PH355 – Philosophy of Education

<u>Week 5 – some extra thoughts re 'training'</u>

I training as the platform for learning

Training can seem an attractive concept for many reasons:

> (i) it's a simpler form of engagement than conceptually mediated instruction
> (ii) it captures the repetitive simplicity of the engagements of early learning
> (iii) it emphasises the role of activity – early engagements with things/properties need not be engagements in experience (Fodor assumes that requires representations), they can be engagements in activity.
> (iv) it's phenomenologically accurate – it captures the graft of craft: it takes time to learn

Note, Fodor is dismissive of the concept of training, e.g., Fodor & Lepore ('Brandom Beleaguered' *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 2007; p.684) where the appeal to training is dismissed as vacuous.

Opening observations:

> (A) If (i) is true, then to appeal to an engagement of X that is not a conceptual engagement of X is only of value if we have an account of how the simpler form of engagement (training) gives rise to the richer conceptual engagement. Isn't that just Fodor's challenge again?

> (B) If the simplicity appealed to in (i) and (ii) is because training is a form of instruction (habituation) that does not require of the trainee grasp of norms that shape activity, then how does training thus conceived give rise to grasp of norms?

> (C) If the role of training is non-social because it is a form of habituation modelled in terms of conditioning of S-R connections, and the grasp of norms is essentially social, then how does training give access to/awareness of the essentially social patterns of activity over and above the patterns of activity produced by S-R conditioning

> (D) (iii) is indicative of the underlying pragmatism of the appeal to training – the prioritisation of activity. But the thrust of Fodor's argument is the defence of a cognitivist account of psychological abilities contra the ongoing appeal to pragmatism, where the latter is seen as the description of what people do. Fodor wants an explanation – an account of how learning is achieved, not a set of notes from an ethnology of learning.

Williams' form of social constructivism in her reading of Wittgenstein is open to critique on all of the above. Descriptions of learning as 'initiation into the space of reasons' (Siegel 2012, Bakhurst 2011) are also, arguably, open to critique on all of the above grounds.

Note also, that Moshman's account of cognitive development as the development of metacognition – acquiring concepts for normative control of thinking that produces reasoning – will also owe us a response to the point raised in (C).

Note also, that Wittgenstein's own appeal to 'training' is expressed in German with a word for training that applies to only very simple S-R conditioning; the German is *Abrichtung*. It is a word appropriate for whipping horses; it is never used for activities with children. (Enduring puzzle why/how Wittgenstein could have thought that such a notion of training was relevant in language learning?)

II training – why is it hard?

Isn't the idea of training difficult because, at heart, acknowledging the simplicity of the training encounter and the fact that it takes time (i) and (iv) amounts to acknowledging something that looks paradoxical – training involves trying to do something that you cannot do.

If X is some abilitiy that you cannot do, then if you cannot do X, what on earth do you do in training to enable you to do X? Fodor's paradox reappears, for if you cannot do X, then training cannot start with doing X; it must start with doing something else. So then we meet Fodor again:

      How can doing Y be a way of learning how to do X?

or,

      How can doing something that is not doing X (and doing it repeatedly, for training takes time) amount to learning how to do X?

It sounds odd to say that

      By repeatedly doing something Y (that is not a doing X) one thereby learns how to do X

But perhaps we should see if we can make sense of this.

III training and staging

Let's ignore concepts, for the moment. Consider instead the transformation from training to second nature.   One label that gets us right to the heart of the matter is this: How does training give rise to second nature? How does repetition of some activity that is not X give rise to an ability to X where that becomes the sort of intelligent skilled activity of second nature.

Take seriously the thought that
      Repetition of doing Y makes it possible to do X

Some simple examples: learning how to ride a bike, not by practising balancing as such, but by repeatedly trying to aim to the point straight ahead; learning how to perform a forehand topspin drive in tennis by practising the way you plant the feet and orientate your stance as you go into the stroke. Doing one thing repeatedly in order to learn how to acquire the ability to do something else.

Doing Y repeatedly so that it becomes second nature, the second nature performance of doing Y makes X salient.

How, by operation of conscious attention – incremental extension to what is previously made available by second nature performance of doing Y. repetition of doing Y as scaffolding, staging for X to be salient ('salient' = available to be engaged in experience).
See Luntley 'Training, training, training…' (2012) on module webpage for discusssion of these examples.

IV incremental attention

Role of attention as essentially incremental and interrogative, a matter of seeing beyond what has been rendered second nature (also conceptual) by prioir practice. Attention as intrinsically extensive of the range of what has been mastered.

Only part of the story….

Recall point that Fodor's assumption that learning is hypothesis formation and testing has a role for LOT in two places: as content of the hypothesis and in giving the result that shows that the hypothesis is correct. The role of conscious attention might contribute to a descriptive metaphysics of how you engage X without prior concept for X, but what about the second role. How do you get the sense that what you're doing in trying the forehand top-spin drive is right?

What is the notion of 'right' here? If it is correct re application of the concept for X, then you cannot have that sense of right without already possessing the concept.

What might be a simpler notion of right and what sort of patterns of activity and engagement give rise to a simpler notion of right?

V next…..

Carey's (2009) response to Fodor – bootstrapping mechanisms and then back to the issue about a simpler notion of right.

11 February 2016