

Embodied Mind, Enactive Rationality, and Performative Self

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For this issue of the International Journal of Body, Nature, and Culture, I interviewed an American Philosopher, Shaun Gallagher. Professor Gallagher is the Lillian and Morrie Moss Chair of Excellence in Philosophy at the University of Memphis. His areas of research include phenomenology and the cognitive sciences, especially topics related to embodiment, self, agency, intersubjectivity, minds in skilled performance, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of psychopathology. The author of several books, including Performance/Art: The Venetian Lectures (2021), Action and Interaction (2020), Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind (2017), Phenomenology (2012), The Phenomenological Mind (2008; 2nd edition; 2012, 3rd edition 2021) (with Dan Zahavi), and How the Body Shapes the Mind (2005), he is also an editor of The Oxford Handbook of the Self (2011), and a co-editor of The Oxford Handbook of 4E-Cognition (2018).

Shaun Gallagher is one of the most representative scholars of today who endorses the notion of the embodied mind. Resisting the view of classical cognitivism which sees cognitive operations as computational calculations which begin with symbolic inputs and end with symbolically encoded outputs, he, as a robust advocate for Embodied cognition argues that cognition is the function of the cognizer's brain, body, and environment. He is well known to have coined the term '4-E cognition' (embodied, embedded, extended, and enacted) which represents the diverse perspectives of embodied cognition (Rowlands 3). As a phenomenologist as well as a cognitive scientist, he has made notable contributions to many important related topics. He suggested the phenomenological distinction between body image and body schema (Gallagher How the Body Shapes the Mind) and presented an in-depth discussion of the sense of ownership and the sense of agency (Gallagher Philosophical Conceptions of the Self: Implications for Cognitive Science 14-21). He proposed the pattern theory of self (Gallagher A Pattern Theory of Self 1-7) and the socially extended mind (Gallagher The Socially Extended Mind 4-12).

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In this interview, I asked Shaun three seemingly unrelated but closely related questions. The first question concerns the famous Dreyfus-McDowell debate which sparked lots of following discussions. In the heated debate, Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell presented apparently irreconcilable perspectives on the nature of the mind and rationality involved in skilled coping or action. The second and third questions are about the nature of the mind in skilled performance. The second question focuses on the various forms of the performative mind, and the third one especially concerns the so-called self-losing experience, which is alleged to be one of the most typical and salient aspects of Korean traditional performances.

1.

Hye-yoon Chung: Interestingly, you attempt to solve the famous Dreyfus-McDowell debate by redefining the mind and the notion of rationality. Dreyfus is well known to argue that skilled performances often occur mindlessly without mental intervention. In contrast, McDowell argues that embodied coping involved in performances is conceptual and therefore not as mindless as Dreyfus contends. I think your enactive view of mind offers an effective way out of the trouble they raised. Would you give us an account of the enactive notion of mind and rationality and how it solves the apparent trouble?

Shaun Gallagher: Some commentators have pointed out that Dreyfus and McDowell agree on how to understand the mind – as rational, conceptual, representational, and so on. The disagreement in the debate is that Dreyfus thinks that skilled performance and expertise do not involve the mind, so defined; and McDowell thinks it does. That’s a simple way to understand where they stand. I think things are more nuanced. Although Dreyfus sometimes indicates that skilled performance is mindless, and McDowell insists on the conceptual nature of perception, I think they may be closer than generally thought. In the debate, McDowell is constantly resisting Dreyfus’s characterization of his position, and Dreyfus is constantly apologizing and back-peddling. I’ll give just one example. Dreyfus interprets McDowell as holding an overly intellectualized view of *phronesis*, a view where *phronesis* is a form of wisdom that allows one to step back and deliberate when that is the appropriate thing to do, and which denies that it can be an intuitive spontaneous response, determined case-by-case in the full practical situation. McDowell resists this interpretation by resisting the bifurcation. For him there is a continuity between the two views: *phronesis* can be a prereflective intuitive or perceptual knowing how to act in the particular

situation, but we can also think of it as a skillful knowing how to reflectively deliberate. In each case, it is more like a skill or a form of know-how than a form of deliberative thought. Some of this involves interpreting Aristotle on the notion of *phronesis*, and it seems to me that Aristotle would endorse both the intuitive end and the deliberative end of this continuum.

I think we get something closer to an enactivist view by going back to Anaxagoras, and noticing a critical reversal effected by Aristotle. Anaxagoras, as reported by Aristotle, maintains that the possession of hands is the reason that human is the most intelligent of all animals. Aristotle reverses this – he argues that it is more rational to suppose that having hands is the consequence of human intelligence. Nature gives to each organism whatever it can make use of, and humans can make use of their hands because their minds have intelligence. On this point, I think Anaxagoras is a better anchor for enactivism than Aristotle. All you have to do is think about what human rationality or intelligence would be like if we evolved without hands. Without hands, our relation to the environment, our perception of space, and our way of acting would be very different, and our brains would be quite different – I think pervasively different and not just different in sensory-motor areas – which means that what we call rationality would be different in some way.

We can think of this in terms of McDowell's endorsement of Gadamer's distinction between (animal) environment and (human) world. This is too much of a distinction. The enactivist would certainly see continuity where McDowell sees distinction. And we could think of a continuity in rationality too. Rationality involves how we couple with our environments. In this regard, different organism-environment relationships enact different worlds that likely operate according to different rules, starting from the basic facts of how we reach and grasp something, to how we solve problems. The fact that the human organism is the result of an evolution that allows, not only for hands, but for specific mechanisms that allow for sophisticated speech and communication does make us different from other animals, but perhaps in a graded fashion.

Even for humans, the brute material environment remains an important part of the process, offering resistance and often pre-conceptually constraining what can be said and what must remain unsaid. Embodied engagement, affectivity, and speech mark out the space where the world emerges, but these are processes that remain anchored in an agent-environment relation where not everything is

linguistic or conceptual, but where our hands, our autonomic and affective systems, and our vocal mouths engage in an embodied-enactive rationality. On the enactive interpretation, the environment doesn't disappear to make room for the world. It's not world, or language, or conceptuality all the way down. It's rather a precarious mix, because we are, after all, bodily entities. I've said something like this in an essay I entitled "Embodied rationality" (Gallagher *Embodied Rationality* 83-94).

2.

Hye-yoon Chung: Supposedly, it would be a difficult task to characterize appropriately the mind exhibited in skilled performance. It might require an account of the rationality and affectivity of performing minds. I would like to ask you how you identify various forms of the performative mind. Specifically, how would you characterize performative self-awareness that goes beyond pre-reflective self-awareness?

Shaun Gallagher: I think there is a lot to say about this, although again it requires us to leave behind some of the traditional conceptions of the mind. If we think of performance, in sports, performing arts, or martial arts, there has been a growing contemporary discussion of just this question about how awareness, memory, and attention – these traditionally defined mental processes – enter into bodily movement, which is often thought of as habitual and automatic. One can see that on the two extremes someone like Dreyfus who thinks of performance as mindless, and the intellectualists about know-how, like Stanley and Williamson, who think of it as requiring higher-order knowledge-that, might agree about habit, or bodily or motor control processes being automatic. In contrast, philosophers like Merleau-Ponty and the pragmatist John Dewey think that habit can be intelligent and differentially responsive when situations are changing.

In my thinking on this, I've been influenced by a model proposed by Christensen (37-66), Sutton et al., which they call a meshed architecture

They conceive of this as a vertical integration of top-down cognitive control processes that "reach in" to instruct automatic motor control processes. They don't mention habit as part of this model, but one supposes that they would put habit on the side of automatic motor processes. John Sutton recently wrote to me, however, to highlight his characterization of habit as less automatic and more intelligent (as he expresses it in his 2011) paper (Sutton et al. 78-103).

It may be, then, in his meshed architecture view that habit is the result of that top-down intervention of cognitive control that makes the motor processes more intelligent in the context of expert or skilled performance. In whatever way that gets worked out, the model does offer some good insights, suggesting that performance is neither mindless, nor purely intellectual, but a kind of mesh that defines skilled know-how. This is okay as far as it goes, but I have proposed what I call an *enhanced* meshed architecture, because I think a number of other factors are also integrated in and can have a profound influence on performance.

First, I argue that motor control (or what I call body-schematic) processes are not automatic – and there is a lot of empirical evidence to show that. Such processes are already intelligent and can offer a kind of intrinsic control that may be precisely what elicits some of the more cognitive processes that involve awareness, attention, and memory. You asked about something I called performative self-awareness (Gallagher *How the Body Shapes the Mind*). This is a kind of pre-reflective self-awareness that gives me a sense that I am moving or doing something, not with a focus on my body parts, but in terms closer to the goal of the action that may involve what Christensen et al. call situation awareness. Dorothee Legrand, based on her research on dance, has characterized it as including a form of body-awareness that is a heightened pre-reflective experience. In any case, this type of awareness, or certain types of attention to situational factors, may in fact be generated in performance, when necessary, not top-down, but by my practiced, intelligent habits and skilled movements.

Beyond this, however, the enhanced model of meshed architecture includes affectivity (including basic bodily affects that include pain, pleasure, hunger, fatigue, etc.) as well as emotional processes – all of which can have a significant effect on performance. And I also add to this architecture what I refer to as a horizontal axis that includes ecological or environmental factors, as well as social/cultural/normative factors. All of these things can have an effect on performance – for example, whether you are performing music with other musicians, whether you are playing one genre rather than another, whether you are playing from a score or by improvising, whether you are playing in a pub or a concert hall, and so on – all of these factors can enter into the mesh of performance.

Finally, let me say that all of these factors need to be conceived as dynamically interacting – the real model is more like a dynamical gestalt than like an abstract

or static vertical or horizontal diagram. If you then ask, where is the mind in all of this, instead of saying it's just the cognitive interventions described by Christensen et al., I want to say that it's just that whole dynamical system, which is a set of embodied, affective, ecological, social, and cultural processes that likely varies from one situation to another, and from one kind of performance (music *versus* dance *versus* acting *versus* football, etc.) to another.

3.

Hye-yoon Chung: Many people agree that one of the most salient features of Korean traditional art forms is self-forgetting. The artists committed to Korean traditional art genres such as Samulnori and drum dance make efforts to reach the level of losing themselves during performances, and the audience is usually moved deeply into self-oblivion. I'd like to ask you how this kind of performance practice could be explained in terms of the enactivist view of mindfulness.

Shaun Gallagher: A former student of mine, Christian Kronsted, is not only a philosopher but also a dancer, and one of his most recent projects is to look at just these kinds of practices, and specifically practices that involve tarantism. I'm not convinced that losing oneself in something like Samulnori or drum dance or tarantella is exactly the same thing as losing oneself in other practices, such as mindfulness meditation in which some meditators describe going into a non-self state. I can say more about the latter type of practice than about Samulnori, since I do not know this tradition or what the phenomenology of Samulnori performance is like.

Let me start by saying that much depends upon how one defines the self or person. That's something you probably expect a philosopher to say. But I think it is important. I've argued for a pluralist conception of self as a self-pattern (the so-called pattern theory of self) (Gallagher *The Pattern Theory of Self* 1-7). This view rejects both substantive conceptions of self and personal identity, and reductionist or deflationary concepts that would reduce the self to just one thing – a minimal self-awareness, or a narrative, for example. Rather, the claim is that what we call the self just is a pattern of various processes or factors that include bodily, experiential, affective, behavioral, cognitive, ecological, narrative, social, and normative factors, and, importantly, their dynamical relations. In this regard, the self-pattern can also be characterized as a dynamical gestalt. It's important to note that not all factors that may be associated with a typical self-pattern need to be

operative to form a self-pattern. In some unusual cases of psychopathology, for example, one may lose narrative competency (dysnarrativa), or cognitive processes connected with memory (amnesia or Alzheimer's). One may even lose one's experiential self-awareness (as in the case of coma) while retaining other aspects of the self-pattern. Appropriately, we typically do not regard someone in a coma or someone with Alzheimer's as a non-person, since a sufficient number of processes are still at work to form a self-pattern.

The notion of a self-pattern has some similarity to Buddhist conceptions of the aggregates (*khandhas*). Buddhist thinkers usually list five aggregates: bodily and sensory experiences in different modalities (*rūpa*); feeling tone (or valence; *vedanā*); knowledge representations (*saññā*; e.g., categories, mental images); mental habits and states (*saṅkhāra*; e.g. emotions, motives, intentions); and consciousness (*vijñāna*), i.e., the awareness of an object.

In convergence with the dynamical integration in the self-pattern, in Buddhist psychology such aggregate processes are regarded as influencing each other in the mind-body system, and as influencing the whole pattern, and in turn being influenced by the whole pattern, in terms of reciprocal or circular causality. We find this idea expressed by Francisco Varela, for example. Likewise, in an embodied/enactive understanding, the self-pattern is dynamically affected by changing factors and conditions in the whole brain-body-environment system, including other people and socio-cultural factors. The important point emphasized by the Buddhist accounts is that one cannot find the self in any one of these aggregates; nor is there a self in the totality of the aggregates. Each aggregate is taken to be transitory and impermanent. This is also the case in the self-pattern – no one factor is equated with the self. What we call self, just is the pattern formed by all of these processes.

Now in the Buddhist meditation traditions, to identify with the aggregates, or with any one aggregate involves a delusion or unhealthy attitude. Meditative practices are meant to reach a dissolution of such attitudes and the realization that one is not identical with any psychological or physical entity. This is attained in the experience of no-self. In terms of the self-pattern, the aim of meditation would be to reduce the influence of narrative processes and to live in the present experiential moment.

Are such states truly self-less states? There is some controversy about this. Some Buddhist scholars maintain that there is something like a minimal, experiential

observer still operating in such states, and indeed, this would necessarily be the case if some meditators are able to offer any kind of description of such no-self states. Some meditators also describe such states as pleasant. In this respect, one could claim that since the meditator is still existing in a bodily state, and to the extent that there is still a pre-reflective self-awareness, and an affective state of pleasure, then there may be a sufficient pattern of processes in play that would still count as a self-pattern. In that case, it may be the case that certain meditation practices diminish the self-pattern to a great extent, but that some minimal self-pattern still exists – so it is not entirely non-self.

Accordingly, one might approach your question about Samulnori in the same way. Is the phenomenology of Samulnori such that one loses consciousness? Does one lose all aspects of the self-pattern other than embodiment? If that is the case, one could say that one reaches self-oblivion. If, on the other hand, one can say that Samulnori is an embodied practice that maintains some kind of ecological relation to the music, and is associated with some kind of affective process, then perhaps a self-pattern continues to operate even in such practices.

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