

# Ryle on Knowing How

An Interpretation and Defence

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**Declaration:**

I, Henry Clarke, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

**Abstract:**

This essay provides an interpretation and defence of Gilbert Ryle's discussion of knowing how, which has hitherto received relatively little attention given the importance of his remarks to the contemporary literature. I argue that Ryle offers an account of knowing how which can be contrasted with both so-called 'intellectualist' and 'neo-Rylean' theories. This consists of two claims concerning the conditions for the psychological state of having an ability, which on Ryle's implicit definition can be termed 'knowing how'. Abilities of this kind consist in reliable success, where this success can be attributed to the agent who possesses the ability. The negative claim is that knowing how to do a kind of activity does not require being in any mental state with propositional content. The positive claim is that it is necessary and sufficient for knowing how to do an activity of some kind that one is disposed to act in accordance with learned rules when carrying out that activity.

I then defend this account against objections drawn from linguistic and psychological considerations. The aim is to treat these two areas of objection in general by looking at two specific objections and showing why they do not work. Although critical accounts of Ryle's theory in the recent literature have mainly focused on the erroneous neo-Rylean interpretation, I apply the two objections to the Rylean theory properly understood. The two objections are Stanley and Williamson's much-discussed linguistic argument for the claim that knowing how is a kind of knowing that, and Bengson and Moffett's argument from conceptual understanding. I argue that these objections suffer from lack of support, and give an account of the structure of the constitutive conditions of knowing how to demonstrate why this is the case that arises from considering some remarks of Michael Dummett's.

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## 0. Introduction

Knowing how is a topic of philosophical interest for at least two different reasons, beyond simply being an interesting phenomenon in itself. One is that some activities that creatures such as ourselves know how to do are of philosophical interest. For instance, we know how to speak and understand a language. A theory of language is partly a theory of what goes into knowing how to speak and understand. This introduces the need to find out what goes into knowing how to do *anything*, since different views on that general question may imply different views on the specific question, and different views on the specific question may imply radically different views about the nature of the activity in question. The other reason is that knowing how seems to be a distinctive kind of mental state. Questions about the nature of the mind may turn on different views about whether and in what way this is correct. So an understanding of knowing how is important both for understanding the things we know how to do, and for understanding ourselves as creatures that know how to do them.

Gilbert Ryle can be credited with introducing the topic of knowing how as an area of philosophical debate. His primary interest in doing so was aligned more with the second reason, but it is undoubtedly the case that his contribution has had ramifications for debates aligned with the first. And indeed, Ryle's discussion is not merely important for having introduced the topic. His contribution has largely set the terms of the on-going debate as to how best to understand knowing how. It is hard (in my experience, impossible) to find a philosophical text on the subject that does not at least mention Ryle in passing, either as an endorsement of (what is taken to be) his view, or, as has become increasingly common, in a more critical mood. However, in the face of all this, it is also surprising how little close attention is given to what he actually claimed. The goal of this essay is therefore to provide a careful reading of Ryle's discussion of knowing how, and provide an account of the theory to be found therein. It will be the contention of this essay that both supporters and detractors of Ryle on knowing how have been mistaken in several respects.

By supporters, I mean proponents of what I will term the 'neo-Rylean' theory (see section 1.6 below). Although not a precisely defined position, as will be seen, it can be identified as what those who take a sympathetic view of the Rylean theory often advocate. Although it bears

some similarities to the Rylean theory, a proper interpretation shows that it is overstated in some respects, and is less than ideally clear in others, in a way that is unnecessary given the resources Ryle provides. By detractors, I mean proponents of what are usually termed *intellectualist* theories. These are theories that hold some version of the claim that knowing how constitutively requires an individual to be in a mental state or collection of mental states with propositional content (typically, knowing that  $p$ , or believing that  $p$ ). Ryle's theory is not intellectualist in this sense. Intellectualism is sometimes motivated by a rejection of the Rylean theory. Such a motivation needs to be correct on the details of that theory in order to be compelling. And equally, those sympathetic to Ryle would obviously do better with an accurate rendition of his theory. Participants in the debate about knowing how can largely be placed into these two camps, and so getting a correct interpretation is important for the debate as a whole.

Getting an accurate interpretation of Ryle is not merely of scholarly interest. The other goal of this essay is to show that the Rylean theory of knowing how is well motivated, and that it can be defended against many of the objections brought against it. The argument need not, and does not, pretend to the status of a proof. I am not certain that a proof of the correctness of the theory can be given. As will be seen, there are many points in the argument where one can only take stock of the possible moves and make a judgement as to which is the most reasonable to make, rather than make a decision on deductive grounds. For this reason, motivating the theory and defending it against its intellectualist critics will be as far as the argument for it can go here. The conclusion will be that both of the dominant parties in the debate about knowing how are mistaken.

The focus of the argument will be on intellectualist objections to the Rylean theory. The main issue will be whether it is a constitutive condition on knowing how to do something that one is in a propositional mental state. I said earlier that an understanding of knowing how to do an activity is important for our understanding of activities like speaking a language, and more broadly, the nature of mind. The debate about the role of propositional mental states with respect to knowing how provides (if not the only, then certainly) one of the ways in which this is so. Propositional mental states are a species of what we might call *representational states*,

since holding some attitude to a proposition is a way of representing the world as being the way that proposition describes. If knowing how to do something constitutively requires being in a representational state, then this provides support for a representational theory of mind, on which the nature of mental phenomena are to explained in terms of representational states. On the other hand, if knowing how does not constitutively require being in a representational state, then this gives support to a non-representational theory of mind. Similar points go for the epistemology of language. The debate between the Rylean and the intellectualist about knowing how is therefore an important part of this more general philosophical controversy.

The essay falls roughly into two halves. The aim of the first half of the essay is to provide the interpretation of the content and structure of the central claims of that theory, as put forward in his *The Concept of Mind* (1949; henceforth *CM*) and his earlier presidential address to the Aristotelian Society (1945; henceforth *PA*) The occasion for Ryle's discussion of knowing how in both cases is an argument against an intellectualist theory of intelligent behaviour. In section 1.1, I give an interpretation of Ryle's statement of this theory, which emphasises its connection to the Cartesian view of the mind, which *CM* as a whole is dedicated to opposing. Section 1.2 gives an account of Ryle's arguments against the theory. In section 1.3, I discuss two puzzling aspects of Ryle's transition from this refutation to making a claim which is key to his theory of knowing how, and in section 1.4, I provide an interpretation of this claim as a way of solving the puzzle. Section 1.5 completes the interpretation by providing an account of the second key claim, which makes up the positive part of the Rylean theory of knowing how. Section 1.6 concludes by distinguishing the Rylean theory proper from the neo-Rylean theory.

The aim of the second half is to defend the theory as interpreted in the first against objections informed by intellectualism about knowing how. Such objections are those that explicitly deny the negative part of the Rylean theory, and so undermine the positive part. Section 2.1 outlines two broad areas from which intellectualist objections might be drawn: linguistics and psychology. Section 2.2 sets out Stanley and Williamson's (2001) *linguistic argument* for what they term *intellectualism*, which they take to contradict Ryle. Against this argument, in section 2.3 I endorse a line of argument taken from Cath (forthcoming), which shows that the most plausible version of intellectualism must be such as to be compatible with the negative view.



Section 2.4 examines Bengson and Moffett's (2007) argument that knowing how requires the subject to have some sort of conceptual understanding, which in turn requires propositional mental states. In section 2.5, I give reasons for thinking that the move to second requirement in what I call the *understanding objection* is unsound. In section 2.6, I consider some remarks made by Michael Dummett (1993) about the representation of abilities in terms of knowledge which raise the possibility that there are two senses of knowing how, where one of these senses requires an intellectualist analysis. By giving an account of the reasons why Bengson and Moffett's objection fail, I argue that this *representation problem* is not genuine. I conclude by giving a summary of the argument in the essay, and make suggestions for further research.

## 1. Interpretation

The first part of this essay approaches Ryle's theory of knowing how by placing it within the broader context of his concerns in the philosophy of mind. The content of the theory is sometimes presented as though it were quite straightforward, but it shall be seen that this is far from being the case. There are number of puzzles involved in Ryle's presentation of his two key claims, of which the following is intended as a clarification. Doing so will illuminate some features of the theory that are not present in more standard interpretations.

### 1.1 *The Intellectualist Legend*

Ryle's has two discussions of knowing how, in *CM* and *PA*, both of which take place within the context of an argument against what is variously referred to as 'the prevailing doctrine' (*PA*: 1), 'the intellectualist doctrine' (*CM*: 27), and more consistently 'the intellectualist legend.' (*CM*: 31) To understand what Ryle has to say about knowing how, it is therefore useful to consider these arguments. Giving a definite shape to the content of the intellectualist legend is not straightforward. In *PA*, Ryle summarises the position as holding

(1) that Intelligence is a special faculty, the exercises of which are those specific internal acts which are called acts of thinking, namely, the operations of considering propositions ; (2) that practical activities merit their titles "intelligent," "clever," and the rest only because they are accompanied by some such internal acts of considering propositions (and particularly "regulative" propositions). That is to say, doing things is never itself an exercise of intelligence, but is, at best, a process introduced and somehow steered by some ulterior act of theorising. (*PA*: 1)

In *CM*, Ryle is less concise, and there are a number of occasions where Ryle sets out ideas which he attributes to the legend he wants to oppose:

[B]oth laymen and philosophers tend to to treat intellectual operations as the

core of mental conduct... they tend to define all other mental-conduct concepts in terms of concepts of cognition. (ibid.)

[T]he intellectualist doctrine... tries to define intelligence in terms of the apprehension of truths. (ibid.)

It follows [from the intellectualist legend's assumptions] that the operation which is characterised as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgement of these rules or criteria; that is, the agent must go through the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done...; only then can he execute his performance in accordance with those dictates. (*CM*: 30)

I shall argue that the intellectualist legend is false and that when we describe a performance as intelligent, this does not entail the double operation of considering and executing. (ibid.)

The absurd assumption made by the intellectualist legend is this, that a performance of any sort inherits all its title to intelligence from some anterior internal operation of planning what to do. (*CM*: 32)

We can summarise the intellectualist legend that Ryle wishes to oppose as consisting of two propositions:

(IL1) All mental operations can be put into two categories: there are mental activities which consist in considering a proposition, and there are mental activities which are controlled by anterior mental operations of the first sort.

(IL2) Operations which count as intelligent fall into the second category, and that it is in virtue of this that they count as intelligent activities, or have the features that qualify them as intelligent.

To expand a little on IL1, the idea is that the first sort of mental operation, which adopting Ryle's terminology we can call *intellectual operations*, are those involved in "that special class of operations which constitute theorising." (CM: 27) Theorising, we may presume, is the activity undertaken by the intellect, or if we are unhappy with talking in the terms of faculty psychology, the mind in its intellectual capacity. IL2 states that whether or not an operation counts as intelligent depends on whether they are controlled by an intellectual operation. This goes even for activities which are not mental in the sense that they are not merely carried out, as we might say, *in the mind* (Ryle carries out an extended discussion of this metaphor, cf. CM: 36-40), but also involve bodily actions. Such activities are mental in the sense that and insofar as they involve, as we might say, *presence of mind*. Less metaphorically, the idea is that bodily actions can count as mental operations to the extent that there is some contribution to the nature of the action from the mind of the person whose action it is. Operations of this kind are what we can call *intelligent behaviour*, and the intellectualist legend can be thought of as a theory of intelligent behaviour that appeals to intellectual operations.

The intellectualist legend so described is likely to seem unclear. There are two particularly pressing questions of clarification which apply to IL1. One is a question regarding the importance of the claim about the priority of the intellectual operations in question. Must the operations be prior, or might they also run in parallel? And what sort of priority is at issue? The point that the intellectual operations are prior is the component of the intellectualist legend which will be important for Ryle's arguments against it, but there could be a question about whether one could derive the general thrust without it. A second question is about what it means to contemplate a proposition. Ryle is less than explicit about what such an act of contemplation might entail. The more natural idea would be that one contemplates the action, and one does so in a way that involves propositions; 'contemplating a proposition' resists simple paraphrase, and although Ryle is obviously unsympathetic to the position he is describing, a more plausible account of it would not damage his argument. A third issue is that there are grounds for doubt about whether or not Ryle is attacking a genuine theory, or merely a strawman for the sake of making a point. To make a judgement on this, we need to consider the sources of the theory that Ryle mentions.

Ryle's earlier discussion of the intellectualist legend identifies its origin in Plato (*PA*: 1). In *CM*, we find a somewhat vaguer allusion, when we are told that “[t]he Greek idea that immortality is reserved for the theorising part of the soul was discredited, but not dispelled, by Christianity.” (*CM*: 27) Later on, however, Ryle devotes a section to ‘The Motives of the Intellectualist Legend’, in which he asks how it can be, “in the face of their own daily experience,” (*CM*: 32) that people are drawn so strongly to the theory of intelligent behaviour encapsulated above as IL1-2. “Part of the answer,” Ryle says, is that “they are wedded to the dogma of the ghost in the machine.” (*ibid.*) In the first chapter of *CM*, Ryle states his overall ambition:

I shall often speak of it [‘the official doctrine’], with deliberate abusiveness, as ‘the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’. I hope to prove it entirely false, and false not in detail but in principle... It is one big category mistake. (*CM*: 17)

The ‘official doctrine’, which is a “doctrine about the nature and place of minds” (*CM*: 1), is said to come “chiefly from Descartes.” (*ibid.*) We can conclude from this that the intellectualist legend and the Cartesian conception of the mind are meant to be somehow related (interestingly, *PA* makes no mention of this). Elaborating a little on what this link is, Ryle claims that assuming “the antithesis between ‘physical’ and ‘mental’” (*CM*: 32) as does the Cartesian conception means that bodily action “cannot itself be a mental operation.” (*ibid.*) One must therefore postulate a link between purely mental operations and purely bodily actions for the latter to count as intelligent. Ryle does not expand much on the link between the more general Cartesian conception of the mind and the more specific intellectualist theory of intelligent behaviour, and having identified the one as a motivation for the other, he immediately goes on to show how the division between the mental and the physical does not do the work that this way of motivating the intellectualist legend requires (*CM*: 33-35). It bears mentioning that Ryle not only thinks that the Cartesian conception of mind is a source of the intellectualist legend, but that the latter is a source of motivation for the former (*cf.* *CM*: 27, 35, 49-50), although the explanation of how this is so may fail to convince.

I propose, however, to take seriously the possibility that the Cartesian conception of the

mind is one of the ways at least to *motivate* the intellectualist legend, and to use this to answer the questions of clarification raised about IL1. The Cartesian conception of the mind is a familiar one, but has the disadvantage of many familiar ideas in that it is hard to say exactly what it is. Nor do we want, given present concerns, to get too deeply involved in Descartes exegesis. Fortunately, we do not need to say everything necessary for a complete description of the Cartesian conception. There are three salient claims:

(CC1) Thoughts are modifications of mental substance.

(CC2) Modifications of mental substance are conscious episodes.

(CC3) Thoughts can enter into causal relations with material bodies.

CC1 is obviously one of the central tenets of Descartes' conception of the mind. The idea is that there is a fundamental distinction with respect to the that can exist although nothing else does - that is, what is a *substance* - between the mental and the material, where the primary attribute of mental substance is thought, and the primary attribute of the material is extension. And, as distinct from idealism, CC1 also brings a commitment to the existence of material as well as mental substance. With respect to CC2, one finds the following definition in the *Principles*:

By the term 'thought', I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. (Descartes, 1984/5, vol. I: 195)

CC3 is supported by the following quote from Descartes' letter to Gassendi:

These questions [about mental causation] presuppose amongst other things an explanation of the union between the soul and the body, which I have not yet dealt with at all. But I will say, for your benefit at least, that the whole problem contained in such questions arises simply from *a supposition that is false and*

*cannot in any way be proved*, namely that, if the soul and the body are two substances whose nature is different, this prevents them from being able to act on each other (Descartes, 1984/5, vol. II: 275; emphasis added).

This partial characterisation of the Cartesian conception of the mind can help us with understanding the intellectualist legend in the following way. A theory of intelligent behaviour can be understood as a part of a theory of action in general. One issue in the theory of action is to say what differentiates things like bodily reflexes from bodily movements that count as actions proper. We can assume that the aim of this theory will be to say what the contribution of mental states is to this distinction. A theory of intelligent behaviour needs to give an account of a more specific kind of action, namely one that displays certain positive qualities, which can be put under the heading of intelligence. If one has the conception of mind according to which mental states are thoughts understood as modifications of mental substance, conscious episodes of thinking, then what kind of theory of intelligent behaviour would one hold? Perhaps there are a great many things one could say here, but a very general answer is to say that intelligent behaviour is action controlled by thoughts about how to do the action in questions, which is equivalent to IL2.

Viewing the intellectualist legend as a consequence of CC1-3 can help with answering the two questions of clarification regarding IL1. The first question was: why should the mental operations be *anterior*, that is, prior to the operations they are meant to control? CC3 says that minds, or rather thoughts that are modifications of mental substance, can enter into causal relations with bodies. Once we have granted the assumption that mental causation is possible, then it seems we should understand the notion of a prior mental operation *controlling* an action as a causal relation of some sort, perhaps in the sense that can be articulated with a counterfactual along the lines of *had the thought not occurred, the action would not have happened at all, or would not have had the properties that it did*. This does not mean that there is no problem of mental causation for the Cartesian conception. The point is that mental causation had better not be a problem for the Cartesian conception to be valid, and so when giving an account of the intellectualist legend in terms of the Cartesian conception, it must be treated as a legitimate assumption. If it is right that we should think of controlling as causing,

then it would follow that the thoughts need to have *causal priority*. The second question was: what does it mean to contemplate a proposition? An answer to this can be given that relies on the second element, CC2. Thoughts are conscious episodes. So *contemplating a proposition* must mean a conscious act of presenting oneself with or entertaining a regulative proposition, where these are just propositions that describe or prescribe a way of doing something. This somewhat obscure formulation can be thought in terms of avowals to oneself using a sentence which expresses one of the regulative propositions, though this is presumably not compulsory.

Viewing the more general theory, the Cartesian conception of the mind, as one of the possible motivations for the more specific theory of intelligent behaviour, the intellectualist legend, accounts for its features, and has the added benefit of making the transition from the setting up of the Cartesian view of the mind as the main target in chapter one of *CM* to the argument against the intellectualist legend in chapter two look less arbitrary than it might otherwise. There is no suggestion of an entailment from the more general to the more specific theory, and nor is there an entailment in the opposite direction. This is particularly true of CC1, since the real moving parts are CC2 and CC3. This is alarming since the dogma of the ghost in the machine is most obviously to be identified with CC1. Nor is it being proposed that seeing the link here decides once and for all whether or not the intellectualist legend is something of a strawman, only that one can tell a story linking it with Ryle's overall target in *CM*. One other proviso to keep in mind is that there may be several theories of intelligent behaviour which do not have the same source nor with all of the same features as, but which are very similar to, the intellectualist legend. This is important if only for the fact that one must not confuse Ryle's target with any of the nearby theories when evaluating Ryle's arguments.

### 1.2 *Ryle's Arguments*

In *CM*, Ryle poses two kinds of arguments against the intellectualist legend. The first kind is introduced by noting the fact that there are a great many activities which it is possible to carry out intelligently although no one has as yet formulated the rules of doing so. As an example, Ryle refers to Aristotle, who formulated the rules of correct reasoning,



yet men knew how to avoid and detect fallacies before they learned his lessons, just as men since Aristotle, and including Aristotle, ordinarily conduct their arguments without making any internal reference to his formulae. (*CM*: 31)

Ryle goes on to point out that practice precedes theory in many cases, again referring to Aristotle: “It was because Aristotle found himself and others reasoning now intelligently and now stupidly” (*CM*: 31) that he was able to formulate what he did. Although Ryle presents these claims in a single stream, there are really three different arguments. First, there is the argument that intelligent practice *can* be done in the absence of any formulation of the relevant rules; second, the argument that we *ordinarily do not* refer to rules when engaging intelligently in an activity; and third, the argument that intelligent practice must in some cases *precede* the formulation of the relevant rules. None of these arguments are quite the same, though they all concern points about the relation between theory and practice, and we are directed to think the intellectualist legend has got it backwards. Consequently, we can group all three points together as the *priority argument*.

The second kind of argument is a demonstration that the intellectualist legend generates a regress which reduces the intellectualist legend to absurdity. Ryle states this argument succinctly in two sentences:

The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle. (*CM*: 31)

This *regress argument* can be stated in a more extended fashion as follows:

(RA1) (Assumption for reductio) Intelligent activity is necessarily preceded by an anterior intellectual operation (i.e. IL2)

(RA2) The anterior intellectual operation must be carried out intelligently if the

intelligent activity they precede is to be intelligent.

(RA3) If anterior intellectual operations must be carried out intelligently, then they are themselves intelligent activities.

(RA4) (RA2, RA3, application of RA1) Therefore, all anterior mental activities must be preceded by an anterior mental activity.

(RA5) If RA4, then the assumption generates a regress.

(RA6) If the assumption generates a regress, then IL2 is false.

(RAC) Therefore, IL2 is false.

Thus Ryle takes the intellectualist legend to be refuted. The problem comes from the fact that the two categories described in IL1 are not exclusive. Since operations of the first sort (considering propositions) are also operations of the second sort (intelligent activities, and hence controlled by operations of the first sort), the two propositions together generate a regress.

In his earlier paper, Ryle mentions an argument which is somewhat like a combination of the priority and regress arguments (the priority argument itself is not mentioned), which I'll refer to as the *causal regress argument*:

If [IL1-2 are correct] the gap between [the] consideration and the practical application of the regulation has to be bridged by some go-between process... This go-between application-process has somehow to marry observance of a contemplated maxim with the enforcement of behaviour. So it has to unite in itself the allegedly incompatible properties of being kith to theory and kin to practice, else it could not be the applying of the one in the other. For, unlike theory, it must be able to influence action, and, unlike impulses, it must be amenable to regulative propositions. Consistency requires, therefore, that this schizophrenic broker must again be subdivided into one bit which contemplates but does not execute, one which executes but does not contemplate and a third which reconciles these irreconcilables. And so on for ever. (*PA*: 1-2)

This argument is problematic insofar as at least one of the assumptions that it relies on is inconsistent with the position that it is supposed to be refuting. Ryle seems to be arguing that the intellectualist legend cannot, even on its own terms, explain the link between thought and action that is the mark of intelligent behaviour. In the interpretation of the intellectualist legend in the previous section, it was suggested that a causal relation is the most obvious way to understand the link. For the regress Ryle has in mind here to work, it must be the case that thoughts are causally closed off from the actions they are supposed to control. I take it that the reason the 'go-between process' must be both kin to theory (i.e. thoughts) but kin to practice (i.e. action) is that it must be both capable of causing action, in the way a bodily impulse is capable of causing action, and also have the character of a disengaged contemplation. In order for consistency to require the eternal subdivision of this go-between process, the disengaged contemplation part of the go-between process would have to be *causally disengaged*, in the sense of having no causal influence on action. Ryle understands the distinction between theory and practice here to have a parallel in the distinction between thought and action, and this is how he characterises the theory of intelligent behaviour he wants to refute. But then there is a contradiction between the idea that intelligent behaviour is a causal consequence of thought, which has been attributed to the intellectualist legend in the interpretation recommended here, and the idea that thought can have by itself no effect on action. So the causal regress argument only works if the target it is meant to attack has incoherent commitments. This suggests a reason why Ryle dropped the causal regress argument from *CM*. From now on, I shall use 'the regress argument' to refer only to the first rather than the second.

### 1.3 *A Puzzle*

We now have a fairly good grasp on the background for Ryle's claims about knowing how. However, there is a puzzle about exactly what the link between the refutation of the intellectualist legend and those claims are supposed to be. Having concluded his refutation of the intellectualist legend, Ryle sums up what he takes himself to have established:

'Intelligent' cannot be defined in terms of 'intellectual', or 'knowing how' in terms of 'knowing *that*'; 'thinking what I am doing' does not connote 'both thinking

what to do and doing it'. When I do something intelligently, i.e. thinking what I am doing, I am doing one thing and not two. My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents. (*CM*: 32)

This short passage expresses three separate negative claims. One is about our understanding of intelligence epithets (about which more shortly). The idea is that they cannot be accounted for or in terms of the intellect, where the intellect has to do with the practice of theorising and the aim of knowing truths. Another is about the mental processes involved in intelligent behaviour, and Ryle returns to this theme throughout the chapter, in stating his aims and conclusions, for instance where he says he hopes “to have shown that the exercise of intelligence in practice cannot be analysed into a tandem operation of first considering prescriptions and then executing them.” (*CM*: 40). A third is about knowing how, and this will be the focus of this section and the next.

The proposition that knowing how cannot be defined in terms of knowing that is the main negative component of Ryle's theory of knowing how; hence I will refer to as Ryle's negative view about knowing how, or the *negative view* for short. Having made this conclusion, Ryle goes on to give a 'positive account' (*CM*: 40-50) of knowing how, the details of which will be examined below. But there are two questions which capture a puzzle about the negative view and its relation to the refutation of the intellectualist legend (which I will refer to as *the refutation* for short). Firstly, what does the refutation have to do with knowing how? And secondly, what does the refutation have to do with knowing that? These two questions are aspects of what we can call the *transition puzzle*. It is a curious feature of both *PA* and *CM* which is the more pressing because the positive account seemingly gets offered on the basis of the rejection of the idea that knowing how can be defined in terms of knowing that, which is itself seemingly supported by the refutation. The statement of the negative view implies that the refutation has something to do with both knowing how and knowing that. So saying something about both parts of the puzzle is key for understanding Ryle's position.

Is there a puzzle at all? As Stanley and Williamson (2001; henceforth *KT*) see things, the intellectualist legend is just the same as the negative view, as is made clear in the following

passage:

Ryle has two extended discussions of the relation between knowledge-how and knowledge-that [i.e. *CM*, ch. 2, and Ryle, 1945]. Both have as their main focus the rejection of what Ryle took to be the "prevailing doctrine" of the relation between knowledge-that and knowledge-how, which he took to follow from what he called "the intellectualist legend"... the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that. In addition, Ryle presents his own positive view of knowledge-how, according to which, contra the "intellectualist legend," it is not a species of knowledge-that. (op. cit.: 412)

If this is true, then there really is no puzzle at all, since the intellectualist legend and the negative view are just contradictories. This *reinterpretation strategy* has considerable appeal, since it makes the statement of the negative view plainly intelligible. The mistake Ryle makes, on Stanley and Williamson's reading, is that the negative view is false, and they provide an argument to that effect (op. cit.: 417-432), which will be examined in some detail below.

There are, however, difficulties with this as a solution to the transition puzzle. The main problem is that, although it excuses Ryle of making a mistake about the connection between the refutation and the negative view, it creates problems with the interpretation of Ryle's arguments. There are slightly different problems related to the two kinds of argument that Ryle directs against the intellectualist legend. Looking at the priority argument, it makes it very hard to see how the three considerations adduced are supposed to have any purchase. Here it is useful to remind ourselves that the anterior intellectual operations involve the consideration of a relevant regulative proposition, but there is no requirement that the proposition must be one which is known. But even if it *were* a requirement which adherents of the intellectualist legend placed on the prior intellectual operations, there would still be no clear commitment either way on the question of whether knowing how is or is not a species of knowing that. It is perfectly consistent with the thought that intelligent activity be preceded by a knowledge-involving consideration of a proposition that knowing how to do something is not a species of knowing that something is the case, since they could still then be distinct yet closely connected

mental states. As a general point, the claim that *X can be defined in terms of Y*, although vague, is clearly not the same as the claim that *X is identical to Y* on any sharpening of the former claim. And nor is it obvious how inserting a requirement that someone know the regulative propositions that guide their action converts the intellectualist legend into the claim that knowing how is a species of knowing that.

Going back to the main line of objection, the initial point is that the three considerations deal with the relation between theory and practice, not knowing how and knowing that; the claim about the general priority of practice over theory on which these arguments are based is orthogonal to any claim about the relation between two kinds of knowledge (which is not to say they are wholly unrelated). So it would seem the reinterpretation strategy would require a further reinterpretation of these arguments, which stretches its plausibility. It is worth nothing that Stanley and Williamson do not mention the first stream of argument at all, doing so perhaps on the basis of a quotation from *PA*, where Ryle says "...I rely largely on variations of *one argument*. I argue that the prevailing doctrine leads to vicious regresses..." (*PA*: 2, emphasis added; see *KT*: 412) The earlier paper does not include the first kind of argument, but this does not warrant ignoring them for the sake of interpreting his discussion in *CM*.

The problem of reinterpreting the arguments also applies to the regress argument, although to an extent that makes the solution not just implausible but clearly mistaken. In order to make the regress argument fit as an argument against the contradiction of the negative view, it must be substantially altered. Having picked this out as Ryle's target, Stanley and Williamson go on to provide an interpretation of the regress argument according to which Ryle relies on the following two premises: the first is the claim that

- (a) if one Fs, one employs knowledge how to F.

The second is the claim that

- (b) if one employs knowledge that p, one considers the proposition that p (cf. *KT*: 413).

Using ' $\Phi(F)$ ' as the general form of propositions that are the objects of the prior intellectual operations, the assumption for reduction is then given as:

(RA) knowledge how to F is knowledge that  $\Phi(F)$ ." (ibid.)

Then, letting  $C(\Phi(F))$  denote the act of considering the relevant kind of proposition, the regress argument is given as follows:

Suppose that Hannah Fs. By premise [a], Hannah employs the knowledge how to F. By RA, Hannah employs the knowledge that  $\Phi(F)$ . So, by premise [b], Hannah  $C(\Phi(F))$ s. Since  $C(\Phi(F))$  is an act, we can reapply premise [a], to obtain the conclusion that Hannah knows how to  $C(\Phi(F))$ . By RA, it then follows that Hannah employs the knowledge that  $\Phi(C(\Phi(F)))$ . By premise [b], it follows that Hannah  $C(\Phi(C(\Phi(F))))$ s. And so on. (ibid.)

Taking themselves to be dealing with an argument with this form, Stanley and Williamson's response can be broken into three parts (*KT*: 414-416): first, they claim that the two premises on which the argument relies are both false; second, they suggest that the premises can be modified in order to make them both true; premise (a) is true only of *intentional* actions, whereas premise (b) need not necessarily refer to intentional acts of contemplating propositions; and finally, they demonstrate that the modified premises mean that the regress argument they are talking about is no longer valid. Stanley and Williamson may be correct about how the two premises must be modified to be true. But it is hard to see how the resulting problem for the argument they are concerned with presents a difficulty for Ryle's regress argument, since they are plainly quite different. One problem with their interpretation is that it requires attributing to Ryle two premises in an argument which are not merely false but quite *obviously* false. This compares with premises RA2 and RA3 of the regress argument given in the previous section: RA3 seems obviously true; RA2 can be disputed, but is not clearly mistaken. The second problem is that there is no evidence for attributing either claim to Ryle; the attribution of RA2 and RA3 is clearly supported by the text, whereas premises (a)

and (b) only make sense on the reinterpretation strategy. Given the lack of any evidence for Ryle relying on these claims to generate the regress, the fact that the re-interpretation of the intellectualist legend requires this misrepresentation of his regress argument is enough to rule it out as a way of treating the transition puzzle, and an alternative is required.

#### 1.4 *Solving the Puzzle*

Rather than attempting to answer both parts of the puzzle at once, I propose instead to offer solutions to each separately. To begin with the first part, why should the intellectualist legend have anything to do with knowing how?

##### 1.4.1 Solving the First Part

The basic thought must be that knowing how and intelligent behaviour are somehow interestingly related, and since the intellectualist legend is a theory of intelligent behaviour, it raises questions about knowing how. But we need to get a clear idea of what the relation is, or rather, what it could be given a fairly unsophisticated understanding of knowing how and intelligent behaviour. From the earlier discussion, we have the idea that intelligent behaviour means something like *actions carried out intelligently*. But this hardly clarifies things, since we need some idea of what *carried out intelligently* means. We are not, at this stage at least, after an idea of what it means for behaviour to be intelligent, a theory of intelligent behaviour of which the intellectualist legend is an example. Rather, we want to know what that theory would have as its subject matter.

An initial thought in this direction, one which we can glean from Ryle's discussion, would be that an action counts as an instance of intelligent behaviour if 'intelligence-predicates' (*PA*: 5) or 'intelligence epithets' (*CM*: 26) can be applied to it. These divide into two kinds: positive terms including *clever, sensible, careful, methodical*, and their negative counterparts, *stupid, silly, careless, unmethodical*. So when we describe someone's action with one of the positive terms, we mean to say that the action was carried out intelligently, and hence is an instance of intelligent behaviour. As an example, consider two people playing chess: A manages to foresee



and exploit weaknesses in B's opening; whereas A castles early and develops her queen dangerously, B contrives to make his back-row pieces ineffective and makes poor sacrifices. A played chess intelligently, and we can say that she was clever, sensible, careful, and so on; B, on the other hand, played chess unintelligently, and the opposite terms apply.

One potential problem with this way of fixing the range of actions that count as intelligent behaviour is that there seems to be some pull towards saying that B's behaviour did display *some* intelligence, since it required some level of intelligence to happen at all. B played chess badly, but we can stipulate that he did not make any illegal moves, and perhaps was capable of grasping the fact that A's strategy was superior to his own, even if he could not say exactly how or in what way. B's chess playing is different from, say, B's sneezing; the latter is not the kind of action that *requires* intelligence, and there is a question of it *displaying* intelligence, whereas playing chess, however badly, does require and obviously displays some intelligence, if only in the sense that it is not the kind of activity in which creatures with limited mental capacities could engage.

This seems to suggest the need to distinguish two apparently rival ways of fixing what counts as intelligent behaviour:

(IB1) S's  $\Phi$ -ing counts as intelligent behaviour if exclusively positive intelligence epithet can be applied to it.

(IB2) S's  $\Phi$ -ing counts as intelligent behaviour if  $\Phi$ -ing displays intelligence.

The example of A and B and their chess game supports the idea that IB1-type intelligent behaviour is a narrower definition. Is the intellectualist legend a theory of IB1-type or IB2-type intelligent behaviour? Initially, the answer would appear to be that it is a IB1-type theory, since Ryle introduces the topic of intelligence behaviour in the guise of a concern with a certain range of "mental-conduct concepts" (CM: 26) which he then goes on to illustrate with the intelligence epithets. One might also think that definition IB2 is no definition at all, since it can be asked how we know which actions display intelligence, and so while it may be trivially correct, it is unilluminating. But while the appearance of a conflict here is genuine, and both

points in favour of definition IB1 are valid, the choice is a false one. A third definition would satisfy both these points, but also capture the idea that B's chess playing, although careless and so on, was nevertheless an instance of intelligent behaviour:

(IB2\*) S's  $\Phi$ -ing counts as intelligent behaviour if positive intelligence epithets can be applied to it, even if negative epithets can also be applied.

Since we can say that B's chess playing was intelligent, although not as intelligent as A's, it counts as intelligent behaviour on this definition. IB2\* can therefore be understood as a way of delineating the range of intelligent behaviour along the same lines as IB1, but with the definition widened to include not just 'intelligent behaviour', where 'intelligent' is a term of special praise, but also when relatively neutral but indicating the necessary contribution of some degree of mental sophistication in the occurrence of the action in question.

We should understand the intellectualist legend as a theory of what makes actions count as intelligent behaviour, and that the range of the actions in question is fixed by reference to the application of intelligence epithets. Intelligence epithets therefore play an important but somewhat limited role in getting to grips with Ryle's discussion. I raise this point because a less limited view of the role can make Ryle's discussion seem problematic in some respects, which will be discussed below. A proviso that needs to be made is that the notion of an intelligence epithet, of either the positive or negative variety, has only been clarified by example, rather than by a perspicuous definition. But this is not such a deep worry about the efficacy of the proposed definition; we can clarify what we are talking about in terms of intelligence epithets by reference to some obvious cases, rather than needing to worry about specifying what they are exactly. Although it is true that Ryle uses highly heterogeneous examples of intelligence epithets, it seems plausible to think that the basic idea is to use these terms to fix the relevant phenomena. One can haggle over which terms do in fact do this, and whether they do so in a more or less straightforward way, but the basic idea can be preserved.

With IB2\* in hand, something can be said about the relation between knowing how and intelligent behaviour. First, we need to bring in three assumptions, which should not be

obviously problematic even if they turn out to be incorrect in some detail on closer inspection. The first assumption is that, in order to understand the concept of knowing how, one has to pay attention to the way in which *knows how sentences* are used: 'knowing how to  $\Phi$ ' is the name of what is ascribed with sentences of the form 'S knows how to  $\Phi$ ' (some authors prefer the term 'knowing how to' to avoid confusion with what is ascribed with sentences of the form 'S knows how heavy/tall/far away/&c. something is'. I will assume that the difference will be taken for granted throughout this essay). The second assumption is that the only values of 'to  $\Phi$ ' which can appear in intelligible knows how sentences are descriptions of actions that require intelligence, or to which intelligence epithets can apply. Compare

- (i) B knows how to sneeze.
- (ii) B knows how to play chess.

One might think it is difficult to say what (i) could be used to communicate such that one would accept it as an apt statement, whereas the sense of (ii) is clear. Extrapolating a little, we can say that it is only intelligible to ascribe to someone a capacity with respect to an activity to which intelligence epithets can apply using knows how sentences. A worry about this thought is that (i) is not obscure, and one can think of cases where it can be used to communicate something definite. A different way of putting the worry is that sneezing *can* be an intelligent activity. One can certainly think of cases where sneezing can be carried out intelligently. Here is one: a group of thieves propose to use sneezing as a signal that a security guard is coming, but the sneeze must be genuine since otherwise the ruse would become too obvious; the lookout therefore sniffs some finely ground pepper as a security guard comes into view, and sneezes at the right moment to warn her partners in crime. She sneezed intelligently. And surely, by extension she knows how to sneeze. But sneezing was supposed to be an example of something that is not intelligent behaviour.

Does this throw the second assumption into doubt? I think not. Suppose we call action descriptions of the form 'to  $\Phi$ ' *bare infinitive descriptions*, then both (i) and (ii) contain bare infinitive descriptions. The difference between them is that, whereas 'to play chess' is a bare infinitive description of an action that always displays intelligence, 'to sneeze' is not. While it is

wrong to say that (i) lacks any sense, it is true that one needs to work a little harder to think of cases in which it can be used to communicate some information. Such cases will be ones where the bare infinitive description can be expanded to include details that bring in intelligence. So for instance, in the case just described, the lookout knows how to sneeze *as a way of warning her partners*. So the suggestion is that bare infinitival descriptions can feature in knows how sentences even if they do not describe actions to which intelligence epithets apply *in themselves*. But the point that we need to expand the action description beyond the bare infinitive in order to make sense of those that do not demonstrates that assumption two is a reasonable one to make.

The third assumption is that when we use a knows how sentence, we mean to indicate certain facts about a person with respect to the kind of action picked out by 'to  $\Phi$ ', which, from the first and second assumption, we know will be actions that require intelligence. In particular, we mean to communicate that that person is someone who, with respect to that action, has some sort of *capacity*. So for instance, in asserting that A knows how to play chess, we mean to indicate that A is able to engage in chess playing. If it turned out that A was in fact unable to play chess, not even to the poor standard set by B, then one would withdraw the assertion. We often talk about capacities, using capacity terms such as 'is able to  $\Phi$ ', 'can  $\Phi$ ', 'could  $\Phi$ ', &c., to indicate the positive likelihood to some salient degree of *success*. One must be careful with talk of capacities, since this is not the only way capacity terms can be used. They can be used to indicate the *possibility* of the specified action occurring, which can be present in even in the absence of it being likely. Capacity terms can also be used to indicate that the action is permitted, although it is less common to talk about normative capacities (perhaps it provides a way of talking about authority, as in 'she had the capacity to walk on the grass although it was usually forbidden.')

In any case, possessing a capacity in the sense relevant here means, as a first pass, that one would likely be successful in the specified action, rather than that it is possible that one carries out the action or that carrying out the action would not be wrong in some way. There may well be circumstances which are too demanding, but in reasonably compliant circumstances, if one has the capacity to  $\Phi$  one would be successful in  $\Phi$ -ing. In other words, possessing a capacity in

this sense means being *reliably* successful. This as well as the possibility sense of a capacity can come apart. It may be that, at some particular time, in some particular set of circumstances, it is simply impossible for one to carry out the action in question, although one remains reliably successful. And it may be that, at some particular time, one is in some particular set of circumstances that does not prevent one from carrying out the action, but it is not the case that one is reliably successful.

One may think, given these three assumptions, one can define knowing how as reliable success in carrying out intelligent actions. Defining the state of knowing how in this way is open to obvious counter-examples, however. Suppose Irina the ice skater is reliably successful in pulling off a triple salchow, which is a complicated ice skating move. On the proposed definition, we should say that Irina knows how to do a triple salchow. But conceivably the fact that Irina is reliably successful was due to some neural abnormality such that, whenever she intends to do a triple salchow, she ends up doing it correctly, although she would not were her neurology more conventional (this example, with a slight modification, comes from Bengson, Moffett and Wright (2009); Bengson and Moffett (2007) also employ it, in a way to be discussed below). Does this mean that the third assumption needs to be rejected? If so, then capacities may have nothing to do with knowing how, but are anyway not sufficient.

Far from showing that knowing how has nothing to do with capacities, the counter-example shows that what it is to possess a capacity in the relevant sense needs to be glossed more precisely. The idea of reliable success only brings out part of what we mean when attributing a capacity to someone. Often when we attribute a capacity to an individual, we mean to attribute the success *to her*, with the assumption that the reason she is successful can be found in facts about things for which she can claim (at least some, or perhaps sufficient) responsibility. Having a capacity in this sense means that one is creditable for the success, and not merely the locus of the success - the person to whom successful action happens, as we might say. Reliable success in carrying out an activity is perhaps sufficient for one kind of capacity. We might call these *success* capacities. But we have already seen that capacities can be analysed in at least one different way, as the presence of a possibility of an action being carried out. The counter-example of the neurally abnormal ice skater either demonstrates that

knowing how cannot be defined in terms of success capacities, or suggests that there is no room for success capacities. But either way, if it is right that we also attribute capacities not just to indicate reliable success, but also to indicate that the reliable success is creditable to the individual to whom the capacity is being attributed, then there is a different kind of capacity, namely, reliable *and creditable* success capacities.

It is difficult to define what, at the most basic level, it is for success to be creditable. I do not think this is a problem for present purposes. Notions like credit and cognate notions like responsibility are notoriously resistant to straightforward analysis. The notion of creditability can be articulated in a few ways. One way of doing this is to think in terms of luck, or rather the absence of luck. Creditable success necessarily non-lucky success. In a very clear discussion of these matters, Katherine Hawley (2003) uses this to draw some links between knowing how and externalist analyses of propositional knowledge. However, it is not obvious that the notion of luck is more basic than that of either credit or responsibility, and the likelihood of analysing the latter in terms of the former is not strong, although, as Hawley's discussion indicates, interesting suggestions and arguments can be made by drawing out the links between them. But the point that matters here is that the notion of credit, in the sense of crediting some state of affairs to an individual, is a concept that does do genuine work in our thinking about actions, the agents that carry them out, and the relation between the two. The difference between Irina and a normal ice-skating counterpart who is not only successful but creditably so may be difficult to locate at a fundamental level, but that does not mean there is no difference between them, and nor does it mean that we do not find it relatively easy to track such differences. So it is surely very hard to deny that the notion of credit is one that does any work. One might have (or think one has) strong reasons to revise this state of affairs, but in that case one would be revising quite a lot else besides, including some of the basic presuppositions of the thought that there are individuals that know how to do things.

The third assumption, then, is that knows how sentences are used to indicate a capacity in the sense of reliable and creditable success. With these three assumptions in place, we can give a definition of the term 'knowing how'. Like the definition of intelligent behaviour, the idea is that this defines what a theory of knowing how would have as its subject matter. Taking

'knowing how' as the state attributed by knows how sentences used in this way, we can say

(Capacity Definition) Knowing how is the state of being able, in the sense of reliable and creditable success, to carry out the intelligent activity specified by the relevant knows how sentence.

With knowing how so defined, it can be seen how the refutation of the intellectualist legend as a theory of intelligent behaviour prompts the negative claim about knowing how. There is, however, still a difficulty. Abilities are not actions. The two belong to quite different categories. Actions are events, whereas abilities are standing states. That this is so is enough to create difficulties in getting a *logical* transition from the intellectualist legend, which is a theory of actions of a certain kind, to knowing how, which is not an action of any kind. The connection being proposed is *thematic*. Both are topics in the general area of intelligent activity, and this may be as close as one can get in tying the two together.

#### 1.4.2 The Second Part

To get a solution to the second question, it would help to see quite why it is so puzzling that Ryle goes from refuting the intellectualist legend to mentioning knowing that. 'Knowing that' is a name given to what, in many other contexts, is referred to as propositional knowledge. The claims IL1-2 say nothing about the idea of propositional knowledge. They do, however, mention something that bears some similarity to propositional knowledge. According to IL2, intelligent behaviour consists in actions which are controlled by intellectual operations. An intellectual operation is an act of contemplating a proposition, what we have had occasion to think of as an occurrent conscious mental state with propositional content. Propositional knowledge can be described in *similar* terms, viz. as a mental state with propositional content, but not identical terms. The two key differences are these. One is that propositional knowledge is not usually thought of as an *occurrent* or *conscious* mental state. That it is not conscious means that one does not need to be consciously entertaining thoughts in order to be in a state of knowing a proposition. That it is not occurrent means that it is a standing condition, rather than a state that depends on a process taking place. The second difference is that propositional

mental states need not have the epistemic status of knowledge. One can think that the cat is on the mat despite not knowing that the cat is on the mat. But one obviously cannot know that the cat is on the mat despite not knowing that the cat is on the mat. So there is a clear need to distinguish propositional knowledge from occurrent and/or conscious propositional mental states, and to distinguish it from propositional mental states in general.

The point that the intellectualist legend does not require the theoretical operations to consist of relations to propositions that are known suggests that there is no clear *philosophical* answer to the second question. That is, there is no philosophical claim which would explain why propositional knowledge appears in Ryle's statement of negative view. However, the fact that propositional knowledge is a kind of propositional mental state, and not only that, but could perhaps be considered the paradigm of such states that have truth as their aim (as it is sometimes put), does suggest a way of making sense of it. The idea would be that, since propositional knowledge is a paradigm propositional mental state, it is used to stand for the more general category. From a stylistic perspective, the idea of contrasting knowing how with knowing that does have a pleasing symmetry. But from a philosophical perspective, it is in danger of being misleading. As stated, it appears as though what is at issue with the intellectualist legend is the relation between two kinds of knowledge. This is often how it has been interpreted, as will be seen below. The interpretation being recommended here suggests that, in fact, one of those kinds of knowledge, knowledge that, is really standing in for propositional mental states in general and the other, knowing how, is involved primarily because of its relation to intelligent behaviour. Ryle's statement of the negative view, the claim that knowing how cannot be defined in terms of knowing that, should be treated with care; looking at the relationship between its elements and the elements of the intellectualist legend shows it to be something slightly different from how it appears.

So even if the intellectualist legend does not require the regulative propositions to be known by the agent, it does require that the agent be in some sort of propositional mental state with respect to those propositions. We have also seen that 'knowing how' can be used for the conditions necessary and sufficient for a capacity to engage in an intelligent activity picked out by the relevant knows how sentence. So if knowing how stands for these conditions, and if



they cannot be defined in terms of propositional mental states, then this suggests the following interpretation of Ryle's negative view as the most plausible:

(RNV) Being reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity does not constitutively require being in any propositional mental state.

The term 'constitutively' is meant to mark the point that the debate is over whether the psychological state of knowing how requires propositional mental states. It might be necessary for knowing how in the sense that if one knows how to do something then necessarily  $2+2=4$ . But mathematical truths are not constitutive conditions on (the vast majority) of psychological states. However, a worry that could be raised about this interpretation relates to the second part of the puzzle about the distinctness thesis. Ryle might be thought rather to be claiming:

(RNV\*) Being reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity does not constitutively require being in any *conscious* propositional mental state.

A conscious propositional mental state, let's say, is one where the person having it is aware of that fact. RNV implies RNV\*, but not vice versa, and so the former is a stronger and more general claim. But which is the better interpretation of Ryle? One might think that, since Ryle states the distinctness thesis as a gloss on his refutation of the intellectualist legend, and since the intellectualist legend is a theory of intelligent behaviour that appeals to a certain kind of *conscious* propositional mental state, then we should understand the distinctness thesis as RNV\*.

Adopting RNV\* arguably misses the fact that it is not the consciousness of the acts of considering the regulative propositions that is important to Ryle's argument. What gets the regress started is that the intellectualist legend posits a certain kind of causal antecedent to instances of intelligent behaviour which are themselves instances of intelligent behaviour. These antecedents are, as it happens, conscious propositional mental states. But, while it could be true or it could be false that all propositional mental states which are instances of intelligent

behaviour are conscious, this is not their most important feature. Since it would appear that Ryle thinks his negative view follows from the refutation of the intellectual legend, and since the consciousness of the propositional mental states at issue in the intellectualist legend is not of primary importance for the refutation, then this suggests that to choose RNV\* over RNV would be to miss this point. A second point in favour of RNV is that adopting RNV\* as the correct interpretation means that Ryle's use of 'knowing that' is doubly misleading, as it would need to stand for a particular kind of propositional mental state, rather than propositional mental states in general. Not only that, but the idea that propositional knowledge, knowing that, should stand in for conscious mental states is hard to justify. And yet this seemed to be a good way of making sense of the statement of the negative view. Propositional knowledge is not something that requires constant awareness of it; one can know, for instance, that the cat is on the mat even when one is asleep. On this showing, the unadorned RNV would be the better interpretation.

This raises a different worry, however, which is that RNV does not receive any warrant from the refutation of the intellectualist legend. RNV says that propositional mental states do not play a necessary role in the possession of a capacity for intelligent behaviour. The intellectualist legend holds propositional mental states to be necessary for a capacity for intelligent behaviour, not as such, but in a particular capacity, as causal antecedents of manifestations of the capacity. These causal antecedents are supposed to be *occurrent* propositional mental states. This suggests that the correct interpretation of the negative view is rather

(RNV\*\*) Being reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity does not require being in any *occurrent* propositional mental state.

Again, RNV\*\* is a more specific version of RNV, and hence a somewhat weaker claim. One problem with this, however, is that the intellectualist legend had better not be understood as claiming that occurrent propositional mental states are necessary for reliable and creditable success. If this was so, then the claim would be that one had a capacity to engage in an intelligent activity only so long as one of the anterior intellectual operations was taking place. Abilities would go in and out of one's possession depending on what one was thinking about.

Aside from being implausible by itself, there is no obvious reason why this should be a consequence of the intellectualist legend. RNV\*\* also shares with RNV\* the problem that it makes Ryle's negative view once again obscure. The suggestion was that knowing that, or propositional knowledge, stands in as a kind of paradigm for a more general kind of mental state. But one of the markers of propositional knowledge is that it is unlike an act of considering a proposition in that it is not an occurrent mental state. So far as this point is concerned, being conscious and being occurrent are properties of propositional mental states which are irrelevant for the interpretation of the negative view. In a version of this sort of erroneous interpretation, Sax (2010:508) says that what Ryle "sometimes called 'knowledge-that'" was "intelligent deliberation". We have already had occasion to remark on the distance between knowledge and acts, and this goes for propositional knowledge and intelligent deliberation just as well. It seems highly implausible to think that Ryle was guilty of making the mistake (a category mistake?) of equating the two.

RNV\* and RNV\*\* are both ways of specifying the kind of propositional mental states that, on Ryle's negative view, are not among the necessary and sufficient conditions for all capacities for intelligent activity. The specifications are suggested by the nature of the propositional mental states that figure in the intellectualist legend. The intellectualist legend is, in this way, itself a specification of the *general* proposition which Ryle's negative view, in the guise of RNV, denies. The main problem with the specifications in RNV\* and RNV\*\* is that they make the mention of propositional knowledge, knowing that, in the negative view mysterious or misleading. But if RNV is the correct interpretation, this means that we must conclude Ryle has made a mistake, since he presents it as directly following from the refutation of the intellectualist legend. There is, however, again a logical gap here. In order to have a valid argument in support of RNV, one would need a bridging assumption, along the lines of:

(Bridging Assumption) Being reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity requires being in a propositional mental state only if acts of considering propositions are among the necessary antecedents of instances of intelligent behaviour.

This assumption would make the truth of the general proposition depend on the truth of the specific proposition. Whether or not it or some variant is plausible, it should not distract from the fact that Ryle does not offer any bridging assumption, let alone an argument for such a proposal, and instead presents RNV as a direct consequence of, or as a gloss on, the refutation. The upshot of this is that if Ryle's negative view is given its most plausible interpretation, one must conclude that Ryle has not presented an argument or even any motivation for it. The transition puzzle, as a puzzle about how to interpret the claims, is solved only due to there being a thematic link. The idea is that both the intellectualist legend and the negative view are claims about the relation between propositional mental states and intelligent activity. But this link can only take us so far. Using it to try to establish a logical link generates incoherence in the interpretation of either or both. So we should conclude that Ryle has at this stage failed to motivate RNV.

### 1.5 *The Positive Account*

Up to now only the negative part of the Rylean theory has been considered. An interesting feature of the section of chapter two of *CM* entitled 'The Positive Account of Knowing How' is that the problem of providing this account is not initially set up in terms of knowing how at all, but rather in terms of intelligent behaviour:

But if to perform intelligently is to do one thing and not two things, and if to perform intelligently is to apply criteria in the conduct of the performance itself, it remains to show how this factor does characterise those operations which we recognise as skilful, prudent, tasteful or logical. (*CM*: 40)

With the earlier clarification regarding the link between knowing how and intelligent behaviour, we can make sense of this. According to the capacity definition of knowing how, it is a capacity for intelligent behaviour, and the positive account of knowing how is an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for such a capacity. The explanatory problem comes from the need to balance two ideas when giving such an account. The first has already been encountered; the thought is that intelligent behaviour does not involve two processes, one of

thinking, and one of practical execution, where the thinking process is prior to and controls the practical execution. The second idea, that intelligent behaviour involves the application of criteria, has not been explicitly argued for up to this point, but it can be viewed as a kind of concession to the intellectualist legend, which holds that performing intelligently is to apply criteria through the prior process of thinking about it. This way of accounting for how criteria or rules are to be applied is in conflict with the first idea. Ryle seems to want to admit that there is *something* right about the construal of an instance of intelligent behaviour as a performance that involves applying rules. So the explanatory problem is to account for this while not making the same mistakes as the intellectualist legend.

When discussing the motivations for the intellectualist legend, Ryle concedes that “there may be no visible or audible difference between [e.g.] a tactful or witty act and a tactless or humourless one,” but dismisses the idea that “the difference is *constituted by* the performance or non-performance of some extra secret acts.” (CM: 33; emphasis added) Ryle proposes that the factor which merits the evaluation of an action as intelligent *is* to be explained by an invisible or inaudible feature of the action, but identifies this feature as “a disposition, or complex of dispositions.” (ibid.) The positive account is based on the idea that the necessary and sufficient condition for a capacity for intelligent behaviour can be understood as a kind of acquired disposition, or what Ryle calls ‘second nature’ (cf. CM: 41). In filling out this suggestion, Ryle distinguishes two sorts of second nature, *intelligent capacities* on the one hand, and *habits* on the other:

It is of the essence of merely habitual practices that one performance is a replica of its predecessors. It is of the essence of intelligent practices that one performance is modified by its predecessors. (CM: 42)

Habits, having relatively uniform manifestations, are what Ryle calls *single-track* dispositions. These generally give the form of dispositions by which that concept is introduced, because they are the simplest kind, and “it is initially helpful to fasten on the simplest models, such as the brittleness of glass or the smoking habit of a man.” (CM: 43) The brittleness of the glass is a dispositional property of the glass which can be glossed as the property of being disposed to

shatter when dropped, and the habit of smoking is a dispositional fact about someone which can be glossed as the property of being disposed to smoke at certain times of the day or in certain situations. These are dispositional properties whose manifestation (shattering, smoking) are relatively uniform. Hence one performance of an habitual practice is 'a replica of its predecessors' because habits are single-track dispositions. Intelligent capacities on the other hand are *multi-track* dispositions. Unlike single track dispositions, multi-track dispositions have "actualisations which take a wide and perhaps unlimited variety of shapes." (ibid.) These are dispositions whose exercises are "indefinitely heterogeneous." (CM: 44) Whereas single-track dispositions are manifested in occurrences which are all highly similar, multi-track dispositions may be manifest in ways which are highly dissimilar.

There are a couple of questions about the nature of these multi-track dispositions the answers to which can help with getting to grips with the details of the positive account, according to which knowing how has something to do with intellectual capacities, which consist in acquired multi-track dispositions. The two questions are, firstly, what accounts for the heterogeneity of the dispositions' manifestations? and secondly, if the manifestations of these dispositions are, as Ryle seems to suggest, highly heterogeneous, then what accounts for these manifestations being manifestations of one and the same disposition? The answer to the first question can be seen by bringing into the account one half of the explanatory problem, which was to make room for the idea that applying criteria to one's action is part of what makes intelligent behaviour intelligent. Something along these lines can be gleaned from Ryle's discussion of the intelligent reasoner:

Underlying all the other features of the operations executed by the intelligent reasoner there is the cardinal feature that he reasons logically, that is, that he avoids fallacies and produces valid proofs and inferences, pertinent to the case he is making. *He observes the rules of logic, as well as those of style, forensic strategy, professional etiquette and the rest.* But he probably observes the rules of logic without thinking about them. (CM: 47; emphasis added)

Taking this example, we might say the following: suppose the intelligent reasoner is engaged in

proving the proposition that all Xs are Ys. She has a choice between two ways of attempting this; one is a fallacious inference form (affirming the consequent, say), while the other is a valid form. The intelligent reasoner will reason in accordance with the rules of logic, and so will carry out the proof using the valid inference. Now suppose that, on two different occasions, our intelligent logician is called upon to prove that all Xs are Ys. On one occasion - at a conference, say - the rules of professional conduct demand that she does so concisely and using the proper technical terminology. On a separate occasion - on a relaxed evening with an audience of non-logicians - the rules of style and friendly relations demand that curt brevity and jargon would be out of place. On both occasions, she proves that all Xs are Ys, but she will carry out this performance in two quite different ways. Not only that, but carrying out the proof in the manner demanded on the relaxed evening would be unintelligent when called upon to do so at the conference, and vice versa.

Abstracting from this example, suppose that our subject S is called upon to  $\Phi$ , and that  $\Phi$ -ing is a *determinable* action, in the sense that one can  $\Phi$  either by  $\Gamma$ -ing or  $\Delta$ -ing (and perhaps so on for indefinite different determinations). S is someone who has an intelligent capacity for  $\Phi$ -ing, and so applies rules or criteria to her performances of that action. Whether or not she  $\Phi$ s by  $\Gamma$ -ing or  $\Delta$ -ing depends on what these rules demand. And let us suppose that on a particular occasion, the rules dictate that S  $\Phi$ s by  $\Gamma$ -ing, whereas she would have done it by  $\Delta$ -ing had the occasion been different. In both cases, the  $\Phi$ -ing was a manifestation of an intelligent capacity; but the manifestations of it were different, and so the disposition qualifies as multi-track. What explains the multi-track nature of intelligent capacities, then, is that they involve the application of rules, and applying rules will result in different manifestations on different occasions. The idea, then, is that someone possesses an intelligent capacity if certain counterfactual statements are true of them, and the truth of these counterfactuals is due to the fact that they have learned the relevant rules of behaviour.

But what about the second question? One might worry that there is nothing to split the difference between saying that on the two occasions S displayed, not one, but two dispositions, one related to  $\Gamma$ -ing, and another to  $\Delta$ -ing. In which case, it would seem difficult to talk about intelligent capacities for carrying out determinable kinds of behaviour at all. Intelligent

capacities would relate only to determinate actions, and so the account of how regulative propositions play a role in intelligent behaviour would be problematic. To get around this, one would need a non-ad hoc reason to group certain kinds of determinate kinds of actions under the umbrella of being manifestations of a capacity to carry out a determinable kind of action intelligently. Ryle offers a clue about how to solve this problem in the section where he discusses the motives of the intellectualist legend. The example is a clown who trips and tumbles as a manifestation of intelligence in contrast to someone who trips and tumbles out of clumsiness:

The clown's trippings and tumblings are the workings of his mind, for they are his jokes; but the visibly similar trippings and tumblings of a clumsy man are not the workings of that man's mind. *For he does not trip on purpose.* (CM: 34; emphasis added)

This helps us with the second question, since we can say that what allows us to say that the different manifestations involving actions which are determinations of a determinable action is that the agent intends to carry out the determinable action, and brings off this intention by doing one of the determinate actions. This also helps understand why the dispositions should be multi- rather than single-track. When our intelligent logician is called on to prove that all Xs are Ys, she does so intentionally. There are better and worse ways of doing this according to the situation, and the rules that she has learned set constraints or make recommendations regarding what these are. This suggests that the definition of an intelligent capacity should read as follows:

(Intelligent Capacity) S has an intelligent capacity for  $\Phi$ -ing if and only if S is disposed to act in accordance with learned rules in attempts to bring off an intention to  $\Phi$ .

One point of clarification needed here is that the rules mentioned in the definition of an intelligent capacity will sometimes be relevant because they dictate how one's attempt to  $\Phi$  can be successful; but this is not the only way they can be relevant, since sometimes there may be multiple ways to successfully bring off the intention, but that one way of doing so will be better



than others. So one could intend to  $\Phi$ , and do this in a way that was appropriate to the situation and hence according to the relevant rules, even though one was indifferent in terms of one's intentions as to whether or not one did it appropriately or not. So one need not intend to  $\Phi$  *appropriately* in order for the rules governing how to  $\Phi$  appropriately in the situation to be relevant. A second point of clarification is that the definition does not entail that one can only manifest an intelligent capacity in intentional action in the sense of action with a *prior* intention.

A question arises about the full generality of this account. Is it the case that, for all intelligent activities, one is creditably successful only if one has learned the rules? There is no reason to think so. What is right is that for some activities, and for some individuals, their being creditable with being reliably successful (and it not being the case that their reliable success is merely something that happens to them), a process of learning, perhaps by self-conscious training or gradual acquisition, is what explains this fact. But if the target is to give an account of the conditions on an agent being creditably successful, then the *learning* of rules is too strong. What does seem right is that the disposition to act in accordance with the rules must be *acquired*. And it also seems right that the disposition must be acquired in the right way. But that this acquisition must amount to a process of learning is not clear. Learning is one in which the acquisition of the disposition may be such that it is acquired in the right way, but it need not be the only way. So for the time being 'learning' must stand in for a specification of 'acquired in the right way', as an exemplar.

So much for the notion of an intelligent capacity. According to Ryle's positive account, to know how to  $\Phi$  consists in the possession of one of these capacities: "[k]nowing *how* [...] is a disposition, but not a single-track disposition like a reflex or a habit." (CM: 46). Given that knowing how is being understood as a capacity to engage in the relevant intelligent activity, Ryle's positive account can be given as:

(RPV) S is reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity  $\Phi$ -ing if and only if S is disposed to act in accordance with properly acquired rules in attempts to bring off an intention to  $\Phi$ .

RPV says that knowing how consists in the possession of an intelligent capacity, as defined above. So according to the Rylean theory of knowing how, the conjunction of RNV and RPV, if one knows how to  $\Phi$ , one need not be in any propositional mental state, but one must be disposed to act in a certain way, as specified by rules one has acquired in the right.

RPV and the capacity definition which, according to the interpretation being recommended here, the Rylean theory employs are obviously very closely related. But it is important to see that they are distinct. According to Snowdon (2004), the positive account plays a role in the transition from the refutation of the intellectualist legend to the negative view is explained by a claim that Ryle makes, an assumption that he makes, and the nature of the explanatory project undertaken by the intellectualist legend. The claim Ryle makes is that “the so-called ‘intelligence epithets’ stand for abilities or capacities;” (op. cit.: 17) the assumption “is that knowing-how ascriptions ascribe capacities and abilities.” (ibid.) This is an assumption that earlier was outlined under the capacity definition. From this, it seems to follow that “what is ascribed by an intelligence epithet can also be ascribed by a knowing-how claim.” (ibid.) If this is right, then “the theory of intelligence epithets can be expressed in terms of ‘know how’ ascriptions.” (ibid.) This result would explain the transition from the refutation of the intellectualist legend to the claims about knowing how, since the intellectualist legend “is a theory about what Ryle calls ‘intelligence epithets’, or the properties they ascribe.” (op. cit.: 24) The problem is that

without that second assumption about knowing how [...] there is no reason to bring knowing how into the discussion at all, the primary focus of which is getting straight about intelligence epithets and not about knowledge ascriptions. So Ryle's views about knowing how do not contribute at all to the dissolution of the intellectualist legend; instead, they merely lead him to talk about knowing how, to bring it in. (ibid.)

The thought is that the assumption about knowing how is all that links the refutation with the claims about knowing how. This is problematic because, as Snowdon sees it, the assumption

about knowing how is equivalent to what he terms *the capacities thesis*, or CT, which is the claim that knowing how ascriptions ascribe abilities. This, on Snowdon's interpretation, is the content of Ryle's positive account. So one only gets the connection between the intellectualist legend and knowing how if one has already assumed the positive account.

This interpretation of the link between the refutation and the claims about knowing how obviously runs counter to what was proposed above. The problem on Snowdon's interpretation disappears if the difference between the *definition* of knowing how with which Ryle is operating and the *positive account* of knowing how he gives is kept in view. The capacity definition says knowing how is reliable and creditable success with respect to an intelligent activity. It does not say that it is to be disposed to act in accordance with learned rules in attempts to bring off intentions. An intelligent capacity is what makes one reliably successful. Being disposed to change one's behaviour to fit the circumstances in accordance to learned rules in order to bring off intentions is what explains the fact that, unless it is too demanding or simply impossible to do so, one is successful. Putting this in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, we can say that the capacity definition says what a theory of knowing how should give necessary and sufficient conditions for, namely the state of being reliably and creditably successful in activities requiring intelligence. RPV does this by identifying a certain dispositional state (and in what follows I shall sometimes refer to it in this more general manner).

Ryle is not totally explicit in why one should accept RPV as the correct positive account of knowing how, in the guise of reliable success in bringing off intentions to carry out intelligent actions. Ryle provides (*CM*: 40-44) an introduction of the idea of an intelligent capacity, and the application of this idea to give the positive account of knowing how. But there is little said in favour of this application. It is possible that it is simply meant to be compelling on its own terms; there is evidence to think this is true, given that Ryle's view is widely accepted even in the absence of an argument for it. However, we might want to look for a slightly more sophisticated motivation. Taking *being reliably and creditably successful in* as an abbreviation for *bring reliable and creditably successful in bringing off intentions to carry out some intelligent action*, an intelligent capacity is meant to be necessary and sufficient for bring reliably

successful. This can be separated out into two propositions

(RPV1) If S is reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity  $\Phi$ , then S is disposed to act in accordance with rules in attempt to bring off an intention to  $\Phi$ .

(RPV2) If S is disposed to act in accordance with learned rules in an intention to  $\Phi$ , then S is reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity.

The conjunction of these two propositions implies RPV. RPV2 seems uncontroversial. The rules governing an action specify how it is that one should act in order to successfully carry out that action. So if one is disposed to act in accordance with those rules, one will be reliably successful, and that success can be attributed to one because one has learned the rules. This also works in the opposite direction, in favour of RPV1. If one is reliably successful, then one cannot do this without acting in accordance with the rules; and one cannot be credited with the success without having learned the rules. RPV is therefore motivated by reflecting on the function of rules in determining how successful actions are carried out, and the role of learning those rules in that success being credited to the individual.

At the conclusion of the previous section, we saw that Ryle fails to provide an argument or a motivation for RNV. Interestingly, one can see how RPV can be used to motivate RNV. If RPV is true, then possessing an intelligent capacity, a disposition to act in accordance with rules, is sufficient for reliable success. RNV follows from this, since propositional mental states are not necessary for that disposition. The positive account does not exclude propositional mental states from being necessary for explaining reliable success in particular cases, but it does exclude propositional mental states from playing any necessary role in explaining reliable success as such. One could act in accordance with the rules without having any beliefs or other thoughts about what those rules are, or any beliefs or thoughts about anything else. Although it would be inaccurate to attribute this line of thought to Ryle, it does mean that the theory as a whole can be substantiated using the resources that Ryle had at his disposal.

1.6 *What the Rylean Theory Is Not*

I have already stressed that the capacity definition is not the same as the positive view. The positive view (given as RPV) is a positive claim about the necessary and sufficient conditions for reliable and creditable success, while the negative view (interpreted as RNV) is a negative claim about the necessary conditions for the same. Though RPV and RNV do not *by themselves* imply anything about knowing how, the addition of the capacity definition means that they do, and so qualifies them to be part of a theory of knowing how. So the capacity definition should be considered part of the overall Rylean theory of knowing how. However, as far as the argument in *PA* and chapter two of *CM* is concerned, whether or not the capacity definition of knowing how is accurate or not is not the main issue. Ryle does not argue for it, and so Snowdon is right to say that Ryle assumes *something*, but importantly it is the capacity definition, and not the positive view itself, which is assumed.

The formulation of the capacity definition given above has been adequate up to now. But if it is to be included along with RNV and RPV, an ambiguity needs to be resolved. There are two different ways of establishing RNV and RPV as claims about knowing how by appealing to the capacity definition according to how the capacity definition is construed. The capacity definition is effectively ambiguous between either of two claims about how to analyse knows how sentences. On the *strong* analysis, reliable success is necessary and sufficient for knowing how. On the *weak* analysis, reliable success is merely sufficient for knowing how:

(Weak Analysis) S knows how to  $\Phi$  if S is reliably and creditably successful with respect to  $\Phi$ -ing.

(Strong Analysis) S knows how to  $\Phi$  if and only if S is reliably and creditably successful with respecting to  $\Phi$ -ing.

The capacity definition was meant to capture a way in which knows how sentences are used. Whereas the weak analysis leaves open the possibility that knows how sentences may be used in different ways, the strong analysis implies that they may only used in this way. Both weak

and strong analyses are sufficient for the purpose of making RNV and RPV imply claims about knowing how. Since the capacity definition can be construed according to the weak analysis, Ryle is not committed to the strong analysis. From an interpretative point of view, all things being equal (and I assume all things are), it is better to attribute the weaker interpretation. Whatever else one thinks about how to approach the question of whether Ryle was committed to the strong or weak analysis, and whatever textual evidence might be adduced, this point is, I think, decisive in favour of the attribution of the weak analysis. So with that, a complete account of the Rylean theory can be given: RNV, RPV and the weak analysis.

A range of objections have been raised in response to Ryle's original discussion. Many of these, although directed at the Rylean theory, are more properly understood as objections to something somewhat different. This is what I will refer to as the *neo-Rylean* theory. The second part of this essay will discuss what I take to be the most important of these objections and test their efficacy with respect to the Rylean theory proper. At this stage, however, I want to contrast the Rylean theory with the neo-Rylean theory, with the aim of bringing out some important points about the former which will be relevant in that discussion. We have already come across the two main elements of the neo-Rylean theory. One is the idea that knowing how ascriptions always ascribe abilities. This was Snowdon's CT, mentioned in the previous section. The other is the idea that there is distinction between knowing how and knowing that. This was Stanley and Williamson's understanding of Ryle's negative view; Snowdon terms this *the distinctness thesis*, or DT.

Attribution of variations of CT and DT to Ryle, in addition to Snowdon, are common in the literature on knowing how, both by those sympathetic and hostile to what they take to be Ryle's position. Attributions of these views to Ryle can also be made implicit by an endorsement or an attack on arguments against these views. Here are some further examples of explicit attribution of DT:

“Ryle believed that knowledge-that and knowledge-how were *different types of knowledge*, such that if one were to confuse or conflate them she would be making a category mistake.” (Adams, 2009: 2; emphasis added)

“Gilbert Ryle... famously argued that there was a *fundamental distinction* between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.” (Cath, 2009: 137; emphasis added)

“In short, we can ascribe two main theses to Ryle’s account, namely a negative one according to which *knowledge-how cannot be reduced to or equated with knowledge-that*, and a positive one according to which *knowledge-how in fact consists in certain abilities or capacities to perform a task successfully*” (Jung & Newen, 2010: 114; emphasis added)

The last quotation also contains an attribution of CT. Here are some further examples:

“For Ryle, knowing how is ability.” (Kumar, 2011: 137)

“...an ascription of the form “ $x$  knows how to  $F$ ” merely ascribes to  $x$  the ability to  $F$ .” (Stanley and Williamson, op. cit.: 416)

“Ryle (1948, p. 33) [held] that:  $\forall s \forall \phi (s \text{ knows how to } \phi \text{ just in case she has the actual ability to } \phi)$ .” (Williams, 2008: 109)

“Ryle *equates* knowing-how with ‘acquired dispositions’ and holds, therefore, that they become manifest in the execution of certain abilities.” (Jung & Newen, op. cit.: 114; emphasis added.)

The neo-Rylean theory consists of Snowdon's DT and CT. The conflation of these claims with the Rylean theory is mistaken. First, the Rylean theory does not imply DT. Neither the individual components RNV, RPV or the weak analysis, nor any conjunction of those components, imply that there is a distinction, fundamental or otherwise, between knowing how or knowing that. The closest Ryle comes to this idea is his statement that knowing how cannot be *defined* in terms of knowing that, which we have seen is best understood not as a claim about knowing that at all, but as a claim about the role of propositional mental states in

the analysis of a certain kind of ability. Moreover, Ryle makes statements that explicitly contradict DT, as in *PA*, where he says

I want to turn the tables and to prove that knowledge-how cannot be defined in terms of knowledge-that and further, that knowledge-how is a concept logically prior to the concept of knowledge-that. (*PA*:4-5)

Since the claim that knowing how cannot be defined in terms of knowing that is compatible with the reversed logical priority, it cannot be the case that it implies DT. So not only is there no positive evidence in favour of attributing that claim to him, there is positive evidence against it (this point is often missed; Fantl (2008: 452) is a happy exception). It is also peculiar to think that, if Ryle is committed to the idea that knowing how can be thought of in dispositional terms, which is implied by the weak analysis plus RPV, that he should be *especially* concerned to show that it cannot be thought of in terms of propositional knowledge. It is hardly the case that, if a mental state is not to be thought of as a kind of disposition, then it ought to be thought of as a kind of a kind of special epistemological standing towards a proposition! Moreover, 'knowing how' appears to be quite dispensable as a term in specifying the substance of what Ryle was talking about. So there is really no need to talk about knowledge at all. To imply, or to state outright, that Ryle was concerned with kinds of knowledge and their logical relationships is therefore misleading.

DT, is in any case, not a precise claim. The idea that two mental state types are distinct is open to a number of different interpretations. On one understanding, it might mean that being in one state does not *imply* being in the other. On a different understanding, it might mean that being in one state does not *constitute* being in the other, where this could be true even if the implication did hold. On yet another understanding, it might mean that our concepts of those states do not *coincide*, where this could be true even if, as a matter of psychological fact, one state did partially constitute the other, or if the implication did hold for some other reason. In the specific case of knowing how and knowing that, it might also mean that two different *sentence forms* are used to attribute mental states, which would be compatible with all three of the previous understandings. The point it is not always clear what content a version of DT



actually has. At this last level, it will cease to bear any resemblance to an interesting philosophical thesis and start to look like an obvious and trivial truth. Where what Ryle actually wrote is concerned, it is clear that no non-trivial version of DT can be attributed to Ryle.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting the relation between it and the Rylean theory. If DT is *true*, if knowing how is distinct from knowing that in some way, then this lends some weight to the negative part of the Rylean theory, RNV, but of course does not prove it. If it is *false*, then this implies that the RNV is false, and this further implies that the positive part of the theory, RPV, is false also. So arguments against DT would, *en passant*, show that the Rylean theory is mistaken. To some extent, discussing DT with respect to Ryle is harmless and even useful; it will be the focus of much of the discussion in the second half of this essay. But it cannot be attributed to him, and mostly it is a distraction from what is actually at issue, which is whether RNV is true.

The objection to the attribution of CT is slightly different. DT is difficult to interpret, and anyway is clearly a misinterpretation of Ryle on all but the most trivial of understandings, given that it is incompatible with explicit statements he makes. Although CT is, I think, relatively clear, something similar holds true of the statements which I have grouped together as versions of CT. The reason they are unclear is one that should by now be familiar; the content of the claim depends heavily on how one treats the term 'knowing how'. These claims can be understood either according to the strong or weak analysis mentioned above. On the strong analysis, one gets something like CT. We have already seen that one only needs the weak analysis to make sense of what Ryle says. The conjunction of RPV and the weak analysis implies only that knows how sentences *can* be used to attribute a disposition.

The problem with the statements that I grouped together as versions of CT is that they do not make clear what exactly is being claimed. Are they simply claims about what Ryle was talking about, i.e. a certain kind of ability? Or are they rather strong claims about how to analyse a certain kind of sentence? It is a mistake to think, just because a claim is about knowing how *simpliciter* that it is by default a claim of the latter kind. 'Knowing how' is not a transparent

term, and one needs to be clear about what a theory of knowing how is actually a theory of, otherwise there is a danger of pervasive obscurity. Ryle is largely to blame for this, since it is not hard to understand why one might think that he is interested in analysing knows how sentences. But on a more careful reading, as I have argued, there is no need to attribute the stronger claim to Ryle. So to the extent that CT is ambiguous between the stronger and the weaker, it needs to be treated with care. And it should also be added that, when put in context, many of those considering one or other of the various forms of CT clearly do take it to be the stronger claim to do with the analysis of knows how sentences (this is most apparent in the case of Stanley and Williamson), and this demonstrates the need for care even more.

Following on from this, we can identify the main difference between the Rylean theory and the neo-Rylean theory as follows: whereas both CT and DT are simply claims about knowing how, RNV and RPV are primarily claims about something else, namely, a particular kind of ability. The interpretative confusion that gives rise to the attribution of the neo-Rylean claims to Ryle perhaps comes from the fact that his account of what it is to have a capacity which takes the form of a formulation of necessary and sufficient conditions. But these are necessary and sufficient conditions for something that, on the weak analysis, is merely sufficient for a knows how sentence to be true of someone. Both the Rylean and neo-Rylean theories offer positive proposals of knowing how. The neo-Rylean theory identifies knowing how with the possession of a capacity, so that possessing a capacity is necessary and sufficient for knowing how. The Rylean theory identifies the possession of a capacity with being in a certain kind of dispositional state, so that being in that state is necessary and sufficient for possessing that capacity, *and* says that possessing that capacity state is sufficient for knowing how.

### 1.7 Summary

The content of the Rylean theory, to summarise are these three claims:

(RPV) S is reliably and creditably successful with respect to an intelligent activity  $\Phi$ -ing if and only if S is disposed to act in accordance with properly acquired rules in attempts to bring off an intention to  $\Phi$ .

(RNV) Being reliably successful with respect to an intelligent activity does not require being in any propositional mental state.

(Weak Analysis) S knows how to  $\Phi$  if S is reliably successful with respect to  $\Phi$ -ing.

A consequence of adopting this interpretation which may be surprising is that for the purpose of characterising Ryle's discussion, knowing how is quite dispensable, given that it is RPV and RNV that provide the real meat of the theory. The weak analysis is brought in to explain the vocabulary Ryle chooses to use, more than being an explicit commitment with respect to the semantics of knows how sentences. This is not a defect of the interpretation. Rather, it reflects an aspect of Ryle's discussion which is easy enough to miss if one was tempted to read into Ryle claims that are not there. Ryle's concern is to give an account of behaviour distinctive in being intelligent. This motivates an account of abilities, in the sense of reliable and creditable success with respect to such activity. RPV and RNV provide the account, which is also an account, albeit perhaps a partial one, of knowing how as a consequence of the weak analysis of knows how sentences. Together, these three claims make up the Rylean theory of knowing how, of which the remainder of this essay presents a defence against intellectualist objections.

## 2. Defence

The second part of this essay examines objections to the Rylean theory of knowing how informed by what I have referred to as intellectualism, the idea that knowing how constitutively requires being in propositional mental states.

### 2.1 *Two Kinds of Objection*

Objections to the Rylean theory can largely be placed into two categories: objections informed by psychological considerations, and objections informed by linguistic considerations (for a similar approach to objections to intellectualism, see Glick, forthcoming). That there should be objections of the first kind is obvious. Ryle is concerned to make claims that bear on the nature of the mind, about the nature of intelligence and intelligent behaviour. Knowing how is a mental state, and claims about mental states must be answerable to other psychological claims. Objections of the second kind, by contrast, may initially seem to be peculiar. What should linguistics have to say of relevance to the nature of a mental state? The short answer is that knowing how is a linguistic artefact. This needs some explanation.

In the discussion of the transition puzzle, in the course of getting at a definition of knowing how that fitted Ryle's use of that term, one of the assumptions was that it picks out something to do with sentences with a certain form, what I termed knows how sentences. The assumption is meant to follow from the fact, which I take to be obvious, that we have the notion of knowing how because of sentences with that form. It is in this way that knowing how is a linguistic artefact. Knowing how is not a linguistic artefact in a more controversial sense, the idea that it somehow depends on our use of sentences. The claim that knowing how is a linguistic artefact does not mean that no one would know how to do anything if we did not use sentences of that form. That would make a psychological phenomenon dependent on a linguistic phenomenon in a way that is patently absurd; but the idea that we pick out or carve up psychological reality, or divide up the kinds of mental states that we find ourselves in, in terms of the ways in which we attribute those states, is not. To make this point clearer, we might distinguish between the phenomenon of knowing how with the concept of knowing

how. Since it depends on certain linguistic forms, it is clearly reasonable to consult linguistic evidence in an investigation of the concept. So the fact that knowing how is a linguistic artefact makes linguistics relevant.

To anticipate the topic of the next two sections, the reason for discussing the way in which linguistics is relevant is because an influential argument, due to Stanley and Williamson (op. cit.) that purports to be important, in a way to be discussed, for the truth of the Rylean theory relies on certain syntactic and semantic – i.e. linguistic - considerations. Section 2.3 will set out the reasons for rejecting the idea that the conclusion of that argument is a problem for the Rylean theory. But the very idea of consulting linguistic considerations has been rejected. To take a particularly clearly stated instance of this sort of view, Noë states that the problem with Stanley and William's approach is that “it directs our attention to considerations about language (how people talk), when theorists of mind (in philosophy or cognitive science) are interested in human nature and the nature of mind.” (Noë, 2005: 289) Moreover, “that for which we seek an account [when investigating knowing how] is not our *use of sentences*.” (ibid.) On a more optimistic note, we are told that “[i]t is a mark of philosophical progress that we can now see that neither linguistic analysis nor cultivated intuitions are the key to understanding the nature of mind.” (op. cit.: 290)

The complaint in its strongest form seems to be that that linguistic considerations are irrelevant to psychology; in a slogan, the use of sentences do not matter for the nature of mental states. Rather than take aim at the slogan as such, we should ask how it stands with respect to knowing how in particular. It is true that claims about knowing how are psychological claims. But it would be wrong to insist that this is all they are. One would want to know why we should have the notion of knowing how as an object of investigation if not because of the kinds of sentences we use to attribute this state. To suggest that linguistic considerations are relevant for the investigation of the concept of knowing how is to suggest that claims about the concept of knowing how are also partly claims about logical commitments taken on by the use of the particular linguistic forms that are used to attribute knowing how. In this instance, these are sentences grouped together with reference to a particular sentence form in English, i.e. knows how sentences.

And of course, making this suggestion is not to deny that claims about knowing how are psychological claims. A line is not being drawn between knowing how as a part of psychological reality, consisting of mental states and related items, and as a part of what we might call linguistic reality, consisting of sentences and related items, which psychologists and linguists investigate in isolation. Understanding the logical commitments of knows how sentences is part of understanding the concept of knowing how, and understanding the concept is at least part of the philosophical project of getting clear on the nature of that psychological state. The idea that linguistic claims are not possibly relevant for our understanding of knowing how closes off an important avenue of investigation where there is little reason to do so. And more importantly, reflecting on the dependence of the idea of knowing how on our linguistic forms suggests it should be actively pursued, and Noë's complaint with respect to knowing how is therefore less than compelling.

Without wishing to labour the point, it is important to consider why knowing how is a term in philosophical use, and what the import of that term is supposed to be. Doing so gives us a good reason to consider the meanings of the relevant sentences. That said, it is not a foregone conclusion that doing so will in fact reveal anything of interest, let alone anything that would count against the Rylean theory. But some philosophers, in particular Stanley and Williamson, have thought that it does, and that it shows the Rylean theory to be false. The next section considers their argument.

## *2.2 Stanley and Williamson's Linguistic Argument*

The conclusion of Stanley and Williamson's argument (*KT*: 417-432) is that knowing how is a species of knowing that. This is the conclusion they call intellectualism (partly on the basis of the mistaken interpretation of the intellectualist legend, discussed above; for an alternative definition of this term that comes much closer to the correct interpretation, see Glick, forthcoming). The basis for this conclusion is an analysis of knows how sentences, on which it turns out that if, for instance, someone is said to know how to ride a bicycle, then this is true if and only if they know that *w* is a way of riding a bicycle. The idea is that knowing how is a

species of knowing that, because whenever someone can be said to know how to do something, this is true only if they know that something is the case.

Stanley and Williamson provide the following argument for intellectualism:

(LA1) Knows how sentences feature embedded questions.

(LA2) If knows how sentences feature embedded questions, then for any token knows how sentence '*S* knows how to  $\Phi$ ', it is true if, and only if, there is some proposition *p* of the form '*w* is a way of  $\Phi$ -ing' such that (a) *p* provides a true answer to the embedded question in the token knows how sentence, and (b) *S* knows that *p*.

(LAC) (LA1, 2) Therefore, if *S* knows how to  $\Phi$ , *S* knows that *p*. (i.e. intellectualism).

In order to get a better understanding of this argument, I will go through each premise in turn, with reference to Stanley and Williamson's discussion.

LA1 is a claim about the *syntax* of knows how sentences.. The idea is that sentences such as

- (i) Anne knows how to do a pirouette.
- (ii) Brian knows where to sign his name.
- (iii) Catherine knows whom to call in an emergency.
- (iv) Dennis knows why to be cheerful.
- (v) Enid knows which career to choose.

can be distinguished from sentences such as

- (vi) Fred knows that the Sun is 91 million miles away from the Earth.

to the extent that, while (i) - (v) feature embedded indirect questions in untensed clauses, (vi) does not (*KT*: 417-8, 420). The syntactical structure of (i-v) can be given as follows, where PRO is "a phonologically null pronoun that occurs... in the subject position of untensed clauses" and *t* is the trace of the movement of the interrogative particle (*KT*: 419):

- (i\*) Anne knows [how PRO to do a pirouette  $t$ ].
- (ii\*) Brian knows [where PRO to watch television  $t$ ].
- (iii\*) Catherine knows [whom PRO to call in an emergency  $t$ ].
- (iv\*) Dennis knows [why PRO to be cheerful  $t$ ].
- (v\*) Enid knows [which career PRO to choose  $t$ ].

So according to “the standardly accepted syntax” (*KT*: 420), embedded question constructions such as (i)-(v) are understood as syntactically similar to non-embedded question constructions such as (vi), in that they take a sentential complement, where the bracketed untensed clauses in (i\*)-(v\*) are understood as sentences. Since 'knows how' sentences feature in the examples, we can say that 'knows how' sentences feature embedded questions, and hence take a sentential complement.

Whereas LA1 is a claim about the syntax of 'knows how' constructions, LA2 concerns the *semantics* of constructions with that syntax. The claim depends on what Stanley and Williamson refer to as the Karttunen semantics for indirect questions (Karttunen, 1977/2002), which is itself a modification of Hamblin's (1973) proposal to treat direct questions as denoting sets of propositions. The thought is that embedded indirect questions denote sets of propositions expressed using sentences that provide true answers. To take an example, the sentence 'Fred knows why the caged bird sings' features the embedded question 'why the caged bird sings', which denotes the set of true propositions expressed by sentences of the form 'the caged bird sings for reason  $r$ '. So Fred knows why the caged bird sings if, and only if, Fred knows that the caged bird sings for reason  $r$  (*KT*: *ibid*). Whether or not Fred must know all the reasons, or merely some of the reasons, for the caged bird's singing depends on whether the sentence is used in a 'mention all' or 'mention some' context (*KT*: 421). According to Karttunen, providing the semantics for sentences such as (i)-(v), which includes knows how sentences, is therefore a matter of giving the proposition that provides the answer to the embedded question, and saying of the subject that they know that proposition. (It is interesting to note, however, that Karttunen rarely mentions 'how' constructions, since his main focus is on interrogative noun phrases.)



As Stanley and Williamson note (*KT*: 422), the untensed clauses introduce some complications for this picture: firstly, it is not clear how 'PRO' be should interpreted, and secondly, it is not clear how the infinitive should be interpreted. Each question presents two possibilities: either PRO should be interpreted as referring to the subject of the sentence, or it means something more general, in which case it can be interpreted as the general third personal 'one' (*KT*: 424); and either the infinitive expresses how the activity *ought* to be done, or alternatively how it *may* be done (*KT*: *ibid.*). This means that a sentence such as (i\*) can be interpreted in four different ways:

- (i\*) (a) Anne knows how *she ought* to do a pirouette
- (b) Anne knows how *one ought* to do a pirouette.
- (c) Anne knows how *she could* do a pirouette.
- (d) Anne knows how *one could* do a pirouette.

Stanley and Williamson consider (i\*a) and (i\*b) to be clearly cases of describing a subject as knowing that something is the case, and since what is at issue is whether or not 'knows how' sentences describe a subject as knowing that something is the case, they are not the relevant contexts (*KT*: 425). The idea seems to be that knowledge of obligations is always propositional, though no argument for this is given.

Applying the Karttunen semantics to (i\*c), it is true if, and only if, there is some way *w* such that Anne knows that *w* is a way of doing a pirouette. The idea is that the indirect questions featuring the interrogative particle 'how' denotes propositions that quantify over *ways*, in the same way that 'why' denotes propositions that quantify over *reasons*, 'where' over *locations*, 'when' over *times*, 'who' over *persons*, and 'which' over *individuals*. Which ways are relevant will again depend on contextual factors (*KT*: 426). Ways are to be understood as “*ways of engaging in actions.*” (*KT*: 427) Such ways of engaging in actions are taken to be “properties of token events.” (*KT*: *ibid.*)

Intellectualism is therefore the result of combining the idea that 'knows how' sentence

constructions belong to the kinds of sentence constructions with an embedded question syntax, and the idea that the correct semantics for sentence constructions with an embedded question syntax involve feature the propositions that provide true answers to those questions. It is clear that, if this argument is correct, then RNV must be false. The combination of the syntactic and semantic claims imply that when we attribute the state of knowing how to do something, we also attribute to them the state of knowing that something is the case. Knowing that something is the case is a propositional mental state. This is an instance, then, of the way in which the strong claim that knowing how requires propositional knowledge implies the logically weaker claim that contradicts RNV. The argument is relatively simple and clearly valid, and consequently compelling.

### *2.3 Response to the Linguistic Argument*

Rumfitt (2003) has disputed the soundness of the argument. The problem he raises concerns LA1, the claim that knows how sentences have an embedded question syntax. This objection can be stated as follows (Rumfitt does not state it quite as strongly):

- (R1) If there are non-English translations of English knows how sentences which do not have an embedded question syntax, then LA1 is false
- (R2) There are non-English translations of English knows how sentences which do not have an embedded question syntax.
- (RC) So LA1 is false.

The examples of the non-English sentences provided by Rumfitt include the following French sentences (Rumfitt, op. cit.: 162)

- (vi) Elle sait monter a vélo [she knows how ride a bicycle]
- (vii) Il sait nager [he knows how to swim]
- (viii) Il sait parler Français [he knows how to speak French]

These sentences are translations of English knows how sentences. However, unlike the English

sentences, they do not have the feature which licenses the embedded question syntactic analysis, the presence of the interrogative particle. There are other sentences which work as translations of English knows how sentences which *do* admit that analysis. But the translations which do not suggest that the logical form of English knows how sentences is ambiguous, since syntactically dissimilar sentences provide translations (op. cit.: 165-6). Since LA1 depends on a non-ambiguous logical form for English knows how sentences, the evidence adduced by Rumfitt undermines the support for the crucial syntactic premise. It might be the case that further analysis could overcome this problem, but Rumfitt provides reasons (op. cit.: 163-4) for thinking this will not turn out to be the case. The nature of the linguistic evidence, then, is such that LA1 is not well supported, and this carries over to the argument for intellectualism that relies on it.

Stanley (2011) has responded to this argument by arguing that the cross-linguistic data to which Rumfitt appeals is not enough to present a problem. Stanley understands Rumfitt to be providing an argument against intellectualism, (that is, the form of intellectualism stated in terms of knowledge), the conclusion of which is that “[i]n English, “knows” as it occurs in constructions such as “John knows how to ride a bicycle” does not ascribe propositional knowledge.” (op. cit.: 228) This is incorrect. Rumfitt explicitly says this is not meant to be the import of his objection (see Rumfitt, op. cit.: 158 - “I shall not challenge Stanley and Williamson’s conclusion.”) But Stanley’s response can be separated from his interpretation of Rumfitt’s objection, so this can be ignored. The thought behind Stanley’s response is that Rumfitt’s objection presupposes that the linguistic argument turns on the fact that English knows how sentences contain a ‘question word’ or interrogative particle, and that it is this that does the work in requiring a semantics featuring propositions. Stanley claims that “on many accounts of embedded questions, one can obtain the embedded question semantics without a question word.” (Stanley, op. cit.: 228) The interrogative particle is ‘semantically void’, and so cannot be what accounts for the correct semantic interpretation of sentences in which it figures. To illustrate this point, Stanley provides (op. cit.: 228-9) a way of getting a propositional semantics for sentences such as the French examples (vi-viii).

Ignoring the details of this account, it is interesting to note that Stanley does not argue that

this is the correct semantic interpretation, and he only claims that it is possible. So as to please neither party to this argument, one can assume that it remains an open question whether the cross-linguistic data presents a problem for the linguistic argument for intellectualism. This issue is, in any case, largely screened off by a different problem, one which can be put in the form of a dilemma. The dilemma comes from the fact that, like the related claim that knowing how is distinct from knowing that, intellectualism is open to to different interpretation. Just as what the distinction might amounts to is open to different interpretations, this is also true for the seemingly opposite claim that knowing how is a species of knowing that. The first horn of the dilemma is this: if intellectualism is understood as the claim that the *psychological* state of knowing how reduces to the *psychological* state of knowing that, then there are familiar epistemological counterexamples which make this assertion problematic. The second horn is this: to avoid the counterexamples, intellectualism must be understood as the weaker claim, that cases of knowing can be described without loss of meaning as cases of knowing that. So understood, intellectualism does not provide sufficient basis for contradicting RNV. Instead of getting the claim that if  $S$  knows how to  $\Phi$ ,  $S$  knows that  $p$ , one would only have a weaker form of intellectualism, the claim that if  $S$  knows how to  $\Phi$ , then  $S$  can be described as knowing that  $p$ , or described using a knows that sentence. This in itself does not show RNV to be false. What I will call the *epistemological dilemma* means that intellectualism is either false or not a basis for rejecting the Rylean theory.

In order for the dilemma to be a live problem, what is needed are cases where someone can be said to know how to do something, but where they cannot be said to know the proposition of the particular form as specified in LA2, i.e.  $w$  is a way of  $\Phi$ -ing. Yuri Cath (forthcoming) provides three ways to derive such counter-examples, all of which are familiar from the epistemological literature, which are meant to reflect facts about our ordinary conception of propositional knowledge: *Gettier cases*, when someone has a belief that is both justified and true, but through an unreliable process; *defeating beliefs*, where someone derives a true belief from a process they believe to be unreliable, and *lack of belief*, where someone lacks a relevant belief. So long as one of these ways of deriving counter-examples is successful, the epistemological dilemma can get going. Gettier-type counter-examples have been a primary source of counter-examples to proposed analyses of propositional knowledge, and therefore

have a good title to genuinely reflecting features of that concept, and so I propose only to look at counter-examples derived from unreliably justified true belief.

These counter-examples make the strong assertion of reductionism problematic because they involve cases where someone knows how to do something, but does not know the relevant proposition. Cath (op. cit.: 2-3) gives the following example as an instance of a Gettier-type counter-example: Someone reads a book which tells them how to change a light bulb; consequently they know how to change a lightbulb; but for arcane reasons, the book only accidentally contained the right information, i.e. that  $w$  is a way of changing a light bulb; so they do not know that  $w$  is a way of changing a light-bulb. This is therefore one of what Cath calls 'NKT' cases, since the subject lacks the relevant knowledge-that, but it is also one of what Cath calls 'KH' cases, since the subject does have some bit of knowledge-how. Since reductionism implies that all KH are cases where the subject also has the relevant knowledge-that, the fact that the light-bulb changing case is one of the NKT cases is a counter-example to reductionism. Cath usefully distinguishes the objection based on Gettier-type counter-examples from a different objection, which argues that since knowledge-that claims are susceptible to Gettier-type counter-examples, and since knowing-how claims are not susceptible to Gettier-type counter-examples, the two states are disanalogous. As Cath points out (op. cit.: 6-7), whether or not the disanalogy objection is correct makes no difference to the idea that Gettier-type counter-examples show that there are KH cases which are also NKT cases.

One way to avoid this objection is to argue that cases of knowing that which are also cases of knowing how are not susceptible to Gettier-style counter-examples. But this cannot, taken strictly, be compatible with the reductionist claim, since take one way, it implies that knowing that does not reduce to knowing how. The claim would have to be that knowing the special propositions that come out of the syntactic analysis in LA2 are not susceptible to Gettier-type counter-examples. If this is the claim, then there is no obvious support (op. cit.: 8). An alternative would be to appeal to the notion of a *practical mode of presentation*. This idea is supposed to pick out the particular way in which people who know how to do things stand in the knowledge relation to the special propositions on the reductionist account (cf. Stanley &

Williamson, op. cit.: 429). Stanley and Williamson decline to define what exactly this is, instead appealing to the fact that other modes of presentation, such as the demonstrative or first-personal, are admitted into respectable theories of propositional attitude ascriptions, so practical modes of presentation should be admitted also.

There are serious questions about the validity of this move and the nature of the modes of presentation in question. But even if they are admitted, practical modes of presentation are unsuited for disputing the Gettier-type counter-examples. The counter-examples do not purport to show that one does not know the proposition under some other mode of presentation; there is only mode of presentation in question, the practical, so one cannot say that while one does not know under some other mode of presentation, one does under the practical mode of presentation. Unless the argument is that standing in the knowledge relation to propositions under practical modes of presentation is immune to Gettier-type counter-examples, then the appeal to them cannot work. And if the argument *is* that the knowledge relation to propositions is immune in that way, then, then this requires a modification of our ordinary understanding of propositional knowledge. This is a step unwarranted by Stanley and Williamson's argument, and hence makes the appeal to practical modes of presentation fatally ad hoc.

Cath acknowledges that “even if these arguments succeed it might still be reasonable to hold that knowing how to  $\phi$  is a matter of standing in an intentional relation to a proposition *other than* the knowledge-that relation.” (Cath, op. cit.: 17) This is undoubtedly correct. It also relates to the point I have been stressing throughout, that one opposed to the Rylean theory need not commit to strong claim that knowing how is a form of propositional knowledge. There is, however, a limit to how concessive one needs to be here, at least in the context of objections from linguistic considerations. Intellectualism need not involve propositional knowledge, that much is clear. But what is not clear is whether a linguistic argument can be given in favour of one of these other, non-knowledge involving intellectualist positions. There is a broader conclusion that can be drawn from the specific problem with Stanley and Williamson's linguistic argument. It is extremely hard to see how any theory of the structure of knows how sentences could demonstrate that some other kind of propositional mental state

figures in their proper semantic interpretation. If this is right, then given that a semantic interpretation that involves propositional knowledge is subject to the epistemological dilemma, then the only form of intellectualism sufficient for refuting the Rylean theory that linguistic considerations could possibly establish is false. Although there are no prior methodological reasons for excluding linguistic considerations, it turns out that they are not enough to refute the Rylean theory.

#### 2.4 Bengson and Moffett's *Understanding Objection*

What I will call Bengson and Moffett's (2007) *understanding objection* starts with reflecting on the following puzzle: why do some knowing how ascriptions entail the possession of an ability, while others do not? Note that the presupposition of this question, the variable entailments of knowing how ascriptions, presents a difficulty for the neo-Rylean in a way it does not for the Rylean theory. On the interpretation being defended here, the Rylean theory only needs the weak analysis of knowing how ascriptions, and so is consistent with variable entailments, whereas statements of the neo-Rylean theory typically commit to the stronger and hence inconsistent analysis. I propose not to say anything about the presupposition, although it is worth flagging up the challenge it presents for the neo-Rylean. In the context of competing interpretations of Ryle, it would seem to give support to that which is being defended here over the stronger neo-Rylean interpretation.

Their solution to the variable entailments question can be summarised as follows. It starts with the thought that knowing how to do something requires having what they term a *minimal understanding* of that activity. Minimal understanding not explicitly defined (this will be important later), but Bengson and Moffett make clear it requires “a reasonable mastery of certain concepts” (op. cit.: 42). One understands an activity if, and only if, one has a reasonable mastery of the concept of the activity in question. Taking the example of addition, if someone “does not have a sufficiently solid grasp of the concept *plus*, then she cannot be said to understand addition, and *vice versa*.” (ibid.) Conceptual mastery must be reasonable, because it need not be complete. At the same time, it is not the same as merely *possessing* a concept. One could possess the concept of plus, by being able, for instance, to memorise statements about

the additive relations between numbers, but lack reasonable mastery since, for instance, one cannot generate new statements of that kind. A reasonable mastery is compatible with “fairly substantial misunderstanding or ignorance with regard to complex applications,” (ibid.) but must go beyond mere possession. The last step in their explanation is to appeal to intuitions about reasonable mastery. For some activities, the activities for which knows how ascriptions entail ability possession, a reasonable mastery of concepts cannot obtain in the absence of the possession of that ability. Such concepts are termed “ability-based concepts.” (op. cit.: 43). And thus the explanation of variable entailments.

According to Bengson and Moffett, with this explanation in place an argument against the Rylean theory can be given. The argument begins with the observation that misunderstandings can undermine knowing how. To demonstrate this, the example of Irina the neurologically abnormal ice-skater, whom we encountered earlier in the discussion of abilities, is brought in. Recall the details of that case were that an ice skater is reliably successful at pulling off a triple salchow, but only due to a neurological abnormality that, were it not present, would mean she would fail to do the jump correct. The point there was to illustrate different ways in which ability terms can be used. Bengson and Moffett add a crucial detail, which is that Irina believes something about how to do the triple salchow. A triple salchow requires jumping off the back of the skate, spinning three times in the air, and landing on the front of the skate. Irina believes it requires jumping off the front of the skate, spinning three times in the air, and landing on the back of the skate. The neurological abnormality comes in because every time Irina attempts to the triple salchow, she does the right thing despite having the wrong belief as a consequence of her peculiar wiring. What this shows, on Bengson and Moffett's view, is that knowing how to do something is not merely equivalent to having an ability, but depends also on having a minimal understanding of the activity in question. This is what Irina lacks. So if she cannot be ascribed knowing how, the explanation of this is that she has the wrong minimal understanding, or perhaps, that she has no minimal understanding at all.

It is worth reflecting on this proposal before moving on. One thing that needs to be pointed out right away is that the Rylean theory does not have the consequence that Irina does in fact know how to do the triple salchow because she is able to do it. Bengson and Moffett's



understanding of what having an ability in the relevant sense requires is anything but compulsory, and, I would suggest, is false. As they would have it, Irina is able to do a triple salchow because she is reliably successful. If having an ability is sufficient for knowing how, then surely the Rylean theory predicts that she knows how. But this is controversial, and so it would seem the Rylean theory is controversial too. The problem with this as an objection is fairly clear. Going back to the discussion above, the Rylean view need not be that having an ability is being reliably successful. Reliable success is not enough. It must be the case that the success is something that can be attributed to the agent herself. In the terminology adopted above, the success must be reliable and creditable. In the ice skater case, her success is not creditable to her in the necessary way; the presence of the neurological abnormality makes her success lucky. So the objection rests on treating the notion that knowing how is connected with the possession of an ability with a lack of proper subtlety. Far from getting the wrong result in Irina's case, the Rylean theory has a ready explanation for why she does not know how – she lacks the ability. Failure to see this lies in a faulty understanding of what an ability is in the relevant sense, a failure that cannot be alleged against Ryle (mainly because it is something left only implicit in his discussion of knowing how). The fault lies in the understanding of what abilities are, not in the theory that appeals to such things.

The objection to the Rylean theory that actually comes out of Bengson and Moffett's discussion is not primarily to do with providing counterexamples to the sufficiency or otherwise of abilities for knowing how (although they intimate that this is how they see things, but no matter). The ice-skater case is meant to make room for the idea that minimal understanding is a condition on knowing how, and accepting the proposal, which I shall refer to as the *understanding claim*, apparently precipitates an account of knowing how that presents two potential problems. These problems give the substance of the understanding objection. The first problem is that the understanding proposal posits something over and above the dispositional state mentioned by the positive view, RPV, which is claimed is necessary and sufficient. If understanding is a further psychological fact about the individual that knows how, albeit one necessary for the latter condition, then the dispositional state is not sufficient. But this problem does not even arise if the second problem is genuine. If minimal understanding requires being in mental states with propositional content, then the understanding proposal

implies that the negative view, RNV, is incorrect, in which case RPV needs to be thrown out along with it.

That Bengson and Moffett think that this requirement goes through is clear enough. On their account, the understanding proposal chimes with Stanley and Williamson's proposed semantics for knows how ascriptions discussed above. As they have it, "[t]hese considerations [i.e. the understanding claim] *take us naturally* to something like Stanley and Williamson's analysis of know how." (47; emphasis added) Their account of said analysis leaves something to be desired, but regardless, Bengson and Moffett reject it as not making room for the role of understanding. Nevertheless, something of the Stanley and Williamson's account remains in their account, which is this:

(Bengson and Moffett) S knows how to  $\Phi$  if, and only if, for some way  $w$  of  $\Phi$ -ing: (a) S knows  $w$ , and (b) S knows that  $w$  is a way of  $\Phi$ -ing (op. cit.: 47)

Given the introduction of propositional knowledge, Bengson and Moffett's account can be rightly called intellectualist along with Stanley and Williamson's, although it is a weaker form, since it does not reduce knowing how to a species of knowing that. It should by now go without saying that the mention of propositional knowledge is both mistaken, given the possibility of Cath style counter-examples, and otiose. However, due to the relative weakness of their intellectualism, it can be dispensed with in a way that Stanley and Williamson's linguistic argument means it cannot on their view. The problem that their proposal presents for RNV lies not with the *knowledge* part of propositional knowledge, but the *propositional* part.

### 2.5 Response to the Understanding Objection

Bengson and Moffett say the understanding claim naturally suggests an intellectualist analysis. But the question that needs to be asked is: where exactly do mental states with propositional content come into the picture? Of course, if introducing propositional knowledge was unproblematic, then the obvious answer would go via that; if understanding requires

propositional knowledge, then understanding requires being in a propositional mental state. But since it is not unproblematic, we need to ask the more basic question. Nevertheless, the main difficulty with the move from the understanding claim to the necessity of propositional mental states can be put in their terms. Quite simply, it is entirely unclear why propositional knowledge should be a necessary condition of understanding. This move is left unsupported. And if the claim is weakened to the idea that propositional mental states are a necessary condition of understanding, then an identical problem arises. It is left entirely unexplained why understanding requires being in a mental state with propositional content.

There are two candidates for what, on their view, introduces the element of propositionality. One is the acquaintance condition on understanding, and the other is the notion of understanding itself. There are problems here. Firstly, it is unclear why knowledge by acquaintance of a way of  $\Phi$ -ing should be needed in addition to knowledge that, knowledge or by description. And certainly, knowledge by acquaintance of something abstract is not something that can be left unexamined in the way that, say, knowledge by acquaintance of a person or mid-sized concrete objects can. In that spirit, it could be pressed that either knowledge by acquaintance makes propositional knowledge redundant, because it implies propositional knowledge anyway, or it does not, but does not introduce propositionality either. So knowledge by acquaintance cannot be what does it.

The real question, however, is why knowledge of either type should come in at all. Is it possible that Bengson and Moffett take it to have been already established that knowing how involves propositional knowledge, and it is acquaintance, knowing a way of  $\Phi$ -ing, that acts as a gloss on the idea that understanding is a condition of knowing how? I do not think so, since this leaves entirely unexplained why the understanding claim should take us naturally to something like Stanley and Williamson's analysis, rather than being something that needs to be added on to it. Whatever the thought process, the reply is that there is no reason for thinking understanding necessarily involves propositional mental states. It is equally possible to argue that, if understanding and/or knowledge by acquaintance is a necessary condition on knowing how, and since knowing how does not necessarily require propositional mental states, then the same must go for them. Nothing Bengson and Moffett give us rules out this turning of

inferential tables.

A possible response to this is that the Irina case shows that understanding necessitates propositional mental states, so that the worries about how propositionality could be introduced via abstract reflections on understanding or acquaintance are by the bye. Irina has a mistaken *belief*, and that is what explains why she does not know how to do a triple salchow. But we have already seen that Irina lacks the ability, in the relevant sense, and so on the Rylean view it is this that explains the lack of knowing how. In order for the example to be one that really (i.e. non-question beggingly) causes a difficulty for the Rylean theory, one would need to change the case to one where someone does not know how, but does have the ability, and where the lack of know how is to be explained by the presence of a correct belief. So the case is one of a different ice skater, Maria say, has a mistaken belief (perhaps she and Irina went to the same disreputable ice-skating school), and also like Irina can do the triple salchow just right, but in contrast to Irina, stipulate that she does so in such a way that she is creditable with the success.

There are two difficulties with appealing to a Maria-style case as a way of substantiating the propositionality of understanding. One is that it is unclear why Maria's mistaken belief should be psychologically relevant given that it does not affect her performance in any way. Cases where an agent has a mistaken belief but also has the ability do not show that knowing how requires propositional mental states, but rather suggest the opposite. At least, a further case would be needed to show that it is relevant. The other problem is that the example may not be one that supports Bengson and Moffett's case. To do so, it must be the case that Maria does not know how to do a triple salchow. Judgements on whether she does or not may vary. I would submit that Maria may be one case where judgements are not so reliable as to be free from revision, not least because it is difficult to interpret, and so it is better to place it in a wider context of other cases, ones where clear judgements are easy enough to come by. On that basis, one can provide a theory to explain these relatively clear judgements, and then apply the theory to Maria's case. The Rylean theory, which we can suppose does well with the central cases, predicts that Maria does indeed know how. This would then make both the belief denying and belief irrelevance interpretations of the case, on which the supposition of

mistaken belief can be sidelined, look highly plausible. So the Irina case is plainly not a counter-example to the Rylean theory, and Maria-style variations on the Irina case do not issue in sufficiently theoretically insulated judgements.

Bengson and Moffett say nothing to get us from understanding to propositional mental states. This point is merely *ad hominem*, so perhaps we should look elsewhere for a reason to accept their move from the understanding claim to an intellectualist analysis of knowing how. A theory which might do is to be found presented forcefully in Jerry Fodor's *The Language of Thought* (1975). On this theory, in order to learn a concept, an entity sufficiently psychologically similar to ourselves must go through a process of hypothesis formation and confirmation (cf. op. cit.: 36). Hypotheses are propositional, and hypothesising is a propositional mental state; one hypothesises *that* such and such is the case. So if learning necessarily involves hypothesis formation and confirmation, it follows that learning requires propositional mental states. The implication of this view, which combines a representational and with a computational theory of mind, is often known as the *language of thought hypothesis*, or simply *neo-cognitivism* (I take the term from Dennett, 1978: ch. 9). Some have sought to criticise intellectualist views on knowing how by associating them with neo-cognitivism (this seems to be one theme in Noë, 2005), although the extent to which this is fair is up for debate. Interestingly, others have sought to establish something like the Rylean theory by appealing to results from empirical psychology that would run counter to the evidence to which the neo-cognitivist appeals (see, e.g., Wallis, 2008; Glick, forthcoming, discusses such arguments).

Does neo-cognitivism help Bengson and Moffett? One might argue that learning cannot be hypothesis formation and confirmation because of the following *reductio ad absurdum* argument: if the ability to entertain propositional thoughts requires learning, then in the process of learning how to entertain propositional thoughts, one would need to do what one was learning to do before having learned to do it; that is plainly impossible, so the idea that learning is hypothesis confirmation and formation engenders absurdity. The Fodorian response is to embrace nativism, i.e. reject the idea that the ability to entertain propositional thoughts requires learning; concepts put one in a position to think propositional thoughts, and so if learning must be understood as hypothesis formation and confirmation, and hypothesis

formation and confirmation requires propositional thought, then concepts are not learned, and so must be innate (cf. Fodor, 1975: 65). And this is ultimately the reason why neo-cognitivism fails to do the job. If neo-cognitivism is correct, and there is no concept learning, then *a fortiori* it is not the case that concepts are learned through a process of hypothesis formation and confirmation. The necessary propositionality of learning would therefore not, even on the assumption that understanding is equivalent to reasonable conceptual mastery, entail propositionality of understanding. Alternatively if there is concept learning, then it is not through a process of hypothesis formation and confirmation, since this would mean the reductio argument succeeds, and neo-cognitivism is false. So appeal to neo-cognitivism (or any view on which one learns concepts via a process that involves propositional thought) does not help on this point.

So much for the second problem. The question posed by the first problem was whether the understanding claim means there is some extra psychological fact about individuals that know how to do things that goes beyond the dispositional state put forward by RPV. If one accepts the Rylean theory, then there is no reason to think that understanding of this kind is something over and above the dispositional state put forward by RPV. Understanding may rather be something that *depends on* or is *constituted by* that state. What the understanding proposal might be making explicit is the fact that knows how ascriptions involve a commitment to attributing understanding; this is useful, it would seem, for approaching a puzzle about the semantics of knows how sentences. Seeing whether this first problem is genuine requires getting clear on the relationship between the state of understanding and the state of knowing how; does the latter depend on the former, or the other way around? The understanding claim is neutral on this question. It is consistent with either possibility, and hence how it is to be understood in the last analysis can be made dependent on our theory of knowing how, rather than the other way around.

Answering the question of what depends on what cannot be done without also saying something about what, exactly, one means by understanding. Or at least this is true if one wants to argue from understanding to a certain analysis of knowing how, as Bengson and Moffett seem to want. And the main difficulty in their discussion on this point, as I hope has been

made clear, is that relatively little is said about this. What they do say, however, is that one understands an activity if, and only if, one has reasonable mastery of the relevant concepts, and for certain activities, this requires having the relevant ability. On an interpretation of the understanding claim that is sympathetic to RPV, understanding an activity is something that consists in, or may consist in, being disposed to act in the right sort of way, such that one can be said to have the ability, and hence know how, to engage in that activity. Both interpretations can accept that understanding in some cases requires the relevant ability. The difference between the two comes down to whether abilities, in the correct sense, are sufficient for understanding, or not. If abilities are sufficient for understanding, then the latter can be seen as a *constituted*, as opposed to a *constituting*, feature of an ability, in the sense that it is constituted by what constitutes an ability, rather than being something that is independent of and constitutive of an ability. The proposal, on the weakest construal, is that a theory of knowing how is basic, theoretically speaking, than a theory of understanding, or more so. To give it a name, let's call this the *priority claim*.

If the priority claim is right, then we do not need to hold off giving a theory of knowing how before giving a theory of understanding, and so the latter can be constrained by the former. And if that's right, then the move from understanding to propositionality is put in jeopardy precisely by the Rylean theory, rather than the other way around. I will say something in the next section in support of this claim. To return to Fodor, it was argued just now that his neo-cognitivism cannot come to the aid of a Bengson and Moffett style argument for intellectualism. In his *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong*, Fodor defends the view that "concepts are constituents of mental states." (1998: 6) Mental states, on the representational theory of mind to which Fodor subscribes, are "species of relations to mental representations" (ibid.) which take propositional form. So it could be that, if understanding is equivalent to reasonable conceptual mastery, then since concepts are constituents of propositionally structured mental representations, a story can be told on which understanding is necessarily either itself propositional or something that requires propositional mental states. One might see this view of concepts to be serially problematic for the Rylean theory, not least because it seems to be in tension with a view on which concepts are susceptible to dispositional reduction (cf. Fodor, op. cit.: 4-5), which is what the Rylean interpretation of the

understanding claim requires. But if the no priority claim is plausible, then there are grounds for thinking that, rather than presenting a wealth of reasons for rejecting the Rylean theory of knowing how, the Rylean theory of knowing how can play a role in addressing whether the Fodorian view of concepts is correct.

A few comments are in order. The first is that the priority claim is merely a proposal. I will provide reasons for accepting it in the next section. The second is that raising the priority claim in this context is a product of accepting the understanding claim in the first place, and I have not meant to endorse it as it stands. A third is that Bengson and Moffett must, given their other commitments, reject the Rylean interpretation of the understanding claim. As we have seen, they appear to think that understanding always involves some sort of propositional mental state or states, and sometimes involves an ability also. But without a demonstration of the necessary propositionality of understanding, the alternative interpretation is left open. They would also reject the idea that knowing how may consist in an ability, and so even if understanding depended on knowing how, they would reject the implication that understanding may consist in an ability. We have already seen that their motivation for doing so is motivated by a faulty take on what abilities are in the relevant sense. If we do grant the correctness of the Rylean theory as well as the cogency of the understanding claim, then it seems understanding is not, therefore, something over and above the dispositional state. So if the understanding claim is a good way of dealing with the variable entailments thesis, which it may well be, then it can be combined with the Rylean theory without difficulty, and neither part of the understanding objection presents a live problem.

### *2.6 Dummett on Representing Abilities As Knowledge*

Michael Dummett (1993: 94-116) has argued that knowledge is central to our understanding of language, and has used this to derive results, negative and positive, about the nature of a philosophical theory of meaning. Very roughly, his argument is that semantic theory, the theory of meaning, should be such as to yield a theory of understanding. Since understanding is manifested in linguistic capacities, the ability to use a language and respond appropriately to others' verbal communicative acts, theories of features of language such as reference and sense



should be constrained by facts about those capacities. Knowledge comes into this because, as Dummett rightly points out, linguistic capacities can be represented using knowledge ascriptions. For instance, we talk of someone knowing a language, or knowing what some expression means. We also talk of people knowing how to speak a language. This prompts Dummett to ask whether knowledge in this sense is a mere way of talking, or if the idea that it is really knowledge that is the relevant mental state can be vindicated. Dummett's view is the latter. In the process of providing the vindication, he makes a number of remarks that seem to conflict with the Rylean theory.

Unlike Stanley and Williamson, Dummett does not claim that knowing how *just is* propositional knowledge. And unlike Bengson and Moffett, he is not claiming that knowing how *always requires* propositional knowledge. Dummett's thought is rather that there are two senses of knowing how, or two ways in which we use knows how sentences, one of which is appropriate to activities like swimming, while the other is appropriate to activities like speaking a language: "Knowing Spanish, or knowing how to speak Spanish, is not, after all, to be compared with knowing how to swim." (op. cit.: 95) Dummett proposes that ascriptions of knowledge how are not genuinely ascriptions of knowledge unless the activity in question is such that having the ability to engage in that activity requires propositional knowledge. To illustrate this, he uses the idea of a scale of "degrees of consciousness with which a person may perform a skilled operation." (ibid.)

By 'degrees of consciousness', Dummett means explicit or implicit knowledge of how it is one carries out a skilled operation. Sometimes, one requires appeal to explicit knowledge in order to be able to carry out some operation, in a way similar to that envisioned by the intellectualist legend; in other cases, one may implicitly know, and so be able to say what it is one is doing and how one is doing it if asked, although one does not need to refer to explicit statements in the actual carrying out of the operation; and in others, one may be entirely unable to do even that, yet still be able to carry out the operation. As opposed to cases of this last sort, where "the expression 'knows how to do it' *has only* the force of 'can do it as the result of learning to do it,' (op. cit.: 96; emphasis added) the cases of the intermediate kind (and presumably cases of the first kind too) are ones where "we have to take more seriously the ascription of knowledge to

someone who possesses the practical ability in question.” (ibid.)

So Dummett is suggesting that there are differing senses of knowing how appropriate to gradations along this scale. One sense is a “mere idiomatic equivalent of 'can do it,'” (ibid.) while the other is one in which the verb 'to know' is used to attribute implicit propositional knowledge in addition to an ability: “we may say of the agent that he knows *that* certain things are the case... [This knowledge] shows itself partly by manifestation of the practical ability, and partly by readiness to acknowledge as correct a formulation of that which is known when it is presented.” (ibid.) The problem this presents for the Rylean theory is that, if there are these two idiomatic and non-idiomatic senses of knowing how, then the weak analysis and RNV cannot both be correct. The weak analysis is false if RNV is correct, because it shows that someone's possessing an ability is not always sufficient for the relevant knows how sentence to be true. RNV is false if the weak analysis is correct, because sometimes knowing how does require propositional knowledge. This arises because of the apparent differences between ways in which we represent abilities using the verb 'to know'. Since Dummett says that knows how sentences can be used to indicate an ability, he would accept the weak analysis. So his remarks suggest that RNV is false, and is a kind of intellectualist objection. To give it a label, call this the *representation problem*.

It would be wrong to avoid the representation problem by arguing that the Rylean is only interested in the sense of knowing how that is appropriate to swimming, and not the sense of knowing how appropriate to speaking a language. The Rylean theory is, I have argued, at base a theory of abilities, and this ought to include linguistic abilities. Such a retreat in response to the representation problem would therefore mean moving away not just from the letter but also from the spirit of the enterprise. It would also be unnecessary. A better option is to take a closer look at the details of what Dummett says. Although he is no doubt right about some things, he is wrong or unclear about some others, and it is worth seeing how the Rylean theory can be made to fit in with what is right, even if it cannot be made to fit with the remarks taken on their own terms. I want to argue that the Rylean theory is consistent with there being a difference between linguistic abilities and others, even when this difference brings in propositional knowledge. The burden of argument is to show that Dummett has no grounds

for saying that there are two senses of knowing how in the way he thinks.

To see how to avoid the representation problem, I want to return to the issues discussed in section 2.5. Recall the two problems that the Bengson and Moffett argument raised. Both turn on the introduction of extra concepts in our account of what it takes to possess an ability of the relevant kind. We can call them *extra concept* problems. The first extra concept problem was that, once we take a closer look at cases where knowing how is or is not present, then it turns out we need to bring some extra conceptual apparatus into our account of abilities that means RPV is inadequate. The second extra concept problem was that the nature of this apparatus is such that propositional mental states are required for abilities, and this means RNV is false. This is what provides the distinctively intellectualist flavour to the objection. Recall also the two reasons for rejecting these as genuine problems. Against the first problem, the reply was that the extra concept can be seen as picking out a dependent feature of knowing how. Against the second problem, the reply was that there is no reason to think the extra element in fact introduces propositional mental states. The two problems are of course related, in the sense that the second stands or falls with the first. If there is no extra concept to be introduced, then by implication the concept of propositional mental states does not need to be introduced. Both problems concern the structure of the constitutive conditions for abilities in the relevant sense. Placing the problems for Bengson and Moffett's particular argument in more general terms will help to get clearer on what that structure is, and this will show how the Rylean can properly address the representation problem.

The claim that propositional knowledge or any other propositional mental state is necessary for possessing an ability falls foul of the fact that a theory of what it takes to possess an ability must, in order not to introduce redundancies, be *psychologically thin*. A theory is psychologically thin if it introduces few or relatively few psychological concepts in the constitutive conditions it proposes. Psychological thinness is a useful way of approaching these problems in a couple of ways. One is that explaining why giving an account of abilities, i.e. reliable and creditable success in an intelligent activity, is psychologically thin can be done by reflecting on the what I will refer to as the *structure of their constitutive conditions*, the way in which the conditions necessary and sufficient for their possession can be categorised. Like

functional states, abilities are *multiply realisable*, in the sense that there are few (if any) restrictions on what sorts of thing can be in them.

Why accept this? Going back to the analogy with functional states, abilities are defined purely by their *input* and *output* conditions, not by what we can call *structural conditions*, which are restrictions on what kind of structure can meet the input and output conditions. In the case of abilities, the output conditions are reliable success in carrying out an intention; the input conditions are acquisition of the dispositional state in such a way that the reliable success can be credited to the agent, i.e. by learning the rules. The input and output conditions set out what it is that constitutes possessing the ability, or being in the functional state. Both functional states and abilities, in this way, share the same structure of constitutive conditions. The analogy only goes so far; functional states are not necessarily dispositions, but are rather ways of relating actual causal inputs with actual causal outputs, and involve dispositional or categorical properties. But the similarities in the structure of constitutive conditions between abilities and functional states go some way to getting at the criteria for a the theory of a state being psychologically thin.

With the structure of the constitutive conditions of abilities in hand, we can say why the extra concept problems do not present genuine objections. The no priority claim that figured in the reply to the second extra concept problem was the thought that the best theory of knowing how does not need to be determined by the best theory of other psychological concepts. If the theory of knowing how is psychologically thin, then it brings in few commitments about those other concepts, and provides is a good place to begin inquiry. The priority claim is, it bears saying, an idea about how to think about these concepts, rather than a thought about the relationships between the assorted phenomena about which the concepts enable us to think. It is often sensible to start by thinking about the epistemically basic objects of inquiry first, and the suggestion here is that abilities are candidates for being epistemically basic because psychologically thin. The first extra concept problem, the idea that further analysis will show an extra concept needs to be brought into account for the nature of abilities, falls foul of the psychological thinness of abilities because of redundancy. If the analogy between abilities and functional states is accurate, and abilities are defined in terms of input and output conditions,

then the dispositional state and the conditions on the acquisition of those dispositions do all the work needed. So any extra concept will either need to be open to reinterpretation as a picking out what I have called a *grounded* feature of abilities, or else it is dispensable because redundant.

Let me emphasise that none of the above goes to show that propositional mental states do not feature at all in an account of knowing how. It may be that for some activities, they are a necessary condition. This is the upshot of Dummett's remarks. The weak analysis leaves open the possibility that knows how ascriptions can be made true by the possession of information rather than the possession of an ability. As discussed in the previous section, this presents puzzles of its own, regarding the correct semantics of knows how sentences. But it is hard to see how the Rylean theory is in danger from potential answers to these puzzles. Very weak intellectualist accounts of knowing how are not ruled out by the Rylean theory. What is ruled out are forms of intellectualism which make it a necessary condition, even when grounded by an ability, either in the form of Stanley and Williamson-style reduction or Bengson and Moffett-style supplementation.

The reason Dummett's remarks do not present a problem for the Rylean theory can now be set out. The propositional knowledge that is required for linguistic ability is not exclusive of but rather part of the grounds for the ability. One would have grounds for positing two different senses of knowing how, Dummett's idiomatic and non-idiomatic senses, if one assumed that propositional knowledge and abilities do not enter into this sort of grounding relation. Propositional knowledge, on that assumption, would be *exclusive* of abilities; they would not coincide in the way I have described. But there is no reason to accept this, and the proposal that abilities share a structure of constitutive conditions with functional states gives a reason to reject it. Propositional knowledge may be a condition on having an ability to do a certain activity in that it is part of what it is to have that ability. Whether or not this is so falls outside of the purview of this essay.

If we do not need to multiply senses of knowing how, then what is the right thing to say about this situation? A simple answer is to distinguish kinds of abilities, while combining this with

the idea that these kinds of abilities do not have different constitutive conditions *qua* abilities. There is a difference between constitutive conditions on being an X as such, and constitutive conditions on being an X of some more determinate kind rather than another. Say there are two ways of being an X, being an  $X_1$  and being an  $X_2$ . What distinguishes these as ways of being an X are that the constitutive conditions for being an  $X_1$  and being an  $X_2$  are different. This means there are different constitutive conditions for being an X. But it does not follow that there are different conditions for being an X as such. When talking at the highest level of abstraction about knowing how, as the Rylean theory does, the claims are about knowing how as such. So the weak analysis can be preserved. Perhaps this is false for some values of  $X_1$  and  $X_2$ ; it is possibly false of what Wittgenstein called family resemblance concepts. I have argued that knowing how is not one of these. Dummett may therefore be right that linguistic ability requires propositional knowledge. But there are no grounds for distinguishing senses of knowing how along these lines, and so the Rylean theory can be preserved.

### 3. Conclusion

This essay began with some remarks about the importance of Ryle's discussion for the debate over the nature of knowing how. One potentially surprising feature of the account of the Rylean theory offered in the first half of the essay is that knowing how is in fact dispensable as a way of thinking about what Ryle was talking about. More precisely, he was concerned with intelligent activity and the abilities, in a particular sense of that term, we have with respect to it. One could state the theory without introducing the concept of knowledge at all. Failure to recognise this fact is indicative of and can also lead to certain mistakes in interpretation, and subsequently in critical strategies. However, it does not change the fact that Ryle's discussion is an important contribution to understanding knowing how. If the argument in the second half of the essay is correct, then at least the negative view is correct, and so the positive view cannot be rejected on the basis of intellectualism.

The reason for concentrating on intellectualist objections is clear; since the debate has been largely dominated by the thought that either intellectualism or neo-Ryleanism is correct, and since the neo-Rylean position is a bad way of interpreting Ryle, then defending Ryle should in the first instance address intellectualism, by defending the negative view. All this shows is that neo-Ryleanism and intellectualism do not exhaust the possibilities. It leaves untouched the question of whether the positive view is correct in its details or its consequences. In terms of the details, one very important idea that knowing how is a dispositional state does not follow directly from the failure of intellectualism. One might therefore accept the criticisms of the arguments for intellectualism given here, while not accepting the positive view as it stands.

So there is room for debate within a broadly a non-intellectualist approach to knowing how over whether an equally adequate or superior theory can be given that relies instead on categorical mental states. Doing this would also require further inquiry into the nature of dispositional states themselves, and would require also require a deeper look at the proposals regarding the structure of the constitutive conditions for abilities given in section 2.6. In terms of the consequences, there are the issues alluded to in the introduction; these are the questions of how the Rylean theory rami fies for our understanding of philosophically interesting activities like language, and of the mind in general. This essay has, for reasons of space and

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relative urgency, said nothing about either of these issues, but the hope is that the foregoing has provided a reasonably solid foundation for addressing both.



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