability for agents to be self-aware, and for us also to be able to answer the "what" and "why" questions.

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[4] This awareness of "aims" is similar to Montero's (2016) thesis of proprioception as an aesthetic sense. She gives an example about ballet, an activity which she claims does not get easier no matter how advanced you become. The dancer requires "attention" in order to perform while also recognizing where there is a room for improvement.

[5] in the sense of Dreyfus's myth of mental

[6] One might argue that the golfer does not have to be able to answer the "what" question because that is the role of the swing coach. But it has to be kept in mind that, I am using golf as an example because it is a professional sport that requires extreme attention and control of one's body in order to improve. I agree that, predominantly, it is a coach who does the part of answering "what" question, but my thesis is to argue that there is a possibility for an agent to be both self-aware and be able to answer the "what" and "why" questions by herself.

Buddhist Phenomenology and Vipassana Meditation: Prospective of Skillful Attention

In the previous section we ended with questions and perspectives on self-awareness of skillful absorbed coping. To summarize, I would like to categorize perspectives on the self-awareness of agency toward practical wisdom to open up the discussion. Please see Table 1:

Table 1 Philosopher's Perspectives on Self-awareness of Skillful Absorbed Coping

Question	Dreyfus	McDowell and Dow	Dow and Anscombe[7]
Who	Zero	Possibly[8] Yes	Yes
What	Zero	Possibly Yes	N/A
Why	Zero	Possibly Yes	N/A

According to Dreyfus, one need not to be able to answer all three questions in order to be an expert, since he is a strong supporter of the position for mindlessness agency; it is, in the end, a non-conceptual form of experience. It can be argued that even in Dreyfus' position, an agent should minimally have self-awareness of the ego (ability to answer the "who" question), but since Dreyfus repeatedly quoted Sartre's famous claim of the "disappearing of the I," I take it that he would reject all three questions. McDowell's thesis does not evidently claim that it should be possible to give answers to all three questions, but he did strongly back up an argument for the role of the representation of mental content. Positively, whether our representation of our experience could be manifested in the form of language or the content of experiences[9], according to McDowell's argument we ultimately have the possibility and capability to be able to answer these three questions.[10]

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[7] Please note that Anscombe's argument is also similar to Dow's argument.

[8] This is possible but not necessary.

[9] For example, we do not have vocabulary for every shade of color, but we do have a content of that exact shade of color we experienced.

[10] The validity of the answer is a separated issue. The agent can give the wrong answer, but the possibility of getting the right answer is always there.

On the other hand, Anscombe's account helps us explain why we should focus our attention to answer the "who" question. It is a hybrid idea to satisfy the question why one could perform skilled action. It seems like we cannot pin point whether the skilled action performed is processed through a mental state or action, because it simply rests solely in the realm of the body. Anscombe's idea is satisfactory in the sense that one can both be aware of one's bodily coping in terms of the agent as the possessor of actions, and thus being able to answer the "who" question which is enough to safeguard the idea of non-thetic awareness.

I suggest that we have to tackle this problem by distinctively dividing the approach into two levels: an implicit and an explicit awareness of skilled absorbed coping. The implicit is meant for setting the stage to explain skilled absorbed coping which allow implicit explanation as a criterion, the latter aims for explicit explanation as a criterion to enter the stage of expertise where one must be able to answer all three questions above accurately. We can see that the implicit level is compatible with the thesis given by Dreyfus, McDowell[11], and Anscombe. In this section, I propose to (1) answer the question of why expertise emerges out of flow when trying to answer the "what" and "why" questions, and (2) to propose an alternative way to explicitly explain the structure of flow and thereby pave a way to allow expertise to be able to self-answer the "what" and "why" questions.

1.   **Buddhist Phenomenological Approach**

In this section, I read Martin Heidegger's and Sartre's accounts of being from a Buddhist perspective. This is in the light of answering the three questions of who what why, and paving the way for the second proposal.

Heidegger and Sartre share some crucial points in their accounts of being, particularly their distinctions between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. Their distinctions between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness make possible a theory of the self which does not involve a dichotomy of mind-body, or even subject-object. We hope that, with these phenomenological resources, this paper will also be able to explain how professional athletes often suffer from uncontrollable immersion into flow and emergence out of flow.

2.   **The Immersion in the Flow and the Emergence out of Flow**

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[11] Arguably, McDowell's thesis could be categorized as explicit awareness. But I posited his position in the implicit category because not of the agent's lack of capability to report their action and those who can report without accuracy.

Dreyfus distinguishes between the ability to act in the world (in the flow) and a freedom to step back and reflect upon the action itself (out of the flow). Nevertheless, Dreyfus also claims that the latter puts the actor in a position in which she is no longer able to act immediately in the world. This dilemma calls to mind the analogy of the centipede and the toad: a toad asks a proud centipede "which leg moves after which," thereby throwing her out of the flow.

I will give a phenomenological account of this dilemma to highlight the importance of why we should consider each and every action in the shortest time frame possible. Thus, I propose an alternative of how we should recollect the experience of our actions in the world. Now, when we divide those actions as minimally as possible, a question may arise as to the benefit from such division. The merit of such division lies in the explanation of action in terms of the structure of what Heidegger calls "care." Heidegger summarized "care" in the following ways: "Dasein means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with." (Cerbone, 2006, p.52) Dasein can be described in three moments or aspects:

(1) Being "ahead-of-itself" which corresponds with "understanding" or "projecting." Heidegger asserts that Dasein always project itself (ahead) in terms of the "for-the-sake-of," which is contrasted with static facts and properties which simply are "there." These "possibilities" can be put in Sartre's words as "I am what not I am. I am what I am not." But it also implies a being toward one's own or innermost potentiality-for-being.

(2) Being "already-in" the world corresponds to "Befindlichkeit," or a "state of mind." Heidegger states that we always find ourselves in a situation, that is, in the world. He thinks that we always find ourselves in a certain "mood" which is the principle manifestation of Befindlichkeit. Mood corresponds to the "thrownness" of "being-in-the-world." It is not a matter of choice or decision.

(3) "Being-along-side" corresponds to "falling." Dasein's falling impairs its ability to do philosophy as well as falling into its world, as Dasein also "falls prey to its more or less explicitly grasped tradition. This deprives it of its own guidance, its questioning, and its choosing. That applies not least to the understanding rooted in Dasein's very own being, to ontological understanding and its capacity to develop it" (Cerbone, 2006, p.52). The two types of falling are connected: the concern with the present, which is central to falling on all three of the above accounts, obstructs a critical inspection of what is handed down from the past, since that would

require an explicit examination of tradition in its foundation and development. This is the sense in which Dasein, engrossed in its present concerns, is "lost in the publicness of the They" and continues to act and think mostly in traditional ways. For example, busy shoemakers make shoes in the same old way, and no improvement can be seen, because they are too busy to care. It does not follow, however, that fallenness is a bad thing. Wholly unfallen Dasein, is as hard as to be described. (Cerbone, 2006, pp. 52-53)

Heidegger attaches great importance to the fact that Dasein's care embraces its future, past, and present, and that Dasein's being simultaneously occupies all three phases of time: in its thrownness, Dasein is already in the world, dealing with the facticity of its past; in its projection and in its fallenness, Dasein is pre-occupied with the world in the present, involved with practical concerns as the "they-self." The unity of Dasein is grounded on care, which in turn is founded on temporality. So, the future-past-present are alive in every moment of human existence and constitute all our current actions. Heidegger's Dasein is pre-ontological understanding of being.

Skillful absorbed coping is a capacity which is desirable when the agent can hold onto the flow. In other words, it is the structure of care in flow, always aiming for goals. It means that, in Heidegger's terms, the reflection of self-awareness is in the mode of "being-ahead-of-itself." When one tries to reflect upon one's action or one's awareness, one tends to step back and reflect upon the ahead-of-itself; however, this is impossible by the nature of care, since we always fall into the "already-in," thus losing and emerging out of flow. This phenomenon is similar to a programming bug. A bug occurs when the algorithm fails due to a coding error. If the programmer cannot maintain the flow of possibilities then the whole system will collapse, reaching a dead end. It seems that one cannot self-answer the present without any disruption of one's coping. This is due to the fact that when one tries to report one's action in the world, one attempts the difficult task of capturing the present moment. However, it can be argued that it is not impossible to be able to capture the present from a Buddhist perspective and practice. In the Buddhist notion of Vipassana practice, for instance, there are exercises that may improve one's Sati and Samadhi[12] in order to enable the capability to capture one's very present moment. In the next section I will try to walk through this possibility of regarded ability with the aid of Sartre.

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[12] roughly translated as mindfulness and concentration

3.   Absorbed into Nature: Sartre's Lack and the Possibility to Cultivate Skillful Attention

Sartre defines the "for-itself" (Pour-soi) in a famous paradoxical formulation from Being and Nothingness: "The for-itself is what it is not and is not what it is." (p. 68) He also describes the "for-itself" as that being who is so affected with nothingness that from all aspects his unity is fractured. This "fracturing," or dispersal of the for-itself's unity, is never so complete as to result in man disintegrating into separate entities. (Catalano, 1985, p.93) According to Sartre, the for-itself, or consciousness, is itself a "nothingness," a "lack," a "hole of being at the heart of being" (un trou d'être au sein de l'Etre) (p. 617; p. 681 quoted in Dermot Moran, 2002, p. 359) The very being of man is the failure of consciousness to attain this identification. But consciousness is aware of its own failure, and this awareness is also its very being. The pre-reflective cogito is a self only as lacking a self (Catalano, 1985, pp. 104-5), or in Sartre's word, the for-itself is condemned to "perpetually determining itself not to be the in-itself" (p. 85). Sartre describes that consciousness is born as a negation of that in-itself which it is not. For this very reason, it experiences the in-itself as that which it would have to be itself. Or rather, it experiences its own self-transcending relation to the in-itself as the attempt to accomplish a synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself, a synthesis which, Sartre would say, is impossible. Though this 'impossible synthesis' can never be achieved, the for-itself is not free to not project such a synthesis and to not seek to attain it. For the being of consciousness as a Nothingness which stands in need of being is a mode of being which is experienced by the for-itself as lack. Lack is therefore not an additional characteristic; rather, the for-itself is constituted by lack. Therefore, for Sartre, the for-itself is not a being, but rather a gap or disruption of being which allows being to reveal itself in the lack. (Moran, 2002, p. 357) Given this lack that brings forth an impossible synthesis (of the for-itself with the in-itself), Sartre uses the existence of desire to illustrate the nature of ontological being. Desire exists as a lack which points beyond itself towards that which would (if it ever could be attained) make the for-itself be what it lacks, therefore ceasing to exist itself as lack. But in surpassing itself towards a being by which it would be completed, the for-itself would convert itself into an in-itself and, in so doing, would suppress the very consciousness engaged in such a self-surpassing. This emphasizes the fact that the for-itself is always seeking to develop itself and come into identity with itself. The in-itself is a condition of the for-itself. The for-itself is not its own foundation; rather it depends utterly on the in-itself. Humanness also arises as a negation of identity with any particular thing

or in-itself. To be specific, man arises as a lack of identity of a self with a self. Thus, in its original upsurge within being, the for-itself tends simultaneously toward identification with a self and consciousness of this self. This arising of humanness as based on the lack of the in-itself is the cause of the same struggle as exemplified here in being an athlete who must face (situations) in order to keep herself in flow. My thesis is to compare Sartre's concept of ontological "lack" to the Buddhist characterization of existence, which could only be noticed through Vipassana.

According to Vipassana Acharya, Vipassana helps us become aware of ignorance (avijjā), and once when we are aware of it, to see things as they really are. According to Buddhism, what one will see is the three marks of existence (tilakkhaṇa). All existence and all beings are in the formation of impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and no-self (anattā). Everything arises under unsatisfactoriness and then exists in momentariness in the world of impermanence. It is only through the realization of this reality that we can see the interdependence of actions. The purpose of practicing Vipassana for the Buddhist is to break the unending cycle of existence and put an end to unsatisfactoriness. In order to do so, actions (kamma), both wholesome and unwholesome, will no longer be considered as acts any more. The question then arises, how can it be possible to act without action?

4.   **An Account of Infinitesimal Action**

According to Tipitaka, we can find examples in the stories of Arahat of actions that do not commit kamma. In the case of the blind Thera Cakkhupala (Theragāthā 1.95) who stepped on and killed insects, the Buddha said, "Just as you had not seen him killing, so also he had not seen those living insects. Besides, as the Thera had already attained arahatship he could have no intention of killing and so was quite innocent." What is claimed by the Buddha in this case is that there are such actions without intention. Moreover, it is stated that Arahat could not commit any actions at all, which concomitantly goes with Karma. This is the extreme case of absorbed coping. It must be because of the real flow solicited by the world that allows such things to happen, an action without actor in this case. Let me give a more mundane example to get a glimpse of how such kinds of phenomena could exist. Let us think about opening a door to enter a room. It is very rare for a person to be able to describe the significance of the doorknob, because we usually report such a phenomenon as an act of entering the room. We never recollect such an act of reaching for the doorknob, or an act of turning the doorknob, etc.

It is undeniable that these small acts exist, but they rarely are represented in the mind. This is because we are experts at entering rooms. The question is whether we should be able to report those small acts in order to claim that we champion the act of entering the room? This brings us back to the debate between Dreyfus and McDowell on professional athletes. Noteworthy here is Montero's (2016) suggestion that we base attention not on sense perception, but upon the aesthetic sense of being beautiful, graceful, or powerful as experienced and understood via motor perception. (Montero's, 2016, p. 172) These divided sets of actions are aggregated representations that give rise to the act of "entering the room." How we can describe these units of action is determined by skilled attention. The more skillful the attention, the more refined the experience would be as represented in perception.

All these claims are, however, based on one problem: how can we get to the stage that allows us to be fully aware of our own actions and consciousnesses? Furthermore, is it even possible to divide our action into infinitesimal actions? That is where Vipassana comes into the picture. Vipassana literally means "to see things as they really are"; it is a logical process of mental purification through self-observation. (Mahasi Sayadaw, 1978, p. 2) The practice starts with concentrating on our every action. Actions include those which are both physical and psychological. For the beginner, it mostly will begin with Anapana which is a practice of concentrating on our body movement, especially our breathing action. Then the next step could be concentrating on our abdomen, in which you will thereby come to recognize its movements of rising and falling. Next, the practitioner has to concentrate on his mundane actions, such as walking, drinking, eating, chewing, etc. The more one can exercise one's self-awareness of one's own actions, the more proficient the Vipassana practitioner becomes. What is the benefit of these practices? According to Buddhism, it helps us to discover who we really are. We do not know who we really are in the present moment because we are distracted, and our minds are obscured like the sky filled with clouds. When this is the case, we do not see the face of the sun, just like the avijjā who has put behind human reality or perhaps what Plato discussed in his allegory of the cave. Vipassana provides us with a method by which we can access our immediate experience. Why do we need to do this? Because we are at present not really aware of our immediate experience. And we are not aware of it because we are distracted and not present in the moment. And being distracted, we are imbalanced and ungrounded. Generally, we pay no attention to our present, immediate experience. Instead, we, always reflect upon them only a moment later i.e. when the present as vanished. But the structure of our

thought continually imposes upon us desires and preconceptions about what we actually perceive. And these thoughts and thought constructions take time to form. Therefore, we live in either the future or the past and never in the present of our immediate experiences. This is true both in our thoughts and actions. But through Vipassana we can discover and access the present moment. We can discover our immediate experience and the center of our being. We can access the base or primary level of our existence. I argue that Vipassana allows us to capture our being-alongside. Vipassana thus represents a crucial part of the spiritual path and our personal development. However, in Buddhist terms, the ultimate goal of this path is not just happiness and the fulfillment of our desires in this present life, but also liberation and enlightenment. And that is the theory of non-action. In theory, if one who practices Buddhism attains the stage of full awareness, then one can become aware of one's every physical and psychological action. Vipassana can guarantee the reflection upon minimal infinitesimal actions. At this stage the practitioner becomes more skilled and begins to perceive clearly, in every act of noticing, that an object appears suddenly and disappears instantly: "All is impermanent, in the sense of destruction, non-existence after having been." Reflecting further, he notes that it "is through avijjā that we enjoy life, but in truth, there is nothing to enjoy. There is continuous arising and disappearing." (Mahasi Sayadaw,1978, p. 26)

Conclusion

This paper has examined the debate on absorbed coping through the lens of Buddhist phenomenology, concluding with suggestions for advancing the debate by incorporating insights from Vipassana meditation and the concept of skillful attention. By integrating insights from Heidegger's notion of care and Sartre's concept of lack, alongside Dreyfus and Dow's respective arguments on the role of self-awareness in expertise, it presents an alternative perspective that acknowledges the possibility of refined self-awareness within the flow of expert action. The crux of this argument is that, contrary to Dreyfus' view, experts may indeed benefit from a form of skilled attention without disrupting their immersion in an activity. To strengthen Dow's view, this paper introduced Vipassana practice emphasizing how it can help cultivate a heightened a skillful attention that enables individuals to not only perform actions fluidly but also improve their ability to analyze and refine these actions when necessary. This nuanced approach provides a pathway for reconciling absorbed coping with a degree of reflective awareness, suggesting that

expertise can involve both intuitive performance and a capacity for reason-giving at critical moments.

In this paper, golf was introduced as a concrete example to illustrate how skillful attention, cultivated through practices like Vipassana, can enhance performance. Golf, being one of the most difficult sports, requires consistency amid numerous variables that can affect performance. Conventionally, golfers are taught not to focus on their bodily movements, as overthinking can disrupt the natural flow of action—echoing Dreyfus' concept of absorbed coping. However, the complexities of the game eventually demand attention to faults and refinements. My argument suggests that incorporating self-awareness within the flow of expert action, through practices like Vipassana, offers an alternative paradigm. Rather than disrupting the flow, skillful attention allows athletes to remain immersed in their actions while gaining the ability to assess and improve performance when necessary. This approach challenges the traditional view that self-awareness hinders expert performance, proposing instead that it can be a valuable tool for refining and perfecting one's skills.

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