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Issac Newton Died a Virgin

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Interview with Hubert Dreyfus

That's just absurd. So there is something cross-cultural, but it has no substantive content; what skills you acquire, what morality you acquire, what understanding of what it is to be a human being you acquire, is left completely open. That's why I can't tell whether it is essentialist or not essentialist. It tells you human beings have to be skillful copers, that all skills have to be exercised in a certain way, but it doesn't tell you whether human beings have to be heroes or saints, or mature or whatever thing our traditions or other traditions have filled in, because skills are very flexible. I don't see any way to describe any limit to what particular skills particular people can pick up in particular contexts.

disClosure: Sort of goes back to that Heidegger question....

Dreyfus: So the skill model is existential, not existentiell. I would say it was a Heidegger existential, or a Merleau-Ponty one. There is an important difference. For Heidegger, the kinds of skills humans have are totally different from the kinds of skills the higher primates might have. Merleau-Ponty is perfectly happy to include apes along with people in most of what he has to say. I can't think of very much that would leave them out. The crucial question is "what are you ultimately trying to do when you cope? Are you trying to get a maximum grip on the world?" This is what Merleau-Ponty thinks; then you can bring apes and other higher animals into your account—they are all trying to get a maximum grip on the world. Or are you trying, through your action, to take a stand on what it is to be a human being? That is, your being is an issue for you. If getting an identity is what all of this skilled behavior is for, then of course it is something only a human being can do. But even with this big difference, what skills are and that there have to be skills cuts across this distinction, whether they are for getting a maximum grip or whether they are for taking a stand on what it is to be human, ultimately, the skills, at the level I am describing, are the same.

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knowledge
what advancement?
does it make the cool apple shine more red?
do molecules named
blow more sweetly round the head?
wherever reason seeks to bind
the human touch you will not find
okay okay I'll leave the sing song off
but men
in white coats
will soon help those
who wear suits
the world to stop