

Reflexive Learning: Stages towards wisdom with Dreyfus

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Abstract

The Dreyfus (2001) account of seven stages of learning is considered in the context of the Dreyfus (1980s) account of five stages of skill development. The two new stages, Mastery and Practical Wisdom, make more explicit certain themes implicit in the five-stage account. In this way Dreyfus (2001) encourages a more reflexive approach.

The themes now more explicit are, in part, derived from Aristotle on phronesis, but are also influenced by Heidegger and Foucault on cultural dimensions of meaning and value. The paper considers whether Dreyfus' revised account tends towards a relativism of different worlds of meaning, disclosed through personal commitment. A more reflexive account of phronesis, it is suggested, needs to clarify the potentiality of phronesis for co-ordination as it promotes patterns of unity in difference and difference in unity.

Keywords: *phronesis*, learning, reflexivity, coordination, difference

An Extended Introduction

During the 1980s the brothers Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus developed an influential account of five stages of skill development. Their joint account has recently been supplemented, and so transformed, by Hubert Dreyfus' 2001 account of seven stages of learning. This paper explores how the two new stages, in effect, make more explicit certain features of pre-understanding which are necessary conditions for, and already tacitly present in, the earlier five-stage account, as well as going beyond that account. Thus the 'two new stages' can be mentioned in quotation marks that can also function appropriately as indicators of the need to handle this phrase with some extra care.

'Pre-understanding', or pre-judice (that is, previous-judgement) in a non-pejorative sense, refers here to how, as human beings, we are always already involved in practices that include or anticipate some understanding or interpretation, more or less tacit, of what it means to be human. In this sense, our ordinary, everyday, taken-for-granted practices already involve some pre-understanding. While this explanation is not intended as a fragment of close reading of Martin Heidegger, or of some of those significantly influenced by him, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, or Charles Taylor, or Hubert Dreyfus, it does seem to be quite close to aspects of their

understanding of understanding. To this extent, this paper is concerned with hermeneutics, regarded, not just as the skills, theory, traditions and practices of understanding (with 'understanding' often used to imply some degree of success) or of interpretation (with 'interpretation' often used to imply some degree of task-setting or challenge), but all these as always involved in becoming a self-interpreting human being amongst others.

This revision enables Dreyfus (2001) and us to take a more reflexive approach, both to the previous five-stage account and to other aspects of learning. In this way, we can connect with, and focus better on, various other features of Dreyfus' work. These other features include his interest in Foucault and what could be called Foucault's Heideggerian version of critical theory; Dreyfus' collaborative work on *Disclosing New Worlds* (Spinoza *et al.*, 1997); and Dreyfus' continuing interpretations of Heidegger and Kierkegaard. Scope for connections with some recent developments in critical and literary theory is also indicated.

The 'two new stages' show the Dreyfus account of learning to be a conflation of two rather different kinds of account. We have a concise account of what it is like, at least for some people in certain situations, to develop as a learner. This could be called a developmental or teleological account of learners learning. We also have a concise account of what some different kinds of learning are like. This could be called a phenomenology or typology of learning. At best these two kinds of account can be complementary. However, some confusion could ensue for those who fail to recognise the differences, and not just the links, between these two kinds of account.

Stage six (called Mastery) appears less potentially threatening when appreciated in its hermeneutic context, where we recognise more readily how we all need to learn from other masters of meaning on our own way towards, and as a continuing aspect of, some personal version of mastery. Stage seven (Practical Wisdom) links with Heidegger's, Gadamer's and other interpretations of Aristotle's important, but perhaps somewhat elusive, understanding of what is often translated as 'practical wisdom' (Greek *phronesis*). It is significant that *phronesis* can be interpreted as, not merely useful for hermeneutics when narrowly grasped, but as central to a broader and deeper version of hermeneutics, such as has been outlined above. In this latter context, we need to be more aware of possible dangers in playing off against each other, all too glibly, simplistic notions of the practical and the theoretical.

Aristotle himself, it is worth recalling here, classified *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue, aiming at truth, rather than as a practical virtue, aiming at goodness. If truth and goodness are not always to be partitioned so neatly, then at least the original Aristotelian idea of *phronesis*, as an intellectual virtue needed for coordinating practical and ethical virtues, compensates for such neatness with its suggestive complexity. Plato, by contrast, seems to have been wise in keeping some distance from such pigeonholing.

The paper then asks whether Dreyfus' version of practical wisdom, with its deliberate blending of insight and commitment, as well as of the ancients and the moderns, tends towards what could be called a relativism of different worlds of meaning, disclosed through personal commitment. Does he leave us about to be

scattered between contextualised and merely plural commitments, with little or no hope of any better approximation towards a coherent personal identity? What then would be left of Dreyfus' aspiration for integrating perceptiveness and responsiveness in skilful activities of learners becoming increasingly coherent and able to share or communicate their expertise? It is worth noting that Dreyfus' concept of commitment, being at heart hermeneutic commitment, is inclusive of practical, intellectual and ethical commitments, and so is closer to the aspect of Plato just mentioned than Dreyfus' references to Aristotle might suggest, especially to those concerned mainly with differences between Aristotle and Plato.

Here we need to recall the already-mentioned tension between the more teleological and the more phenomenological features of Dreyfus' complex account. Should we regard this tension as tending towards incoherence or complementarity? Complementarity seems to be better warranted if we take into account the good sense of a general heuristic strategy for learning and understanding which appreciates the complementary and enriching potential of seeking both better analysis and better synthesis. Why should not more careful differentiation, without separation or conflict, contribute to an enriched appreciation of higher levels of unity, without confusion or vacuousness? To reject such values just because they have often been reified into religious or metaphysical systems would surely be to throw the axiological baby out with the ontological bathwater. Of course, the claim that some bathwater is ontological does not imply that all ontology is bathwater (compare Desmond, 2001).

Keeping in mind such caution, we can conveniently name the strategy, or learning style, of differentiation in terms of its tending towards 'unity in difference', and the complementary tendency as 'difference in unity'. Such tendencies and names are also at home in certain versions of aesthetics. While Dreyfus does not appeal, so far as I know, to the argument or terms of the previous paragraph, they could be shown, though another paper would be needed for this, to be akin to lines of thinking in the hermeneutic ontology of Heidegger and some of his students, as well as to lines of thinking in John Dewey's Pragmatist treatise on *Art as Experience*. In the context of styles of learning, the approach taken in this paper could be called that of a versatile style, as contrasted with one-sided, merely analytical or merely global, styles. We need to learn both how to accommodate towards the other and how to assimilate from the other, to learn both how to see the trees for the wood and the wood for the trees. As Francis Bacon's allegory depicted, ahead of Kant, the mere empiricism of 'the ants' and the mere rationalism of 'the spiders' needs to be transcended by the versatility of 'the bees'. In the context of hermeneutics, such considerations seem to transpose quite fluidly into the terms of wellknown discussions of the circular, or spiral, character of hermeneutics or of understanding, as we come to appreciate and explain, in specific situations, interactions playing between (our sense of) the whole and the parts.

We are now in a position to enquire whether the apparent pluralism or—on deeper consideration—potential unity in difference, of Dreyfus' worlds of meaning, allows us some complementary version of difference in unity. This paper suggests that MacIntyre's (1999a) case for deepening our understanding of *phronesis* in the

context of what he calls virtues of dependence and independence, as well as what he calls traditions (compare ‘dependence’) of enquiry (compare ‘independence’), along with Mulhall’s (2001) reading of the partial interdependence of Cavell, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, can provide a complementary, richer, more educationally appropriate version of (practical, or perhaps more Platonic and holistic) wisdom which develops as learners become more reflexive. Such *phronesis* resonates with, and promotes, patterns of unity in difference and difference in unity, within and between ethical agents, seeking both personal and shared wellbeing. Light is cast on such potential complexities by recalling again central features of *phronesis* in its Greek classical sources.

It is the work of *phronesis*, already in Aristotle’s ethics and politics, following Plato here in seeing ethics and politics as mutually reflective and implicated, to co-ordinate the division of labour between different virtues within the individual, but also within community, and potentially between communities, as well as between individuals. This can be compared with Dreyfus (2003) on Kierkegaard’s account of the self as reflexive self-relating in relating to the other. Dreyfus (2003) can be seen as, in effect, tacitly supplementing Dreyfus (2001) on practical wisdom. While this paper cannot explore Dreyfus (2003) on the significance of Kierkegaard, it would be important to include in such a paper some comparison with Vygotsky’s notion of learning through a teacher’s scaffolding, whereby the teacher models for and with learners what they may be ready to learn next, before learners move on to assimilate or internalise this teaching and learning for themselves.

Unsurprisingly, in view of the features of understanding and hermeneutics introduced so far, this introduction already anticipates some of the conclusions towards which this paper tends. Perhaps most importantly, regimes of linear planning and management—especially but not only in education—cannot, and should not be allowed to pretend to, replace the more circuitous routes needed by and for understanding. The reflexive aspects of learning, to which this paper’s title refers, are the circuitous, self-revisiting aspects required for coming to understand better, for individuals as for communities, traditions and cultures.

Why Dreyfus Renewed?

The original Dreyfus account (as eventually represented in Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988) of five stages of skill development was worked out in the 1980s by the brothers, Hubert (Bert) Dreyfus, a philosopher, and Stuart Dreyfus, an engineer and computing specialist. This collaboration was funded by a contract connected with training US air-force pilots. The brothers explored similarities with learning, training and teaching of skills needed for driving cars and playing chess. They presented their conclusions as an apparently simple account of five stages of skill development. These five stages were labelled as follows: (1) Novice, (2) Advanced Beginner, (3) Competence, (4) Proficiency, (5) Expertise. This account has been widely used, adapted, discussed and evaluated. It has had some influence on occupational or professional formation and training for nurses (Benner, 1984, etc.), schoolteachers, social workers, community education workers, social science

researchers (Flyvbjerg, 2001) and others. Areas of discussion have included whether or how the Dreyfus approach is, or is not, compatible with interpretations and applications of Donald Schön's 'reflective practitioner' (1983, 1987), or with rival accounts of professionals as researchers.

While the Dreyfus five-stage account has various limitations, it is far from clear how well it was understood by its supporters, let alone by its critics, especially when they had little or no appreciation of the contextual relevance of H. Dreyfus' work on Heidegger and other phenomenologists and hermeneutic thinkers, as well as his appreciation of aspects of the American Pragmatist philosophical tradition. The bewilderment of some critics is suggested by criticisms brought together in Eraut (1994). This critic does quote the Dreyfus warning that, 'detached deliberation is often incorrectly seen as an alternative to intuition' (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986/88, pp. 163–164). However, Eraut elsewhere seems to forget this warning and criticises the Dreyfus approach as if it could only be over-emphasising intuitive and tacit features of learning, at the expense of deliberative, calculative, self-critical features (Eraut 1994, pp. 127–128). Clearly, the Dreyfus five-stage account did insufficient to help at least some of its readers to appreciate how it differed from a conventional psychological developmental account, and how it connected, not by chance, even if not always explicitly, with certainly philosophical tendencies or styles, particularly European phenomenology and hermeneutics, along with aspects of existentialism, as well as aspects of American Pragmatist philosophy, neo-Aristotelianism, and the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Various such misunderstandings, and too limited interpretations, lend a special interest to seeing how, in 2001, Dreyfus renewed this earlier approach in terms of seven stages of learning. The new stages are (6) Mastery, and (7) Practical Wisdom, while stages of learning replace, at least sometimes, stages of skill. Now this is not a simple matter of adding on two missing parts, as if building with Lego bricks. Important questions arise about how the two new stages relate to and modify the five older stages. As well as discussing the two main Dreyfus accounts, I shall add some suggestions of my own about how the whole approach can be further renewed or perhaps challenged.

The Five Stages of Skill Development Reviewed

It may, by this time, be redundant to go into detail about each of the original five stages, by exploring the examples given by the Dreyfus brothers (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1988, etc.). For now, I will summarise, as follows, the main features of these five older stages, without going through these in their original sequential presentation.

(1) The task of learning new skills, or a higher level of skills, or a new cluster of skills, is broken down into simpler parts or stages. The five stages themselves mirror and exemplify this approach. This also involves simplifying the relevant kind of situation in which the skills are needed and used, and how this situation is perceived or described. Novices are typically told and shown what few parts or aspects of a simplified situation they need to recognise and are given a simple rule or instruction for responding to these.

While the point is not made in the Dreyfus texts, it is apparent that what may look or sound like the same words may be used differently (whether or not in the speaker's intention, or in the hearer's perception or interpretation), and thus arguably function in slightly different contexts of use, either to describe or to give directions (that is, 'instructions' in much traditional UK English but not 'instruction', as teaching in general, in USA English), as is the case with Wittgenstein's (1967) famous 'Slab' example in his *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 2–10, pages 3–6. One difficulty for beginners is in linking such descriptive and directive (instructing as ordering or guiding) uses. Beginners may either fail to make such links or may make these too rigidly or simplistically, so as to give rise to difficulties for their future learning. (Compare recent discussion of competence in learning by Hager, in press.)

The Novice stage is constituted by the lowest appropriate level of disconnected and simplified parts of task and situation. The following stages are constituted by progressive co-ordination and gradual integration of the parts and aspects of task and situation. It is important for the Dreyfus approach that this can only happen through the increasing personal involvement and development of learners in situations.

Notice that here we can already recognise something like the so-called 'hermeneutic circle', as already mentioned above. The circle-like aspects of how we come to interpret and understand better can also be seen in terms of mutual illumination between parts and whole, in such cases as stories, games, performances, texts, paintings, myths, rituals, music, historical and biographical or autobiographical projects, and so on. Such aspects can also be understood in terms of spirals of development in understanding, or in terms of already evoked patterns of (centrifugal) unity in difference and (centripetal) difference in unity.

(2) The five stages involve progressive co-ordination and integration, bringing together learners' differing powers of recognition and response, of perception and pro-activity, or of reflection and deliberation.

(3) Learners' perception or recognition of situations increasingly involves higher levels of skill in perception of relevant possibilities or potentialities in each situation, and of relevant differences and similarities between situations and their possibilities. Thus recognition and perception have a forward-looking face, towards possibilities for us, as well as a backward-looking face, towards actualities for us. Similarly, deliberation about goals and means for achieving these has a backward-looking face, as well as a forward-looking one. This two-way facing will be important for the interpretation of *phronesis* suggested towards the end of this paper. Compare earlier Heidegger (in *Being and Time*, 1962) on the temporality of human existence and later Heidegger (in *Time and Being*, 2002) on aspects of unity in difference and difference in unity among phenomena of temporality. Heidegger does not explicitly draw attention to putative analogies hereabouts between his teaching and Christian teaching on the triune life and love of God. However, some theologians have been less reticent in evoking such analogies, somewhat in the manner of Augustine, Hegel or Royce. Here again, a further paper would be needed to begin to explore the significance of such reverberations, linking them with Dreyfus (2003) on Kierkegaard and post-metaphysical (or 'post-onto-theological') versions of religion.

(4) To develop from stage one to stage five, learners have to pass through what I call the fire or ordeal of excessive complexity. At earlier stages, the build-up of so many explicit rules and relevant instructions, and of experienced differences and similarities between situations, comes to be experienced as potentially or in fact overwhelming. If learners are to come through this ordeal by complexity, what do they need? The earlier Dreyfus account typically focuses on practice, habituation, automatization of schemas for perception and response, and intuitive or unselfconscious aspects of skill, performance and development. Although the Dreyfuses do not mention this, so far as I know, their approach can be supplemented by the following beautifully symmetrical piece of traditional wisdom, which comes with four stages. In learning we move from unconscious incompetence, via conscious incompetence and conscious competence, to unconscious competence. Of course, this symmetry comes at a price. We need also to appreciate how beginners also bring unconscious competences or skills, or in the case of the newborn, inherited automatic reflexes and other powers. At the other end of the process, experts may need daily practice. As we achieve some degree of unconscious competence, in some situations, for some purposes, this frees us for attending to new learning, with respect to new challenges, changes, problems or innovations which also call for conscious effort. We can, all being well, usually rely on our conscious minds and minding being well supported by much generally unconscious processing done for us by our brains. (On such matters, see Guy Claxton's delightful book (1997) which connects with the Dreyfus critique of inflated claims made for cognitive science, artificial intelligence, etc.) Thus, to come through the ordeal of excessive complexity, we learners need some sort of self-confidence, courage, resilience or self-esteem, and some willingness to take increasing responsibility for our learning, with the planning, implementation, self-questioning, persistence and evaluation which may be involved. Some of these matters are touched on, or called for, by the earlier Dreyfus account. They come more to the foreground in the seven-stage account of learning, to which we turn shortly. Thus far, expert learners seem to have little, if any, reflexive understanding or wisdom. Such wisdom would articulate and develop, or at least cohere with, the already present aspects of unity in difference and difference in unity.

The 'Seven-stage' (2001) Account of Learning

This renewed account of developing skills and learning seems to owe something to critical discussion of the earlier account, but also to Dreyfus' own wish to develop his long-standing interpretation of the thinking of Martin Heidegger and Søren Kierkegaard, and probably other thinkers. However, it soon emerges that the two 'new stages' make better sense if they are interpreted as concerned with features of learning already present at earlier stages, but which now need to be made more explicit, for reasons indicated above. Stages (6) and (7) involve increasing self-awareness and concern for some enhanced version(s) of personal coherence or integrity, all of which are aspects of reflexivity. Such reflexivity is not merely about raising awareness of some of our presuppositions and pre-understanding. For such

awareness tends to go together with an enhanced and transforming sense of responsibility for these matters. Such responsibility may be seen as more or less well defined and delimited, and (correspondingly) as shared to a greater or lesser extent. Consciousness-raising may be equally conscience-raising, as is made explicit in some languages.

Even the five stage account should not be assumed to be exactly on a par with familiar accounts of individual development, as found in psychology textbooks. For we can and do keep going through these five stages at different times in life and in different areas of learning. The Dreyfus stages are, in some respects, more like ideal types in sociology. They can be applied to very basic skills, such as are needed for learning to walk and speak our first language, but also to much later and perhaps optional skills such as those needed for learning a new sport, or new area of work, or new argument, or new musical work. However, the pressure to turn this account into one of personal development comes from the way in which the ongoing process of coordination and integration of skills needs self-involvement and self-development. Consequently, instead of ever-tempting pictures of simple linear or teleological development, we need another picture or model, to do more justice to the Dreyfus account. Preferably this should also allude to situational involvement. Perhaps we could explore some picture of a spiral, or spirals, of development, seen as tending towards some ideal point of convergence, and equally seen as flowing away from this into ever more differences. As a visual aid, perhaps one might try contemplating the structure of the poisonous Giant Hogweed, with its radiating levels of symmetry.

The two 'new stages', (6) Mastery and (7) Practical Wisdom, have the following features. Instead of the much-used examples of learning to drive and to play chess, other examples are used, learning to make a musical instrument, learning and assessment in higher education, and ethical learning, the latter linking with Dreyfus stage seven, Practical Wisdom, influenced by Aristotle's ethics, and by the young Heidegger's attempts to reinterpret Aristotle (Rickey, 2002; Raffoul *et al.*, 2002; Hatab, 2000; Spinoza *et al.*, 1997). Both new stages are concerned with authentic on-going inter-personal or inter-human appropriation of what Dreyfus calls cultural styles. This self-involving, encompassing process, or process of processes, may—for some readers—echo or distort Heidegger on *Ereignis*, variously translatable, often as 'event of appropriation' or as 'enownment'. Here Dreyfus helps his readers by alluding to sociological and anthropological studies of how parents in different cultures initiate their infants and children into the life-world and style of the different cultures to which they belong. Later learning grows from, and is influenced by, such roots. This goes some way towards answering critics concerned about the Dreyfus focus on skills, development, cars, chess, computers, etc. These can be understood and evaluated as typical of a certain culture or cultures and the style(s) they generate. Another example of cultural style, not given explicitly as such by Dreyfus (2001), is the original Dreyfus focus on the learning of skills. This can be re-viewed reflexively as typical of a culture which, since turning its back for the most part on its earlier (Romantic) critics, has taken for granted the division of labour and carefully planned, specialised training or learning, but which is

becoming increasingly uneasy with aspects of this as a confining framework; a culture which has been fascinated by technology, training and control, but is beginning to take more seriously the dangers in all this; a culture which has tried to manage risk and to control personal involvement, but is beginning to worry over some limitations of all this. As a cultural style, would it be unfair to label it as a late, and increasingly ambivalent, version of American instrumentalism, a vehicle with a younger, more pragmatic, Heidegger riding shotgun and Kierkegaard hidden behind closed windows? Manifestly that would be unfair, on various counts, not least in view of the attention to skilful practices (and practitioners), even admiration for these, and the standards which belong to them, or to which they belong, sometimes evident in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as in Emerson, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and MacIntyre.

But what about 'Mastery' as the name for stage six? Might this be a somewhat threatening or sinister notion, perhaps too close to such notorious suspects as authoritarianism, elitism, fundamentalism, imperialism, fascism or patriarchy? Arguably such globalised suspicion is not well, let alone necessarily, warranted, if the networks of mastery and apprenticeship, in which the acknowledged disciplines of every culture involve us all, come through the cultural mastery of our parents and other early teachers and trainers. These networks run through wider interactions between the changing generations, as younger and older learners work together, and change places, to maintain or transform the culture(s) and life-world(s) more or less shared between them, doing so more or less well. Here we can recognise the importance of trust, confidence, self-esteem and inter-dependence in life-long learning. The significance of phenomenology also emerges further. For we only learn how to construct, maintain and change meaning because we are first constructed and changed by meaning. Our early or late mastery of meanings, actual and potential, depends on our on-going apprenticeship in meanings, both within and between cultures. Supplementing Dreyfus (2001), we regularly seek to modulate the relationship between, and the character of, our dependence and independence, our difference in unity and our unity in difference. Such modulations seem to be deep amongst the sources of cultural creativity, beginning with infant and childhood fantasies, games, story-sharing and other transitional objects and opportunities. Such cultural mastery as Dreyfus has in mind really does begin in the ecology of infancy.

Practical wisdom (with some reference to *phronesis*) is sketched by Dreyfus (2001) all too rapidly. It appears there as if perhaps an easy synthesis (at least for some readers) of Aristotle and American philosophical pragmatism, with or without some influence from Wittgenstein, on practical knowledge and understanding, including perhaps some quiet allusion to MacIntyre's (1985) *After Virtue*. In the latter work, skilled practices typically embody or incorporate their practitioners' own shared standards of intrinsic excellence. These standards may be more or less akin to recognised moral virtues. Such practices, nurtured by networks of practitioners, can constitute virtual schools for learning virtues, at least provided the different spheres, institutions or traditions in which such practices hold sway are not held to be so different from each other as to threaten the integrity and constancy

of the people involved across them (compare MacIntyre, 1999b). Possible linkage between Dreyfus and MacIntyre is not always evident. For example, it may not seem easy, or even possible, to identify a place in Dreyfus (2001) for reflection on, or to search for, a common good inclusive of, or at least consistent with, the good of individuals. To assume that such would be ruled out merely by appreciation of the value of differences, or of plural values and cultures, would be to fail to appreciate the previous discussion in this paper, so as to verge on a dogmatic impoverishment of imagination. I, for one, cannot imagine that Dreyfus is insensitive to such problems, even if he were to think that some others are mistaken in supposing them solved, at least 'in theory'. Yet another paper would be needed to explore to what extent Dreyfus is, at least by implication, committed to the learning of *phronesis* as a common good, justly and generously inclusive of the good (and 'goods') of individuals.

For Dreyfus (2001) practical wisdom (equated by him with *phronesis*) shows in practical and morally skilled perception and grasp of relevant features of particular situations, including people, but also in the world disclosure(s) opened up by and for the most passionate, spirited learners, whose unlimited care and constant commitment are, he implies, thus rewarded. However, such situations and such commitments may seem, at least to some readers of Dreyfus, to be potentially many and unrelated. Are such world-insights or world-visions, and their matching world-versions, to be understood in relation to what the 'common sense' of each culture still wants to invoke as 'the world'? It seems Dreyfus could be seen as calling for, or expressing, resignation to conventional value pluralism, a polytheism of cultures or life-worlds which need our commitment (compare Peter Pan and Tinkerbell?), even though we can re-evaluate them as we summon the courage to migrate from one to another, if or when one lets us down or needs reconstruction. We seem here in danger of losing contact with the reflexive rhythm in which learners can seek an understanding that includes both unity in difference and difference in unity. Is Dreyfus' (2001) brief account of *phronesis* sufficiently open to the reflexive learning through which wisdom emerges as being both necessary pre-understanding and culminating crown—both alpha and omega?

However, in fairness, it must be noted that, more recently, Dreyfus (2003) has sought to clarify and develop his understanding of Kierkegaard, as, in effect, the discloser of what Dreyfus describes as 'Christianity without onto-theology', in terms such as to suggest that Dreyfus is advocating this life-world, at least for those (actually and potentially) fully involved in its disclosure, as a more rewarding alternative than either the Christianity of the metaphysicians and onto-theologians, or what he describes as the paganism of Heidegger. (Here 'pagan' is used close to its root associations with rural, pretechnological, peasant cultures, and perhaps with polytheism or pantheism, or even some form of religious dualism.) For Dreyfus, it is a signal merit of Kierkegaard that he supposedly recognises how it is now too late for us, after Christ, to try to revert to such pre-Christian ways of forming and understanding the self. Whatever the merits or problems of Dreyfus' (2003) account of Kierkegaard and Christianity, or perhaps of post-Christian spirituality or religion, Dreyfus here seems to approach something more like the position

suggested in my present paper, in that practical understanding or wisdom, with its commitment to some degree of personal coherence, reliability, integrity, and constancy, necessarily involves us in at least some judgements comparing, prioritising and co-ordinating different worlds of disclosure. In order to be able to do this, *phronesis* needs to be able to appreciate, to aim for, and to approximate towards, both difference without alienation or conflict and unity without confusion or vacuity. In the order of learning, ethics can come before ontology, and needs to do so when our ontology is deficient, even though, in the ideal account, ethics and ontology would need to cohere (compare Desmond, 2001).

By contrast with Dreyfus (2001), MacIntyre's (1999a and 1999b) account of practical wisdom is in the context of what he calls the virtues of dependence (for example, trust, patience, generosity, loyalty) needed by would-be independent, or—perhaps we should say—interdependent, social, rational animals. We also need (typically Aristotelian) virtues of independence, MacIntyre suggests, not just to leave our nests and work with some degree of success, but also in order to question, test, criticise and replace inappropriate versions of our social, cultural and ethical projects. MacIntyre's account seems at first sight richer, with more potential to guide and empower many forms of learning, amongst which moral learning emerges as central for becoming and remaining reliable learners and teachers. MacIntyre (1999a) writes, for example, of what he sees as the rationale for a virtue of 'just (i.e. fair) generosity' needed for bridging human generational differences, suspicions and conflicts, though without dwelling explicitly on hermeneutic aspects of this. Similarly, Mulhall (2001) both shows and writes about human qualities involved in learning from the mutual illumination of Cavell, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, without any superficially unifying syncretism or any superficially differentiating relativism. Mulhall's hermeneutic capabilities and virtues, interacting with those of his chosen authors and their interacting texts ('intertextuality'), can be read as showing an interdependent *phronesis* in action. These briefly mentioned examples indicate the potential significance of richer accounts of *phronesis* than that sketched by Dreyfus (2001). However, any such judgement now needs to be qualified in view of the Dreyfus (2003) account of Kierkegaard, which does point in this direction with its account of the reflexive becoming of the self in unconditional relationship with the other—in and through Christ, seen as the one in whom the infinite encompasses, heals and reconciles the finite. Here, as with Hegel and Kierkegaard, it becomes urgent to try to negotiate some understanding of how philosophical and theological voices are to be accommodated—or otherwise: again a task for elsewhere.

Reflection on forms of human interdependence, and on longer-term reflexive learning, suggests the salience of *phronesis*, interpreted as an emergent shareable quality, both gift and task, needed for learning, knowing and understanding how to live well with one another, in fair and reasonable relationships, with our common human powers and vulnerabilities, and in similar as well as different situations, both shaping us and shaped by us. The hermeneutic pattern of unity in difference and difference in unity, present in the Dreyfus accounts of skills and learning, and present in *phronesis*, as already explained, can be recognised in many variations.

This hermeneutic mastery and practical wisdom can pervade learning of skills, and shape all stages, kinds and degrees of learning, from beginning to end. Such practical wisdom involves, as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Gadamer appreciated, both ethical and ontological implications, both interhuman virtues and virtues of the mind. Consider the courage needed to learn from both past (with its given factuality) and future (with its promising possibility), mediating between them. Practical wisdom pervades and holds together both justice and reason, seeking to be fair to both past and future, factuality and possibility, and offering reasons which aim to take better account of both future and past. Seeking to balance the claims, needs and potentialities of both past and future, practical wisdom may anticipate a balance that is harmonious, beautiful, appropriate and just. In such ways, practical wisdom offers and calls for a generous gratitude to our past and a grateful generosity to our future, recognising yet going beyond our grounds for mere suspicion and resentment. Such themes, perhaps hinted at in Dreyfus (2001), are suggested more in Dreyfus (2003) on Kierkegaard, and are echoed in themes in Heidegger, Kierkegaard and others for whom the lifetime of human learning means not just estrangement, incoherence or dissolution, but somehow also homecoming or coming to belong together (compare Mulhall, 2001). What we can glimpse, touch or taste in and through better features of communities, communication and communion appears inexhaustibly utopian, but also inescapably charismatic. These aspects make it matter all the more that such wisdom has its witnesses in the midst of all the constraints, aridities and conflicts in which learners and learning can be trapped, whether these are more institutional or more personal (compare Hodgson, 1999). From such a perspective as this, it is possible to recognise the limitations of the Dreyfus accounts, without having to fear that if we find them useful they will imprison our understanding. Suspicion has its place: this place need not be the last word.

Dreyfus' interest in Foucault, and the appropriation of Foucault and Dreyfus by others (especially Flyvbjerg, 2001; see also Wicks, 2003), show how the ideal types of learning according to Dreyfus cannot be adequately appreciated apart from all the un-ideal and anti-ideal factors which damage learners and learning, and which need to be challenged and changed. For example, the kind of cultural and political criticism in Eagleton's (2003) *After Theory*, with its revitalising, would-be comic, style, and strong appreciation of *phronesis*, is significantly congruent with the Dreyfus seven-stage account of learning. Let's hope that theory, research, thinking and professional formation discover more of this new world towards which the Dreyfus account points, in which prolonged reflexive learning, understanding and wisdom can increasingly enable us to appreciate difference without estrangement or conflict, and to appreciate unity without confusion or assimilation. Compare the apparently unresolved tension, in Spinoza, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997, between cultural worlds and individual commitments, or cultural styles and individual styles. How deep does such tension in fact go? How deep does it need to go? May not some other versions or version of *phronesis*, towards which this paper has tried to gesture, promise a genuine resolution—a just and peaceful, and so more powerfully attractive and reliable, way of well-being? As our learning becomes more reflexive,

we need to revisit such possibilities. This being so, we can welcome the seven stage Dreyfus account of learning as being potentially much more than a minor variation of the five stage account, more than ad hoc *bricolage*—more than, as one student who discussed this with me put it, a last attempt to wring juice from an already well wrung orange. Let's drink to that 'more than'.

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