

Breivik, G. (2017). Intentionality and Action in Sport: A Discussion of the Views Of Searle and Dreyfus. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 12, 133-148.

---

Dette er siste tekst-versjon av artikkelen, og den kan inneholde små forskjeller fra forlagets pdf-versjon. Forlagets pdf-versjon finner du her:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1332677>

---

This is the final text version of the article, and it may contain minor differences from the journal's pdf version. The original publication is available here:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1332677>

---

# Intentionality and action in sport: a discussion of the views of Searle and Dreyfus

Gunnar Breivik

## Abstract

The article looks at sport as a form of human action where the participants display various forms of Intentionality. Intentionality may be defined as “that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world.” (Searle 2004). Sporting actions are about human intentions, beliefs, desires, perceptions, and not to forget, movements. This means that sports typically display what we call ‘Intentionality’. The study of Intentionality and intentional actions has previously received relatively little attention among sport philosophers, but deserves more attention. Even though there is a tension and several differences between continental and analytical approaches to philosophical problems there is a common understanding of the phenomenon we call ‘Intentionality’. The debate between John Searle, representing the analytical camp, and Hubert Dreyfus, representing the phenomenological camp, is instructive to see the differences, but also the commonalities between the two approaches. The article starts with a clarification of the concept of Intentionality and sketches some of the history and background of the concept. It then presents the main conceptual framework that Searle uses to distinguish the different types and forms of Intentionality and his views on sporting actions. This is followed by a presentation of the phenomenological approach of Dreyfus and the response by Searle. The article ends by discussing the possibility of a combined and enriched view where a clarification of the logic as well as the phenomenology of sporting actions is needed. It may thus be possible to bridge the gap between the two approaches.

**Keywords:** Intentionality, action, sport, sporting action

## Introduction

Sport can be studied at many levels – from microbiological processes to socio-cultural systems. But the central features of what we call ‘sport’ must be defined at the level of human action. Sporting actions are about human intentions, beliefs, desires, perceptions and not to

forget, movements. This means that sports typically display what we call ‘Intentionality’. Actions in sports are directed at or are about something. The study of Intentionality and intentional actions has previously received relatively little attention among sport philosophers, except Kretchmar (1982), but has more recently come into focus (Moe 2007; 2016, Breivik 2017). This is timely since the study of movement, skill and action has become central in cognitive sciences as well as in general philosophy (Berthoz 2002, Thompson 2010, Bennett & Hacker 2003, Gallagher 2005).

In general philosophy, as well as in philosophy of sport, there has been a certain division and tension between continental and analytical traditions (Kretchmar 2014, Moe 2014). Even if there is a common understanding of the phenomenon we call ‘Intentionality, there is a difference between phenomenological and analytical approaches. The debate between John Searle, representing the analytical camp, and Hubert Dreyfus, representing the phenomenological camp, is instructive to see the differences, but also commonalities between the two approaches. Since both Searle and Dreyfus use examples from sport, I will in the following presentation discuss whether a combination of phenomenological and analytical perspectives can give us a better understanding of Intentionality and action in sport.

I will start with a clarification of the concept of Intentionality and sketch some of the history and background of the concept. I will then present the main conceptual framework that Searle uses to distinguish the different types and forms of Intentionality and his views on sporting actions. This will be followed by a presentation of the phenomenological approach of Dreyfus and the response by Searle. I will end by looking at the possibility of a combined and enriched view.

### The concept of intentionality

The concept of intentionality was developed by Brentano who retrieved a Scholastic concept, stripped it of its metaphysical connotations, and used it to characterize an important aspect of psychic acts. They are always directed at something<sup>1</sup>. Husserl did not like Brentano’s talk of ‘psychic acts’, and instead used concepts like ‘intentional experiences’ (*Erlebnisse*) of ‘intentional acts’ (*Akte*). Husserl maintained that “all conscious experiences (*Erlebnisse*) are characterized by ‘aboutness’. Every act of loving is a loving *of* something, every act of seeing is a seeing *of* something” (Moran 2000,16). For Husserl this opened up a new field of study.

He could study the acts and the content of the acts without having to decide whether the content existed as an object independent of the human act, as long as the object existed as a meaningful correlate of the act.

Heidegger disagreed with Brentano and Husserl. For Heidegger intentionality means our 'directedness' and specifically our 'self-directedness' towards the world. Against Husserl he holds that this directedness is practical and embodied in its nature and not theoretical and detached. Heidegger argues: "Our lived experiences are practical bodily encounters with things in our environment: for example, in moving around in a room I am in encounter with 'a thing in the environment' (Umwelt Ding)" (Heidegger: *History of the Concept of Time*, 1985, 49, cited by Moran 2000, 232). To inspect things in a theoretical manner where we notice shape, weight, size and so on, is a secondary and derived mode (Heidegger 1962, 95-107). Things are mostly presented to us in their practical mode. The most fundamental form of intentionality is the human transcendence towards the world which makes possible the human dwelling in the world (the '*being-in-the-world*') where things can then be discovered either as equipment or mere objects.

Merleau-Ponty goes further in the direction of a practical and embodied form of intentionality. Intentionality is not primarily a voluntary and cognitive act but an 'operative intentionality' (*fungierende Intentionalität*), or that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life (Merleau-Ponty 2002, XX). This means that: "Our bodily intentions already lead us into a world constituted for us before we conceptually encounter it in cognition" (Moran 2000, 402). Intentionality has a corporeal basis and a historical situatedness<sup>ii</sup>. Through our bodies we are already intentionally related and at home in the environing world, before the specific intentional encounters take place.

As we shall see Hubert Dreyfus builds on the Heidegger-Merleau-Ponty tradition in his discussion with Searle. The concept of intentionality has had a less important place in the analytic than in the phenomenological tradition. Therefore John Searle's (2004) book *Intentionality*, which was first published in 1983, was a landmark in the study of intentionality inside this tradition. Particularly innovative was the uncovering of the logical features of intentional states, which created a sort of new paradigm in the philosophy of the mind. Searle's definition of Intentionality is similar that of Brentano and Husserl. Searle defines Intentionality as: "That property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world" (Searle 2004, 1). A belief must be a belief that such and such is the case. A hope is a hope that something should happen. A fear is a fear of something or that something will occur. And so on.

Since the 'aboutness' of mental states has been misunderstood in various ways Searle makes a more precise delineation of the concept. He uses a capital "I" to mark this wider and technical sense of Intentionality. This means that intending and intentions are just one form of Intentionality along with belief, hope, desire and so on (Searle 2004). Furthermore, Searle distinguishes between Intentionality and consciousness. Many conscious states are not Intentional, for instance states of elation, anxiety or nervousness; and conversely, many Intentional states are not conscious. These includes beliefs that I am not conscious of now, like where and when I was born, that the sun will rise tomorrow, and so on. These beliefs are unconscious, but not repressed in a Freudian sense. They are just beliefs that one does not think about.

In opposition to externalists, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who maintain that mind states "really" are states linked to and caused by external phenomena, Searle is an internalist claiming that such states are totally "between the ears". They are experienced in the mind and realized in the brain, which for Searle simply means that the experiencing mind is a higher-order feature of the brain.

### The structure of Intentionality

Searle's analysis of the structure of Intentionality introduces a vocabulary that will be useful in the analysis of the various forms of Intentionality in sport. First, mental states have a *content* and a *psychological mode* (Searle 2004). The content refers to states of affairs in the world beyond themselves, and can be presented under different psychological modes. The proposition "scoring a goal" is a content that can be presented as something that is desired, hoped for, believed and so on. In the formula S(p) "p" marks the propositional content and "S" the mode of presentation.

Second, propositional states have *conditions of satisfaction* and *direction of fit*. Propositional states refer to the world in various ways and are fulfilled under different conditions of satisfaction. A belief is satisfied if true, not satisfied if false. Intentions are satisfied if they are carried out. An intention to score a goal is not satisfied if the player misses the goal with his/her shot. The direction between mind and world can thus run in two opposite ways. Beliefs have a *mind-to-world direction of fit* (Searle 2001,37). This means that the beliefs are dependent upon the states of the world in order to be true or false. They must fit the world in order to be true. Desires, on the other hand, represent not how things are in the world, but how

we would like them to be. It is up to the world to fit the desire. Desires thus have a *world-to-mind direction of fit* (Searle 2001,38).

Third, mental states are dependent upon a *network of intentionality* and a *background of preintentional capacities*. Beliefs are dependent upon other beliefs that together form a network. If I believe that it is raining I must also believe that drops of water are wet, come out of clouds, that drops fall down, and not up, and so on. If I own a football I must have a belief that it is a ball, that is possible to kick and can be used by two teams trying to kick the ball between goal posts, and so on. Beliefs are linked together in such networks and are satisfied only in relation to such larger wholes and not in isolated units.

If one follows the threads in the network Searle argues that one ends up “with a set of abilities, ways of coping with the world, dispositions and capacities generally that I collectively call the Background” (Searle 2004, 121). He exemplifies this with skiing. If one has the intention to go skiing one must take for granted that one has the ability to ski and “the ability to ski is not itself an additional intention, belief and desire” (Searle 2004, 121). Here and in many other cases one needs a background of “know-how”: “I must know how things are and I must know how to do things, but the kinds of “know-how” in question are not, in these cases, forms of “knowing that” (Searle 2000, 143). This means that the representations in our minds only can function on a background of capacities that cannot themselves be put into representational form.<sup>iii</sup>

### The role of physical skills in sporting actions

Physical skills represent an important part of the Background abilities. Searle asks us to consider the example of learning to ski. The novice is given a set of instructions that s/he is supposed to follow: “lean forward”, “bend the ankles”, “keep the weight on the downhill ski”, etc. The skier following the instructions is a perfect example of the way Intentional causation works: “The instructions have world-to-word direction of fit and word-to-world direction of causation” (Searle 2004, 150). The instruction should in an environmentally relevant way cause the skier’s behaviour.<sup>iv</sup>

After a while Searle’s novice gets better, forgets the instructions and just goes skiing. According to a traditional cognitivist view the representations have become internalized and now function unconsciously, but still as representations. Searle opposes this view and maintains that the repeated experiences “create physical capacities, presumably realized as neural pathways, that make the rules simply irrelevant” (Searle 2004, 150). The expert skier

becomes flexible, responds adequately to the terrain and makes fine adjustments. The body takes over and the expert skier can concentrate on winning the race.

Skiing is thus possible only on a Background of relevant capacities. This Background is not on the periphery but “permeates the entire Network of Intentional states; since without the Background the states could not function, they could not determine conditions of satisfaction” (Searle 2004, 151). Searle shows that even such a simple skill as walking could not be performed on the basis of discrete representations and rule-following. There would be an infinite regress.

Searle furthermore sees the Background as something that is purely mental, individual and realized in the brain. It is not something socially constructed or something out there in the world. He explicitly denies that it has anything to do with “actual objects in the world such as chairs and tables, hammers and nails” – “the referential totality of ready-to-hand equipment, in a Heideggerian vein” (Searle 2004, 153-154). The Background has nothing “metaphysical” or “transcendental” about it. All the skills, stances, preintentional assumptions and presuppositions are realized in human brains and bodies. They could even be realized in a “brain-in-a-vat”. Here Searle disagrees with Dreyfus and in general with the phenomenological conception of what the Background means.

In *Being and Time* (1962) Heidegger shows how the equipmental context in a workshop becomes disclosed when a piece of equipment breaks down or is missing. Similarly, Searle finds that the Background can best be studied in cases where there is a failure in the Background conditions. One type of such a case is when one’s physical capacities fail.

Suppose that I have had the ability to swim since childhood and suddenly one day I am not able to swim anymore. Here two Intentional states are frustrated. First, my intention to swim and second, my belief that I am able to swim. But Searle maintains that the actual capacity to swim is neither an intention nor a belief. And it is the capacity to swim that simply failed me. It is a breakdown in “how to do things” that causes the failure to satisfy the Intentional states.

## Intentions and actions

In sport, intentions and successful actions are especially relevant and important. If I believe that I will shoot the ball into goal my belief will be true iff I shoot the ball into the goal. If I wish to shoot a goal my wish will be fulfilled iff I shoot the goal. If I intend to shoot the ball into the goal my intention will be carried out iff I shoot the ball into the goal. This means that

“an intentional action is simply the conditions of satisfaction of an intention” (Searle 2004, 80). A consequence of this is that anything that can be the satisfaction of an intention can be an intentional action. A rough test of whether something can be an action is whether or not it can occur in the imperative: “run”, “shoot a goal”, “train” are names for actions, but “believe”, “intend” and “want” are not.

Furthermore, intentional actions have to come about in the right way. Beliefs are different. If I believe the home team will win, and it wins, it does not matter how it came about. My belief was true. But if I intend to shoot the ball into the goal and instead it is the wind that takes it and blows it into the goal without any help from me, my intention is not satisfied. The goal was a goal but it did not come about in the right way. It was not an intentional action. There are many intermediary cases here. The wind can help blow the ball into the goal to varying degrees and my intention may be partly realised depending upon how specific my intention was. If I had a very precise idea of how I would do it, placing it in the upper right corner of the goal with a screwball, it will be harder to satisfy my intention. We also see here how my intention will be dependent upon my Background capacities. I have an intuitive feeling of what can be done, what is possible for me to do, and my intention is formed relative to that Background.

Searle also introduces an important distinction between “intention-in-action” and “prior intention”. In many cases one acts on short notice and on the spot. The intention is in the action but there was no prior intention. I got a pass and shot directly to the goal. I intended to shoot and to hit the goal but there was no prior intention. However, if there is a free kick I have time and opportunity to make a plan. I may then have a prior intention. And the prior intention must cause my executing the plan in accordance with the prior intention. It must come about in the right way. This means that both prior intentions and intentions in actions are causally self-referential. Let us look at an example where a Norwegian handball player is going to take a penalty throw in a tournament match against Denmark. The score is 28-28 and it is the last minute of the match. The penalty thrower’s intention is to score a goal by shooting the ball in the gap between the goalkeeper’s right leg and arm. This requires a distinct flick of the wrist and precision. According to Searle we have four elements that need to be understood and connected in the right way: the prior intention, the intention in action, the bodily movement, and the action.

The penalty thrower has a representation of what is going to happen. The representative content of *the prior intention* can be expressed as follows: “I perform the action of taking a penalty shot by way of carrying out this action.” The prior intention makes reference to the



whole action as a unit and not only to the movement. *The intention in action* can be expressed as follows: “The handball is thrown into the goal as a result of this intention in action.” The action contains two elements, the experience of acting and the movements, with the flick and the precision.

There is thus a difference between the prior intention and the action. The prior intention contains the whole action of taking a penalty throw as the “Intentional object”. The intention in action has, however, the *movements* as the “Intentional object”. We can therefore also say that the prior intention causes the intention in action, which causes the bodily movements.

### Levels of intention

Many actions in sport are complex actions where the intentions may go far beyond bodily movements or even sport. When we analyse specific bodily movements or skills they are part of larger structures, such as games, sports, national interests and international relations.

We can say of the handball player in the example that he moved his right arm with a distinct flick of his wrist, he shot a goal, he made Norway win, he struck a blow to Denmark, he showed Norway is best.

We could move further up or down the list of intentional levels. We could say that he produced neuron firings in his brain, or contracted muscles in his body. But this sounds strange. Firings in the brain are not something one intentionally produces. It is an unintended occurrence that happens as a result of an action. Searle introduces the notion of a basic action: “A is a basic action type for an agent *S* iff *S* is able to perform acts of type *A* and *S* can intend to do an act of type *A* without intending to do any other action by means of which he intends to do *A*” (Searle 2004, 100).

This means that what is a basic action is relative to the agent and his/her skills. What is basic for one agent need not be basic for another. Searle uses the example of making a right turn which may be a basic action for a good skier, but for a novice it is performed by a series of movements. It also leads to the consequence that two agents may perform the same movements but for one it is basic and for the other it is not. And for the individual what is basic changes over time as one becomes more skilled.

We have now looked at Intentionality and human actions from an analytic perspective and applied it to examples from sport. Searle has given us a vocabulary and an overview of the logic of sporting actions. It is time to take a look at the phenomenological tradition as it is represented in Searle’s long-time adversary and friend Hubert Dreyfus’s work.

## Heidegger on intentionality. Dreyfus's critique of Searle

We saw that Intentionality as an important philosophical problem was developed in the phenomenological tradition from Brentano and Husserl to Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. An important, recent philosopher in this tradition is Hubert Dreyfus who has argued for the merits of the phenomenological approach and against Searle's views. Dreyfus maintains that Heidegger has a deeper conception of intentionality than that allowed by the analytic framework. In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger says: "The usual conception of intentionality ... misconstrues the structure of the self-directedness-toward, the intention. The misinterpretation lies in an erroneous subjectivizing of intentionality ... The idea of a subject which has intentional experiences ... encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of the being we ourselves are" (Heidegger 1982, 63-64, cited in Dreyfus 1993, 19-20). Heidegger instead argues that "intentionality is founded in Dasein's transcendence and is possible solely for this reason - that transcendence cannot conversely be explained in terms of intentionality" (Heidegger 1982, 162, cited in Dreyfus 1993, 22). For Heidegger the human being is continuously transcending towards the world. The human being and the world belong together. The human way of existence, the *Dasein*, is *being-in-the-world* and intentionality as an act is based upon this deep relational structure.

Searle makes a distinction between the subjective mental content of the Intentional agent on one hand and the objective movements the agent is causing in the world on the other hand. Dreyfus maintains that Heidegger attempts to overthrow the subject/object account by showing (1) "that intentionality without the experience of self-referential content is the characteristic of the unimpeded mode of everyday activity, whereas Husserl's (and Searle's) mentalistic intentionality is a derivative mode that occurs only when there is some disturbance, and (2) that both these modes of intentionality presuppose *being-in-the-world*, a more fundamental form of intentionality that Heidegger calls 'originary transcendence', and that he claims is the condition of the possibility of both active and contemplative intentionality" (Dreyfus 1993, 22).

According to Dreyfus, Heidegger would deny two claims following from Searle's theory. "He (Heidegger) denies *first* that the experience of acting must be an experience of my *causing* the action, and that the experience of acting must *represent the conditions of satisfaction* of the action" (Dreyfus 1993, 23).

Dreyfus has coined the term ‘absorbed coping’ in response to Heidegger’s (1962) analysis in *Being and Time*. Here Heidegger analyses everyday activities like the carpenter working in his workshop or people moving around in the rooms of their houses. In these situations of absorbed coping the experience of acting is “a steady flow of skilful activity in response to one’s environment” (Dreyfus 1993, 24). One is trying to reach an optimal balance with the environment, to reduce the ‘tension’ if something does not feel right. Dreyfus is invoking Merleau-Ponty’s notion that our bodies are solicited by the situation to get into the right relation to things. He also brings in the feeling of flow that athletes experience when they are “playing out of their heads”. In these situations it is impossible to distinguish oneself from the activity. “One does not distinguish one’s experience of acting from one’s ongoing activity, and therefore one has no self-referential experience of oneself causing that activity” (Dreyfus 1993, 24). It is only in deliberate action that there is an experience of one’s intention in action causing the movements. And most of our lives are not spent in deliberate actions according to Dreyfus.

Dreyfus brings in what he calls a Merleau-Pontyan example to clarify his view. Consider a tennis swing. A beginner would concentrate on the ball, keep the racket perpendicular to the court, try to hit the ball with the right angle. It would be a deliberate action. An expert in the middle of the game would rather experience something like the “arm going up and its being drawn to the appropriate position, the racket forming the appropriate angle with the court – an angle we need not even be aware of – all this so as to complete the gestalt made up of the court, one’s running opponent, and the oncoming ball” (Dreyfus 1993, 25). This leads Dreyfus to say, contrary to Searle, that the experience of acting here not only has a world-to-mind direction of fit but also a world-to-mind-direction of causation. We are drawn by the situation to act in appropriate ways.<sup>v</sup>

The second point that Heidegger would oppose, according to Dreyfus, is Searle’s claim that the intentional content of an action is a representation of its conditions of satisfaction. It means that my intention of scoring a goal is represented in the experience of the scoring of the goal. But according to Dreyfus this cannot be the case since in a wide variety of situations we “relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of a representational state which specifies what the action is aimed at accomplishing” (Dreyfus 1993, 27). As examples of such activities Dreyfus mentions sport (tennis), habitual activities (driving, brushing one’s teeth), casual unthinking activities (rolling over in bed, making gestures) and spontaneous activities (fidgeting, drumming one’s fingers). In these cases there are according to Dreyfus no representations of what one is doing. One can sometimes even be

surprised about what one is doing. Most of our activities are spent in this immediate coping mode and only a small fraction is spent in the deliberate and purposeful mode. It is however these purposeful activities that we tend to notice and that are typically analysed by philosophers.

For Dreyfus skilful coping does not require a mental representation of its goal. Coping can be purposeful without the agent having an explicit purpose. Dreyfus here uses his favourite example of Larry Bird passing the ball and not realizing he has passed it until a moment or so later. Another example is the expert tennis player who is being drawn to the appropriate position on the court in order to reduce a sense of deviation from the satisfactory gestalt. This satisfactory gestalt is, however, in no way represented.

Dreyfus interprets Searle in a way that makes the representation of an intention into something like a conscious representation of a goal. If you then ask the agent what the intention is you may get a misleading answer. According to Dreyfus there may then be a mismatch in Searle's examples between what the agent is doing and the conscious intention that initiated the activity. According to Dreyfus, Heidegger has an alternative account where human comportment consists of subunits or segments of activity directed towards some purpose that is not represented as a conscious goal. Our lives consist of such meaningful chunks of comportment where most of the time we are absorbed in what we are doing.

Dreyfus criticises Husserl and Searle for their "egological conception of consciousness". According to their conception: "I must represent to myself that my bodily movement is meant to bring about a specific state of affairs" (Dreyfus 1993, 34). Dreyfus therefore finds it necessary to underline that skilful coping 1) is a mode of awareness, 2) is adaptable and copes with situations in a variety of ways. But if the going gets difficult it is necessary to switch to deliberate subject/object intentionality. On this last point he even admits: "Indeed, when the situation is new or especially complex, manipulation or representation seems to be the primary way we have of carefully considering our options and ourselves" (Dreyfus 1993, 35). But this conscious, thematic, representational coping is down-played by Dreyfus. He insists that absorbed coping is the "normal" and also the most "advanced" way of dealing with the world. Both in everyday life and at the highest skill levels in sport we are totally absorbed in what we are doing. We are not acting in a conscious, thematic, representational, self-referential manner. Rather our dealing is characterized by "open responsiveness to a gestalt" (Dreyfus 1993, 35).

We have seen that the idea of a Network and a Background is important for Searle because it is a condition for having specific intentional actions. Dreyfus also thinks that the Background

is important for deliberate as well as non-deliberate actions. But in contrast to Searle, and in accordance with Heidegger, he interprets Background as a primary and originary transcendence towards the world. We are situated in the world as *being-in-the-world* where there is no separation between subject and object, between the mental and the physical, between representation and reality. This originary transcendence means that we have a deep familiarity with the world that is the Background and condition of possibility for any actions at all, whether they are absorbed or deliberate. In *The history of the concept of time* Heidegger characterizes this transcendence as “the background of ... primary familiarity, which itself is not conscious and intended but rather present in (an) unprominent way” (Heidegger 1985, 185 cited in Dreyfus 2000, 36). This is the reason why the Dasein knows its way around in the environment. Our everyday dealing with the world is a practical ‘sight’ or a practical circumspection. This pervasive accommodation to the world is what is meant by being-in-the-world. In *Being and Time* Heidegger states: “Being-in-the-world ... amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in ... an equipmental whole” (Heidegger 1962, 107 cited in Dreyfus 2000, 37).

Like Searle, Heidegger’s idea of Background involves “abilities”, “capacities” and “practices”, but these are neither a set of goal-directed actions nor the conditions of possibility for such actions, i.e. a capacity that must be activated by an intentional state. Dreyfus seems however not to see that there is a much deeper difference. For Searle, the Background is entirely located in the brain and the neurophysiological features of the brain and the corresponding mind states. For Heidegger, the Background is something that is realized between Dasein and world; it is realized in the existence of being-in-the-world. It is not a physical feature of the world nor a mental or physiological feature of the agent, since self and world belong together in the single entity called ‘Dasein’. Dreyfus cites an illuminating passage from Heidegger’s *Basic Problems* (1982, 297): “Self and world are not two entities, like subject and object ... but self and world are the basic determination of Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world” (Dreyfus 2000, 37).

### Searle’s response to Dreyfus

In his response to Dreyfus, Searle claims that Dreyfus systematically misunderstands some of his central views. Instead of focusing on key terms like “contents of intentional states” and the “Background capacities” that enable intentionality to function, Dreyfus misconstrues the terms in the direction of a subject with inner representations against an independent outer

objective world. Searle claims his view does not imply an “ego doing the taking” of intentional states and “representing things to myself”. For Searle “representation” is not an ontological, much less a phenomenological, category, but a functional one that serves to characterize the logic of actions. I agree with Searle that in many cases Dreyfus misconstrues Searle’s views to give them a phenomenological rather than a functional and logical interpretation. We will see this when we discuss some examples from sport.

Dreyfus maintains that most of our behaviour can be characterized as “ongoing skilful coping” and therefore Searle must be on the wrong track when he thinks that intentional causation is important in explaining human behaviour. Searle responds by saying that of course normal behaviour involves mental states in the only sense that matters: “Such behaviour can succeed and fail, and the conditions of success and failure are internal to the behaviour in question” (Searle 2000, 77). Searle goes on to test Dreyfus’s views on Dreyfus’s own behaviour. Dreyfus’s daily life is not spent on tennis courts, in carpenters’ workshops or on ski slopes, as his examples of skilful coping seem to indicate. Rather, he typically writes papers and is involved in linguistic behaviour. Searle refers to a passage from one of Dreyfus’s books and considers: “According to Dreyfus we are supposed to accept that when he wrote this passage, and presumably also when he rewrote, edited, and proofread it, he had no mental states whatever: no ‘beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.’ Frankly, I find the idea out of question. I believe that when Dreyfus wrote the passage he did so *intentionally*, i.e. he intended to write the very passage” (Searle 2000, 77). Furthermore, he had certain beliefs, desires and “worst yet, I believe that all of his skilful coping was conscious” (Searle 2000, 78). This does not mean, however, that mental states must accompany the behaviour all the time or be represented to the agent as a constant accompaniment to his actions.

What about pre-linguistic examples? Searle, correctly I think, observes that skilful coping in sports is linguistically permeated: “There is no way you can play basketball or tennis without the activity being linguistically loaded” (Searle 2000, 79). Basketball players have to communicate with each other, players have to know the score, which team one is on, when one is in zone or in man-to-man defence, how many time-outs are left, and so on. All this “skilful coping” is linguistic in one way or other.

Searle then turns to the tennis example where Dreyfus maintained that the players’ movements were caused by the perceived conditions and were constrained “to reduce a sense of deviation from some satisfactory gestalt” (Dreyfus 1993, 28-29). Searle asks us to consider the contrast between Dreyfus’s tennis player and real life. It is very unlikely that a player who had just blown the match would say to his coach that it was not his fault, “rather my motions

were caused by the perceived conditions, and those conditions failed to reduce the sense of deviation from some satisfactory gestalt, where the nature of that satisfactory gestalt was not represented” (Searle 2000, 79). He would say: “Coach, I was hitting the ground strokes short because I got really tired in the fifth set. And when I lose my concentration, I couldn’t get my first serves in” (Searle 2000, 79).

The problem according to Searle is the problem of level. Dreyfus is not at the level where tennis players, carpenters and philosophers are when they are consciously trying to do something. What are tennis players consciously trying? First of all they are trying to win. Second, they make a lot of preparations, say before a tournament, that involve a lot of conscious planning. And when the players get on the court it is very unlikely, according to Searle, that they simply experience letting themselves be moved by gestalt tensions. Rather there are flashes of conscious thinking going through the players’ minds as they lunge for the ball or prepare the serve. And these thoughts need not be in words but they are thoughts about what is going on, what the score is, what the next move should be. For Searle, “a serious competitive activity is filled with intentionality down to the ground” (Searle 2000, 80). What about the “micropractices”, such as holding the racket in the right way, swinging it in a certain manner, are not these micropractices beyond intentionality? Searle thinks not. Rather they are part of how intentional actions are realised, but are not themselves necessarily conscious. As we saw earlier, the Background consists of abilities that make practices possible. These practices are not something separate from the intentional phenomena, but are the way the intentional phenomena are carried out. “For example, in order to try to hit the ball harder I have to be able to hold the racket and swing it, in order to write this article I have to be able to move my fingers over the keyboard.” And furthermore, “my intention in action (what I am trying to do) is to hit the ball close to the baseline, but in so doing my subsidiary movements are done intentionally, even though they are not at the level of what I am trying to do” (Searle 2000, 81).

This means that intentionality connects to and uses Background abilities in performing actions. For Searle intentionality is not an accompaniment to skilful behaviour. The tennis player does not play tennis and, in addition, have a set of second-order mental representations. Rather playing tennis is the form that the intentionality takes.

Another important point is the difference in how Searle and Dreyfus see the role of consciousness. In his commentary on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Dreyfus seems to be saying that the *Dasein* need not be conscious, there is skilful coping without consciousness. Searle however thinks that skilful coping requires consciousness. One can only cope skilfully

when one is conscious of what one is doing. But if one is conscious there must be a content and this content determines, according to Searle, the conditions of success and failure. One cannot play tennis and in addition have consciousness as musical background. Rather the content of consciousness determines the way of playing of tennis.

If admittedly skilful coping requires consciousness, what about our ability to do one thing and think about something else? Searle sees no problem here. We are able to operate at different levels of consciousness at the same time. We are nevertheless aware of what we are doing, for instance driving to work. If we are aware, we are conscious. If we are conscious we have intentions with certain conditions of satisfaction. This means that the Larry Bird example really is no problem for Searle. Bird may not be aware of what he just did. But that is at a low level of description. He is all the time engaged in a play with a set of rules that determines what it is all about and with certain conditions of success. It is this overriding logical structure and not the phenomenological micro-content that is Searle's focus. As he states succinctly: "You will never understand my tooth brushing behaviour if you think it is all about removing gestalt imbalances, and not about preventing cavities" (Searle 2000, 88).<sup>vi</sup>

### Bridging the gap: can Searle's and Dreyfus's views be reconciled?

We can either look upon the views of Searle and Dreyfus as two incompatible alternatives, or we can consider whether they can complement each other and enrich our understanding. I think the latter is worth pursuing. Maybe we can, to a certain extent, bridge the gap between continental and analytical positions on Intentionality and action in sport. Let us consider some main points.

First. I think the Heidegger-Merleau-Ponty-Dreyfus tradition has a strong position when it comes to the basis of Intentionality and its ontological foundation. I think humans through a long evolutionary history belong to and fit into the world. Humans are geared to the environment and have a basic familiarity with the environing objects and other living beings. Our basic transcendence is this belonging and this togetherness with other beings and objects in a 'world'. I think Heidegger with the structural conceptualization of Being-in-the-world and the ensuing phenomenological description of what it means to live and belong in a world is a better conceptualization than Searle's idea of a Background and a Network that are realized in our brains as representing the world around us.



Second. I think Dreyfus gives a good description of what he calls ‘absorbed coping’. A lot of the time we are involved with the world in a mode of familiarity: opening doors, sitting down in chairs, finding the right distance to persons and objects, performing our training rituals, and so on. But he is wrong, I think, when he generalizes the account of absorbed coping to elite sports or to activities that presuppose intentional effort to improve performance. I agree with Searle that on a background of daily coping and based on the various physical skills that we have acquired, intentional actions arise, in sport as well as in other areas. When Dreyfus argues that athletes are immediately responding to solicitations from the environment and are acting in a non-deliberate, nonconscious, non-representational manner I think he is wrong. Elite athletes are intentionally trying to improve their performance in training and in competitions and are consciously monitoring their performance. They are not mindless zombies (Breivik 2013). This does not mean that they need to be consciously aware of all moves, but when Larry Bird non-consciously passes the ball it is an intentionally defined solution to a movement problem in a sporting situation. It is, as Searle says, an intention-in-action that is based on a prior intention, to play basketball as well as possible by finding the best solution in every situation.

Third. Situations in sports cannot be understood and defined as natural events. In sports we do not only react to the natural or physically constructed sporting environment, but to an environment that is defined by the rules of the sport. What Dreyfus does not see is that the natural environment in sport is permeated by culturally defined rules and prescriptions. So, when he says that tennis players on the court move to reduce a sense of deviation from some satisfactory gestalt this is not the whole story. It is not only about the court and the running body, but as Searle says, about scoring points and winning matches and this sometimes includes going against the optimal, natural gestalt. It is not only about optimizations in a physical space, but about perfections inside a rule- and goal-defined sporting space.

Fourth. There is room for phenomenological descriptions and analytical structures and for a combined view. In rule-governed sport there is, as Searle maintains, a basic understanding among participants of what a competition is about, even if the rules and the goals need not be consciously present. There is a basic cognitive understanding of sporting competitions, a cognitive intentionality that permeates and guides the sporting actions. But inside this structure there is an operative motor intentionality, as advocated by Merleau-Ponty and

followed up by Dreyfus. This motor intentionality is an optimizing agent acting in relation to the sporting contexts and situations, guiding the bodily movements on the courts and arenas. In this way the analytic perspective and the idea of a cognitive understanding of what sport is about can be combined with the phenomenological experience of an operative motor intentionality, or what Dreyfus calls absorbed coping – where athletes function on automatic pilot. What Dreyfus does not see is that there is a Searlean ‘prior intention’ that guides the ‘intention-in-action’ and thus sits at the steering wheel of the automatic athletic machine.

Fifth. I thus think that cognitive and motor intentionality can be combined to a unified view. In a recent article Moe (2016) argues, following Kelly (2000), that there is a fundamental difference between cognitive and motor intentionality. By using Merleau-Ponty’s (2002) analysis of the Schneider case Moe argues that motor intentionality involves a co-habitation and familiarity with things in the surrounding world, whereas cognitive intentionality is based on a conception from a distance. It is like the difference between grasping things and pointing at things. I do not quite follow Moe and Kelly here. I think cognitive intentionality involves more than pointing and a view from a distance. We are not like Schneider, we combine cognitive and motor intentionality. Motor intentionality works inside and presupposes the cognitive structuring and understanding of the world. The motor intentional familiarity a football player has with the football can only function inside a cognitively based understanding of what football is about and how a football can be used and handled according to the rules of the game. This means that cognitive and motor intentionality should not be separated. They function together to realize intentional actions in sport. The Searle-Dreyfus debate on Intentionality and action is thus not ended but will continue in new versions.

## Literature

BENNETT, M. and HACKER, P. 2003. *Philosophical foundations of neuroscience*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

BERTHOZ, A. 2002. *The Brain’s Sense of Movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

BREIVIK, G. 2013. Zombie-like or superconscious? The role of consciousness in elite sport. *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, 40, 1, 85-106.

BREIVIK, G. 2017. Rizzolatti, Merleau-Ponty, Searle – three perspectives on Intentionality and action in sport. (manuscript under review)

- DREYFUS, H. 1993. Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality. *Social research*, 60, 1, 17-38.
- DREYFUS, H.L. 2001/2. Phenomenological Description versus Rational Reconstruction. *La Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 181-196.
- DREYFUS, H. 2001. The Primacy of Phenomenology over Logical Analysis. In H. Dreyfus, & M.S. Wrathall (Eds.) 2014. *Skillful Coping: Essays on the phenomenology of everyday perception and action*, 146-148. London: Oxford University Press.
- GALLAGHER, S. 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HEIDEGGER, M. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated from German by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco.
- HEIDEGGER, M. 1982. *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- HEIDEGGER, M. 1985. *The history of the concept of time*. Bloomington: Indiana University press.
- KELLY, S.D. 2000. Grasping at straws: Motor intentionality and the cognitive science of skilled behaviour. In A. Wrathall & J. Malpas (Eds.), *Heidegger, coping, and cognitive science: Essays in honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, Vol. 2. 161-177. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- KRETCHMAR, S. 1982. 'Distancing': An essay on abstract thinking in sport performances. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 9, 6-18.
- KRETCHMAR, S. 2014. The Philosophy of Sport and Analytic Philosophy. In C.R. Torres (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion the Philosophy of Sport*, 41-58. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- MERLEAU-PONTY M. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated from French by C. Smith. London and New York: Routledge.
- MOE, V.F. 2007. Understanding the background conditions of skilled movement in sport: A study of Searle's 'Background Capacities.' *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1 (3), 299-324.

MOE, V.F. 2014. The Philosophy of Sport and Continental Philosophy. In C.R. Torres (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion the Philosophy of Sport*, 52-65. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

MOE, V.F. 2016. On phenomenological and logical characteristics of skilled behaviour in sport: cognitive and motor intentionality. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 10 (3), 251-268

MORAN, D. 2000. *Introduction to phenomenology*. London and New York: Routledge. Sartre.

SEARLE, J. R. 2000. The Limits of Phenomenology. In M. Wrathall & J. Malpas (Eds.), *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science. Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*. Vol. 2 , 71-92. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

SEARLE, J. 2001/2. "Neither Phenomenological Description nor Rational Reconstruction". *La Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 277-297

SEARLE, J.R. 2001. *Rationality in action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

SEARLE, J. R. 2004. *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

THOMPSON, E. 2010. *Mind in Life. Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

---

<sup>i</sup> Brentano writes: "Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on" (Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 88, cited from Moran 2000, 47).

In another text Brentano writes: "There is no hearing unless something is heard, no believing unless something is believed; there is no hoping unless something is hoped for ... and so on, for all other psychological phenomena" (Brentano, *On the Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, 14, cited from Moran 2000, 48).

<sup>ii</sup> This is in contrast to Sartre where the corporeal and practical gets lost and Husserlian notions come into the foreground. Sartre builds on the Husserlian analysis of a pure and free cogitation directed towards a cogitatum. Moran argues that Sartre operates with a fairly simplistic ontology with a being that is contained in-itself and a consciousness which is never in-itself but is always for-itself, transcending itself towards the world.. Consciousness is a nothingness or "hole of being in the heart of being" (Moran 2000, 360). Consciousness has no inside. There are no representations inside consciousness. Consciousness is a reaching out, a bursting out towards the world. This happens in cognition but also in emotions. Hating is a bursting out towards the world. It is intentional.

---

<sup>iii</sup> Searle tries to develop a sort of geography of the background. The “deep Background” includes what is common to human beings in virtue of their biological makeup – “capacities such as walking, eating, grasping, perceiving, recognizing, and the pre-intentional stance that takes account of the solidity of things, and the independent existence of objects and other people” (Searle 2004, 144). The local Background or “the local cultural practices” include things related to our present culture such as opening beer bottles, things relating to refrigerators and cars, using money and going to cocktail parties. The meaning of sentences is context-dependent. Metaphors can only be understood relative to practices with which we are familiar. And practices can only take place on a background of physical skills.

<sup>iv</sup> According to Searle skiing is learned with the aid of explicit representations. This is not true of most kids in Nordic countries who learn to ski by trial and error and by observing other better skiers.

<sup>v</sup> He follows up by maintaining that perceiving is not a representation of the outer world to the mind but an action of the mind. “Thus looking as experienced has a mind-to-world direction of causation”(Dreyfus 1993, 26). This implies a view where it is the agent that arranges, structures and constructs the gestalt of the experienced world.

<sup>vi</sup> The debate between Dreyfus and Searle went on in two more responses, each of them maintaining having the right or the most relevant view (Dreyfus 2001/2; Searle 2001/2).