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# HAVING KNOW-HOW: INTELLECT, ACTION, AND RECENT WORK ON RYLE'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE-HOW AND KNOWLEDGE-THAT

BY

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**Abstract:** Stanley and Williamson reject Ryle's knowing-how/known-that distinction charging that it obstructs our understanding of human action. Incorrectly interpreting the distinction to imply that knowledge-how is non-propositional, they object that Ryle's argument for it is unsound and linguistic theory contradicts it. I show that they (and their interlocutors) misconstrue the distinction and Ryle's argument. Consequently, their objections fail. On my reading, Ryle's distinction pertains to, not knowledge, but an explanatory gap between explicit and implicit content, and his argument for it is sound. I defend the distinction's necessity in explaining human action and show that it propels a fruitful explanatory program.

*How does intellect guide and inform action?* For example, how does deliberation, and the intelligence of its episodes, affect, control, or impose itself on the course of subsequently deliberate, and intelligent, performance? Asking it the other way around, how do overtly behavioral performances acquire qualities of mind like intelligence (sensitivity, wit, cleverness, prudence, etc.), deliberateness, and purposefulness? How do some of these acquire the intentional content of genuine acts?

Gilbert Ryle addressed these questions in chapter 2 of *The Concept of Mind* – 'Knowing How and Knowing That.' He there employed a char-

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acteristic sort of regress to uncover a gap in the chain of explanation from intelligent deliberation, which he sometimes called ‘knowledge-that,’ to the practical aptitude or proficiency in virtue of which performances are intelligent, deliberate, etc. – what he occasionally called ‘knowledge-how.’ In light of this gap, he argued that: (i) ‘knowledge-how’ cannot consist in, or be explained in terms of, ‘knowledge-that’ and, consequently, (ii) ‘knowledge-how’ is ‘. . . the ability . . . to do certain sorts of things’ (p. 27).<sup>1</sup> In their recent article ‘Knowing How,’ Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson contend that Ryle’s regress argument for (i) is unsound, and they adduce apparent counterexamples to (ii). Their central concern, however, is the analysis of ascriptions of knowledge-how, and this establishes, they claim, that ‘[k]nowledge-how is simply a species of knowledge-that’ (p. 411). On the basis of this conclusion, they denounce Ryle (and the many philosophers who accept (i)) for believing ‘. . . there is a fundamental distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that’ (p. 411). That belief, they chide, is not only false; it also obfuscates the very issues Ryle sought to illuminate:

All knowing-how is knowing-that. Neglect of this fact impoverishes our understanding of human action, by obscuring the way in which it is informed by intelligence. (p. 444)

Here, then, is what at least appears to be a dispute over Ryle’s familiar, old distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that – I’ll call it the ‘Fundamental Distinction’ – with disputants agreeing that an adequate theory of human action awaits its resolution. As a result of the interest stirred by ‘Knowing How,’ this dispute has received serious attention recently. The weight of current opinion is against Ryle, for, despite lively debate over Stanley’s and Williamson’s analysis of ascriptions of knowledge-how, their critics tend uncritically to affirm their critique of Ryle. I’ll argue, however, that the authors’ critique is mistaken; Ryle’s strategy (if not his final theory) is correct; and Stanley, Williamson, and their critics have passed over what was most distinctive, and what remains most fruitful, in an old distinction that turns out not to be as familiar as one might have supposed.

I present the authors’ critique of Ryle in Part 1, while Part 2 provides a very different view of the nature of his investigation. On this view, the Fundamental Distinction between (what he called) ‘knowledge-how’ and ‘knowledge-that’ *simply isn’t about knowledge at all*. Ryle’s phraseology is idiomatic. It distinguishes, respectively, the sort of intelligence implicit in performance from the sort that is explicit in intelligent deliberation and intention. Read this way, his regress argument for the Fundamental Distinction is sound: on pain of infinite regress, the intelligence of a performance cannot consist in, or be explained in terms of, the intelligence of episodes of deliberation. As I show in Part 3, Stanley’s and

Williamson's failure to appreciate this undermines their critique. It also obscures a fruitful explanatory strategy. And yet, a brief examination of some of their critics in Part 4 illustrates the puzzling popularity of their critique.

Parts 5 and 6 turn from the contemporary reception to the development and evaluation of the Fundamental Distinction and its role in what I'll call the 'Rylean strategy.'<sup>2</sup> I argue in Part 5 that Ryle and Stanley and Williamson share a profound accord: what Ryle called 'knowledge-how' turns out to be a sub-species of what Stanley and Williamson call 'a species of knowledge-that,' for, despite the authors' insistent denial (and their critics' agreement), the former turns out to have propositional content, the feature by which Stanley and Williamson demarcate the latter. This completes the paper's serious critical work. Part 6 is a brief and summary sketch suggesting that a correct understanding of the Rylean strategy is essential (though not sufficient) for the adequate explanation of human action that is of interest to all parties. The strategy makes clear that the main task of that inquiry is to provide a fundamentally nonintellectual and non-deliberational theory of the content implicit in human acts. Though that insight is hardly new, it is correct. But, the authors do not incorporate it into their theory of knowledge-how. Moreover, their theory offers no alternative insights nor suggests any alternative approach to '... our understanding of human action . . . [and] the way in which it is informed by intelligence.'

### 1. *The authors' case against Ryle*

Stanley and Williamson attribute to Ryle two theses, which I'll call 'R<sub>1</sub>' and 'R<sub>2</sub>':

- R<sub>1</sub>. There is a fundamental distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.
- R<sub>2</sub>. Knowledge-how is an ability. (p. 411)

They reject both, developing their opposition in two stages. In their critical phase, where most of my concerns arise, they argue that Ryle's justification for R<sub>1</sub> is unsound and produce counterexamples to R<sub>2</sub>. In their positive phase, they argue that knowledge-how is merely a form of, and so not Fundamentally Distinct from, knowledge-that.

#### A. THEIR ARGUMENT AGAINST R<sub>1</sub>

R<sub>1</sub> expresses Ryle's opposition to intellectualism, and as the authors see it, '[t]his doctrine is the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that' (p. 412). As for Ryle's defense of R<sub>1</sub>:

Very roughly, Ryle's argument against the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that is supposed to work as follows: if knowledge-how were a species of knowledge-that, then, to engage in any action, one would have to contemplate a proposition. But, the contemplation of a proposition is itself an action, which presumably would itself have to be accompanied by a distinct contemplation of a proposition. If the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that required each manifestation of knowledge-how to be accompanied by a distinct action of contemplating a proposition, which was itself a manifestation of knowledge-how, then no knowledge-how could ever be manifested. (p. 413)

They analyze this argument into two premises:

- (1) If one *F*s, one employs knowledge how to *F*
- (2) If one employs knowledge that *p*, one contemplates the proposition that *p*. (p. 413)

To put these in play on Ryle's behalf, they suppose (for reduction to vicious regress) that knowledge-how is propositional. Thus, it is a species of knowledge-that. Now, in order to *F*, one must employ knowledge how to *F* (by (1)). On the supposition, it follows that one must employ knowledge that *p*, where the proposition that *p* describes how to *F*. In order to employ that knowledge, one must contemplate the proposition that *p* (by (2)). But contemplating that-*p* is also doing something, say, *G*; so in order to do it, one must employ knowledge how to *G* (by (1)). This implies, on the supposition, that one must employ knowledge that *q* (where that-*q* describes how to *G*). One must therefore contemplate that-*q* (by (2)), an activity requiring a further employment of knowledge-how (by (1)), and so on and on.<sup>3</sup> As it induces infinite regress, the supposition is false. Therefore, knowledge-how is not propositional. So, it is not a species of knowledge-that. So, there is the Fundamental Distinction between them (as  $R_1$  asserts).

Rather than accept  $R_1$ , the authors suppress the regress by denying the argument's premises. This is not hard to do, for (1) and (2) are pretty implausible. Contrary to (1), there are lots of things that one does – their example is digesting food – for which one does not employ knowledge-how. If (1) is to have a hope of being true, it must be restricted, they offer, to 'intentional actions' (p. 415). Contrary to (2), in, say, crossing the street, fixing a sandwich, or putting on shoes, one typically employs propositional knowledge – that one steps up onto the curb from the street, that oleo is spread only on the bread's inside surfaces, that the left shoe goes on the left foot – without contemplating these propositions. (2) becomes plausible, they suggest, if the contemplation it mentions is something other than the 'intentional act of contemplating a proposition' (p. 415). But given (1)'s restriction to 'intentional actions,' (2) will not come back into

play, and the regress will not flower, if the relevant contemplation isn't intentional. They conclude:

There is no uniform reading of the two premises in Ryle's argument on which both are true; the argument is unsound. It therefore fails to establish any difficulty for the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that. (p. 416)

In the positive phase of their critique, the authors argue that  $R_1$  is not merely unjustified but false. They defend an analysis of ascriptions of knowledge-how (properly so called) that, they believe, contradicts the Fundamental Distinction. Their defense consists in citing linguists' currently 'standard' analyses of the syntax of the English '. . . know(s) how . . .' construction and the semantics of ascriptions employing it. Details aside, these analyses show that ascriptions of (proper) knowledge-how attribute propositional knowledge. So:

If these standard accounts of . . . syntax and semantics . . . are correct, then ascriptions of knowledge-how simply ascribe knowledge-that to their subjects. (p. 431)

Knowledge-how is thus a species of knowledge-that. Therefore, there is no Fundamental Distinction between them. So,  $R_1$  is false.

Summarizing the key elements of their interpretation: (a) intellectualism offers an analysis of (proper) knowledge-how as a species of knowledge-that; thus, (b) Ryle's regress argument against intellectualism is a *reductio ad absurdum* of that analysis; consequently, (c)  $R_1$  denies that ascriptions of (proper) knowledge-how ascribe propositional knowledge; therefore, (d) the Fundamental Distinction is inconsistent with their propositional analysis of such ascriptions.

## B. THEIR ARGUMENT AGAINST $R_2$

With  $R_2$ , Stanley and Williamson intend to attribute to Ryle the view that '. . . an ascription of the form " $x$  knows how to  $F$ " merely ascribes to  $x$  the ability to  $F$ ' (p. 416).

Against this they offer two brief counterexamples. A ski instructor knows how to perform a certain stunt, but she is not able to do it herself.<sup>4</sup> And a pianist who has lost her arms in an accident still knows how to play the piano even though she no longer can. 'It follows,' they conclude, 'that Ryle's own positive account of knowledge-how is demonstrably false' (p. 416).

## 2. Rereading Ryle

Stanley and Williamson made fast work of  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ . But the very implausibility of the attributed argument's premises and the susceptibility

of the attributed analysis to (apparent) counterexample ought to make us pause and wonder if we can't do a little better by Ryle. We can. A brief study of the second chapter of Ryle's monograph, 'Knowing How and Knowing That,' shows that their attributions are inaccurate and provides a plausible interpretation that avoids their critique.

#### A. PRELIMINARIES

It is essential to realize from the start that, despite his titular references, Ryle has no special interest in knowledge (properly so called). His interest, rather, is performers' expertise, mastery, or proficiency, that is, their *practical intelligence*: '... the intelligent execution of an operation ...' (p. 32) and '... the exercise of intelligence in practice ...' (p. 40). So, his investigation targets all performances, activities and operations that are done on purpose or deliberately and display intelligence as a result.<sup>5</sup> And it aims to explain how such activities acquire these properties.<sup>6</sup> I'll use 'intelligent performance' to cover all of the phenomena (like those listed in endnote 5) that the theory targets.

We must also note three further things. First, Ryle's *occasional* use of 'knowledge-how' (and related forms) is philosophically idiomatic; it is merely an abbreviation for the sort of prowess or expertise, whatever it ultimately is, in virtue of which one performs intelligently.<sup>7</sup> This usage is natural, for it is common in English to speak of the things that one does intelligently as what one knows how to do. So, to say (with R<sub>2</sub>) that knowledge-how is an ability while using 'knowledge-how' in Ryle's sense is merely to put forth the subject of investigation (rather than to offer any analysis at all).

Second, the theory Ryle opposes, intellectualism, explains intelligent performance in terms of intelligent deliberation:

Champions of the [intellectualist] legend are apt to try to re-assimilate knowing *how* to knowing *that* by arguing that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria. It follows that the operation which is characterized as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria; that is, the agent must first go through the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done ('maxims,' 'imperatives' or 'regulative propositions' as they are sometimes called); only then can he execute his performance in accordance with those dictates. He must preach to himself before he can practice. The chef must recite his recipes to himself before he can cook according to them; the hero must lend his inner ear to some appropriate moral imperative before swimming out to save the drowning man; the chess-player must run over in his head all the relevant rules and tactical maxims of the game before he can make correct and skilful moves. To do something thinking what one is doing is, according to this legend, always to do two things; namely, to consider certain appropriate propositions, or prescriptions, and to put into practice what those propositions or prescriptions enjoin. It is to do a bit of theory and then to do a bit of practice. (p. 29, author's emphases)

According to intellectualism, then, practical intelligence is fundamentally intellectual. An intelligent performance is just one informed by intelligent deliberation, and this informing is always the result of the performer having intentionally guided his performance by following directions describing specifically what he is to do, which are spelled out in thought prior to the performance.

Thus, intellectualism takes intelligent performances to be intentional acts, for according to an ordinary, unsophisticated, and non-controversial notion here made unusually precise: (i) an intentional act is a performance whose production the agent governs or controls by way of the intention that he thinks so that his (successful) performance is an enactment of his intention; (ii) an intention has the fine degree of specificity characteristic of propositional content – to bring it about or make it the case specifically that *p*; (iii) as a result of the agent's successfully governing his performance's production by his intention, his performance acquires the same specificity, that is, the content of the intention that the performance enacts; so, (iv) the performance is the specific act of bringing it about that *p*. In brief, an act acquires the propositional content of the intention with which it (successfully) was produced by way of the performer's (correct) grasp and (correct) enactment of his intention.<sup>8</sup> And, this is exactly how intellectualism, on Ryle's description, explains the intelligence of a performance. In baking Danish intelligently, the chef (in the passage just quoted) first thinks out an apt recipe – preheat the oven to 400°, whisk six eggs into two cups of milk, etc. – and then intellectually governs his activity by his intention to follow it. Thus, he intends that the oven be brought to 400°, that six eggs be whisked into two cups of milk, etc. and, consequently, his subsequent performances are intentional acts of bringing it about that the oven comes to 400° and of making it the case that six eggs are whisked into two cups of milk. Explained intellectualistically, the chef's intelligent performances acquire the propositional content of the intelligent criteria by which he intentionally steers them.

Finally, the third thing we should note is that it is this sort of intelligent deliberation that Ryle *occasionally* calls 'knowledge-that' (and related forms) and only in order to abbreviate locutions like '... an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria ...' and '... the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done. ...'<sup>9</sup>

Rephrasing intellectualism in his epistemic idiom: the 'knowledge-how' in virtue of which a performance is intelligent consists in, and is explained in terms of, the performer's prior 'knowledge-that.' Nevertheless, intellectualism targets *all* intelligent performances – even those that don't involve genuine knowledge-that (should there be any) – and *only* intelligent performances – to the exclusion of cases of knowledge-how (properly so called) that involve no intelligent performance (should there be any). And

it purports to explain their intelligence in terms of prior episodes of articulate thinking, which need not articulate knowledge (properly so called).

Though Ryle is quite clear about his idiom, it is worth acknowledging that, as with all such colorful figures of speech, it is not always felicitous. With its connotations of truth and justification, 'knowledge-that' is not always an apt choice to describe thinking an intelligent thought. And though one does have knowledge-how for doing what one does intelligently, one can also have the bare knowledge-how to play chess or pluck a chicken while not being any too good at it. So, I'll replace his terms with some mildly technical vocabulary. I'll use the noun 'know-how' (as in 'good old American know-how') to refer to the sort of understanding, whatever it ultimately is, in virtue of which performances are intelligent. It's clear that a poor chess player with only the bare knowledge-how to play may know how to play chess, but he has no chess know-how. I'll describe both the intellectual episodes in which directions are spelled out in thought and the spelled-out directions themselves as 'explicit.' Finally, I'll use 'intellectual embrace' to describe the process of translating directions into action by first deliberating upon, and then enacting, them. Put in these terms, intellectualism takes know-how just to consist in the intellectual embrace of explicit directions.

#### B. THE REGRESS ARGUMENT FOR THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION

Turning to Ryle's justification for the Fundamental Distinction, he argues that intellectualism is viciously regressive. For one reason, if they are to explain the intelligence of a performance of a certain sort of action, the directions for performing the action must be themselves intelligent, that is, appropriate for that sort of action. Prior to her performance, then, the performer must select performance-directions intelligently, where intelligence in the selection procedure will just consist in the prior intellectual embrace of explicit selection-directions. However, this earlier procedure also must be conducted intelligently, and so on *ad infinitum*, all prior to her performance.<sup>10</sup> For another reason, the performer must apply her performance-directions in a way that is apt for the local circumstances; that is, she must enact them intelligently. Prior to her performance, then, she must intellectually embrace explicit application-directions. But, application-directions must be enacted intelligently (as well as selected intelligently), and another regress opens.<sup>11</sup> Now, there are intelligent performances, but there couldn't be any if intellectualism were true. Thus, Ryle concludes, it is false.<sup>12</sup> (Of course, explicit deliberation sometimes really does guide consequently intelligent performance, as when a sound chess move results from the player's intellectual embrace of an explicit tactical principle. But redeployment of the regress argument shows that,

contrary to intellectualism, this process of intellectual guidance itself cannot be guided intellectually.)<sup>13</sup>

That is Ryle's regress argument.<sup>14</sup> And it certainly looks sound.<sup>15</sup> No performance can be intelligent just in virtue of the intelligence of prior explicit deliberation, for the necessary *intelligence* of the deliberation requires even more anterior intelligent deliberation . . . , and the deliberation's *explicitness* requires prior intelligent application . . . ; and these conditions permit no intelligent performance to come forth. In this way, the regress argument reveals an explanatory gap between *explanans* and *explanandum* from which it follows that the know-how in virtue of which a performer argues compellingly or removes gallstones skillful does not just consist in her explicit understanding of rhetoric or surgery.<sup>16</sup> There is, in other words, a Fundamental Distinction between know-how ('knowledge-how') and deliberation ('knowledge-that'), which is what R<sub>1</sub> asserts.

This interpretation credits Ryle with an apparently sound argument for R<sub>1</sub>, and it makes that thesis reasonable. Indeed, Ryle's Fundamental Distinction is notably intuitive, for it is just the difference between description and what is described, statement and exhibition, regulation and practice, or directions for  $\Phi$ -ing and a practical demonstration of  $\Phi$ -ing.

### 3. *The authors' critique again*

We can see now that Stanley and Williamson have misread Ryle's epistemic idiom and, as a result, their attributions are mistaken. In the first place, intellectualism does not offer (*contra* (a), p. \*\*) an analysis of ascriptions of knowledge-how (properly so-called); it is, rather, an explanation of practical intelligence.<sup>17</sup> Evidently, then, R<sub>1</sub> neither expresses an analysis nor even a properly epistemic distinction (*contra* (c)). (Similar remarks apply to R<sub>2</sub>.) Thus, it denies neither the conspecificity of knowledge-how and knowledge-that (properly so-called) nor the propositional contentfulness of know-how (again *contra* (c)). What R<sub>1</sub> does deny is that know-how consists in intelligent deliberation. Consequently, the regress argument is a *reductio* of that supposition, not the supposition that knowledge-how is propositional (*contra* (b)). Therefore, the Fundamental Distinction concerns, not the content of (properly) epistemic ascriptions, but the explanatory gap between what is explicit in thought and what is inarticulately displayed in performance (*contra* (d)) as well as the ultimate fruitlessness of explaining the second in terms of the first.

Moreover, the regress argument is not composed of the implausible premises:

- (1) If one *Fs*, one employs knowledge how to *F*.
- (2) If one employs knowledge that *p*, one contemplates the proposition that *p*.

Ryle does not hold with (1) that knowledge-how (properly so-called) is implicated *whenever* one does something, for he is concerned only with intelligent performances. He would accept:

(1') If one *F*'s intelligently, then one employs knowledge how to *F*.

But (1') is true. Certainly, the authors' example of digestion is no counterexample. Nor is he committed to the claim in (2) that one employs propositional knowledge only if one contemplates the proposition known. He would accept:

(2') If one explicitly thinks that *p*, then one contemplates the proposition that *p*.

But that is also true, and unmindful common sense – that the left shoe goes on the left foot, and so on – does not show otherwise.<sup>18</sup>

The result of all of this is that both the critical and the positive stages of the authors' critique fail. (1) and (2) are simply irrelevant to Ryle's regress argument; so, their inconsistency doesn't matter to R<sub>1</sub>. Since the Fundamental Distinction does not deny propositional content to know-how (let alone to knowledge-how properly so called), the authors' analysis of ascriptions of (proper) knowledge-how neither contradicts, nor provides any reason to doubt, R<sub>1</sub>. As for their unable ski instructor and disabled pianist who cannot do what they nevertheless know how (in some sense) to do, their very lack of ability makes these cases fail as counterexamples to R<sub>2</sub>. Insofar as these subjects cannot perform the subject tasks, they cannot perform them intelligently. So, they lack all pertinent know-how. Thus, they are irrelevant to R<sub>2</sub>, which claims only of those who do perform intelligently that the know-how they thereby exhibit consists in a sort of ability.<sup>19</sup>

More generally, given the authors' concern with '... our understanding of human action' and not '... obscuring the way in which it is informed by intelligence,' it's hard to understand their interest in cases where no relevant action *can* be informed by intelligence. To the contrary, the very possibility of coherently ascribing (proper) knowledge-how in such cases is, by itself, a good indication that investigation of intelligence in action does not target (proper) knowledge-how.

#### 4. *The current debate*

I've pursued these interpretive matters at length because recent commentators' more summary treatments have energetically affirmed Stanley and Williamson's critique. I'll confine myself to three respected examples.

In 'Stanley and Williamson on Knowing How,' John Koethe adopts the authors' construal of intellectualism and the regress argument against it as

‘. . . an argument . . . against construing knowledge-how as a species of knowledge-that’ (Koethe, 2002, p. 327). Thus:

Ryle argued that, if performing an action requires one to know how to perform it, and if knowing how to perform an action requires one to entertain or contemplate a proposition, then a regress would ensue, since entertaining or contemplating the proposition would itself be an action one would have to know how to perform, which would require one to entertain or contemplate a distinct proposition, and so on. (p. 327)

(But, Ryle’s argument is confined to intelligent or deliberate actions and concerns only explicit contemplation.) Koethe also uncritically affirms (in slightly different form) the content of their criticism:

Stanley and Williamson rightly note that this argument requires the action initially at issue to be an *intentional* action, and that the entertainment or contemplation of a proposition need not be taken to be an intentional action; so the regress is avoided. (pp. 327–8, author’s emphasis)

Putting their critique this way (rather than in terms of their premises’ inconsistency) directly brings out its carelessness. Ryle doesn’t argue that the regress is unavoidable; he argues that it besets intellectualism; and, yet, Koethe here employs the regress’ avoidability against a philosopher whose announced aim is to construct a theory that avoids the regress! Furthermore, Koethe argues for that avoidability with Ryle’s own conclusion about avoiding it, namely the Fundamental Distinction: ‘. . . the entertainment or contemplation of a proposition need not be taken to be an intentional action.’ Clearly, something has blinded Koethe to the nature of Ryle’s inquiry: the regress besets only intellectualism, it constitutes a criticism only of that theory, and it shows precisely that ‘intentional’ action cannot be explained in terms of ‘. . . the entertainment or contemplation of a proposition . . .’ when that is ‘. . . taken to be an intentional action.’

Similar remarks apply to Ian Rumfitt’s ‘Savoir Faire.’ He too follows Stanley and Williamson in interpreting intellectualism as the thesis that ‘. . . all knowledge is propositional’ (Rumfitt, 2003, p. 159). (But, Ryle’s own formulation (which I cited on p. 66) that ‘. . . the operation which is characterized as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgement of . . . rules or criteria . . .’ says nothing about knowledge.) Equally, Rumfitt characterizes the Fundamental Distinction in the authors’ terms as ‘. . . Ryle’s hypothesis that knowledge-how is not a species of knowledge-that’ (p. 166). He shows no hesitation, then, in affirming both the construal and criticism of ‘. . . the regress argument that Stanley and Williamson rightly reject . . .’ (p. 166).

Tobias Rosefeldt is more careful in ‘Is Knowing-how Simply a Case of Knowing-that?’ He cites Ryle in correctly rejecting the authors’ rendering of intellectualism:<sup>20</sup>

The authors claim that Ryle calls the thesis that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that ‘the intellectualist legend’ [p. 370]. [But,] [w]hen [Ryle] characterizes this legend, he does not *define* it as the claim that knowledge-how is knowledge-that, but as the thesis that to perform an act intelligently is ‘always to do two things; namely, to consider certain appropriate propositions, or prescriptions, and to put into practice what these propositions or prescriptions enjoin.’ (p. 371, author’s emphasis)

And he sees that the regress argument is immune to the authors’ criticism:

According to the intellectualist legend, an operation is executed intelligently only if there is a prior theoretical operation which consists in contemplating a proposition. Since this second operation has to be performed intelligently itself, there would have to be a third operation of contemplating a proposition, and so on *ad infinitum*. Since nobody can perform infinitely many operations, no act could ever be performed intelligently, which is absurd [p. 370]. . . . Defined in this way, Ryle’s criticism of the intellectualist legend stays untouched by Stanley and Williamson’s objection to it. (p. 371)

Nevertheless, his understanding of the Fundamental Distinction shows the effects of ‘Knowing How’ in that he agrees with the authors that the Fundamental Distinction contradicts their propositional analysis of (proper) knowledge how:

Of course, Ryle’s distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that would be refuted if there was some . . . successful attempt to account for the former in terms of the latter . . . [which] is what Stanley and Williamson claim to offer . . . [in] their own positive account of knowledge-how. (p. 371)

(But, since in denying that practical know-how can be explained in terms of explicit deliberation Ryle does not deny that it (or proper knowledge-how) is propositional, Stanley’s and Williamson’s propositional analysis of (proper) knowledge-how can’t refute his distinction.)

We see, then, that confusion over the Fundamental Distinction is not confined to ‘Knowing How.’

### 5. *R<sub>2</sub>, ability, and propositional content*

To this point, I’ve argued that  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ , when understood correctly, elude the authors’ widely accepted critique. Understood correctly,  $R_1$  expresses a truth about human action of which recent debate has lost sight.

But  $R_1$  tells us only that know-how is not deliberation, not what Ryle thinks it is.  $R_2$  purports to do this. Still, it isn’t very interesting to be told that a performance is intelligent just in virtue of the performer’s ability to produce it. We want to know what Ryle thinks that sort of ability must be.

The authors tell us only that he thinks it’s a sort without propositional content. They don’t tell us more, I suspect, because they treat  $R_2$  as

independent of  $R_1$ . However, there is an illuminating connection between the two theses, which they and their critics have overlooked:  $R_1$  expresses a criterion of explanatory adequacy on theories of know-how, and it's precisely Ryle's acknowledgment of this criterion that drives him to  $R_2$ . Moreover and contrary to all of the previous commentators, this connection commits Ryle to the propositional contentfulness of know-how.

#### A. RYLE'S THEORY OF KNOW-HOW

To show how that commitment arises, I'll briefly review Ryle's construction of his theory.<sup>21</sup> To begin, intelligent performances in every field of endeavor are those that satisfy descriptions that are or could be made explicit as regulations, canons, strategic principles, and tactical rules for the endeavor; instructions that are (or could be made) explicit in the training manuals; directions that experts do (or could) give to neophytes. Intelligent performances, that is to say, are just those that satisfy intelligent criteria of performance.

Now,  $R_1$  proscribes a theory of performance intelligence in terms of performers' intellectual embrace of such criteria, but intelligent performances nevertheless do accord with them.<sup>22</sup> A valid conclusion, for example, accords with rules of inference just as an ingenious experiment or assiduous assault of a machinegun nest accords with criteria that could be explicitly formulated in those training manuals.

Such accord, however, is not sufficient: a sleepwalker's utterance may adventitiously accord with an inference rule, but it isn't thereby intelligent.<sup>23</sup> In general, producers of intelligent performances are 'responsible for their performance' (p. 28). So, performances done '... automatically and without having to mind what [one] is doing' (p. 42), by 'rote' (p. 42), or out of 'sheer habit, blind impulse, or ... a fit of absence of mind' (p. 40) aren't intelligent no matter their accord with intelligence criteria. To perform intelligently, then, a performer must:

... think what he is doing while he is doing it, and think what he is doing in such a manner that he would not do the action so well if he were not thinking what he is doing. (p. 29)

That is, he must *apply* the criteria.<sup>24</sup>

To avoid the regress that immediately threatens,  $R_1$  demands a theory of applying criteria of intelligent practice (on which one counts as thinking what one is doing while one is doing it ...) that makes no explanatory reference to explicit intellectual episodes.<sup>25</sup> Such a theory must be nonintellectual and non-deliberational; it must describe a fundamentally implicit or practical way to apply a criterion.<sup>26</sup>

The ordinary notion of practical skill strikes Ryle as promising in this role.<sup>27</sup> In the first place, skilled performances do accord with intelligent

performance criteria. And, second, this is no accident, for a performer's skillfulness implies that she reliably performs that way and reliably exhibits enough of the other regularities that an endeavor's performance criteria describe.<sup>28</sup> A skilled chess player, for example, reliably castles early, controls the center, and avoids pawn islands and, more generally, reliably makes legal moves and avoids illegal ones, complains of opponents' illegal moves but concedes their legal ones, applauds good moves by other players, and so on. Third, skill is ultimately nonintellectual; at bottom, it is a matter of regularly intelligent performance, not of intellectual formulation of criteria for intelligent performance.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, skillful performance demands thoughtful, detailed attention to oneself, others, and the local circumstances – the sort of mindfulness that counts as thinking what one is doing (while one is doing it . . .).<sup>30</sup> Thus, Ryle argues, exercises of practical skills count as mindful but non-intellectual, deliberate but non-deliberative applications of criteria of intelligent practice. Such exercises count, we may say, as *implicit* or *practical* applications of intelligent performance criteria. Know-how, he concludes, just consists in possessing practical skill, and a performance is intelligent in virtue of being an exercise of skill.

$R_1$  next requires that the explanation of possessing a skill doesn't reintroduce explicit deliberation upon performance criteria. To satisfy this demand, Ryle takes a skill to be nothing more than a battery of practical abilities, namely those abilities in virtue of whose mindful exercises a performer reliably exhibits the sort of regularities described by the endeavor's intelligence criteria. In this way, Ryle takes know-how just to consist in ability as *per*  $R_2$ . Finally, he takes the practical abilities constitutive of a skill to be nothing more than complexes of variegated dispositions.<sup>31</sup> The chain of constitutive explanation ends here with what is plausibly a fundamentally nonintellectual posit.

In virtue of its construction, Ryle's theory of know-how purports to permanently suppress intellectualistic regresses and, thence, satisfy  $R_1$ . The theory may fail in its purport, and there may be further adequacy criteria on the explanation of practical intelligence, but the theory that  $R_2$  expresses is at least more interesting and better motivated than consideration of that thesis in isolation might lead one to expect.

## B. PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT

We now can see that Ryle's theory commits him to the propositional contentfulness of know-how and the intelligent performances it explains.<sup>32</sup> That commitment arises in the same way that it arose for intellectualism. Intellectualism, recall (from pp. 6–7), takes intelligent performances to be intentional acts (as understood pre-theoretically). For it explains the intelligence of a performance in terms of the intelligence that is made explicit in

a performance criterion, which the actor explicitly thinks out and intends to follow, and the intellectual procedures of deliberation, grasp, and enactment of the criterion by which she directs her performance, and these procedures, when successful, transfer or impose the criterion's content and, thus, its intelligence onto the performance. Now, Ryle rejects intellectualism, but, as my brief discussion of the construction of his alternate theory was intended to show, he does not reject the explanatory role of explicit (or explicitable) intelligence criteria but only the intellectualist's regressive implementation of it. On Ryle's theory, intelligent performances are just those that result from exercises of practical skills where the explanation of such exercises is constructed precisely so that they count as mindful but nonintellectual applications of intelligence criteria. That is, Ryle eliminates intellectually explicit application of an intelligence criterion, but his theory purports to entitle us to count an exercise of a practical skill as an intelligent performance exactly because it takes the exercise to be an *implicit* or *practical* application of such a criterion. So, a performance that comes about as the result of implicitly or practically applying a criterion describing how intelligently to make it the case (specifically) that *p* thereby acquires the intelligence explicitly formulated in the criterion, and, in just the same way, it acquires the criterion's propositional content becoming an act of bringing it about (specifically) that *p*. But, it has these features implicitly or practically, for it acquires them without the agent articulating the criterion in thought.

For example, Smith, who is a skilled chess player, finds herself in the sort of tactical predicament that such-and-such circumstances (of type *c*, say) comprise, and she skillfully extricates herself by making a thus-and-so move (say, of type *m*). Hers, then, is an intelligent move to make when in those circumstances. So, her move accords with a criterion of intelligent play that could be explicitly articulated in good chess books as a tactical principle – call it '*P*': to escape from *c*-like circumstances make an *m*-like move. On Ryle's theory, that exercise of her skill is a genuine albeit implicit or practical application of *P*. Smith deliberately, intentionally makes a thus-and-so move in order to escape from such-and-such circumstances, but she does so nonintellectually without explicitly formulating, deliberating upon, or intending to follow *P*. Thus, her performance manifests the content of *P* – it is an act of bringing it about (specifically) that she escapes from such-and-such circumstances by making a thus-and-so move – but implicitly, in an unarticulated form. And in this way her move implicitly or practically exhibits the intelligence that *P* makes explicit.

Performances brought about through the deliberate exercise of practical intelligence (as described by Ryle) are just as propositionally contentful (and just as intelligent) as those brought about through the deliberative exercise of theoretical intelligence (as described by intellectualism), for both theories assign the same essential explanatory role to propositional

performance criteria. It's just that on pain of infinite regress the content (and the intelligence) of such performances must be constituted and explained practically or implicitly, which is precisely what Ryle's theory of skilled performance as a fundamentally non-intellectual mode of criterion-application is meant to provide.<sup>33</sup> I conclude that know-how on Ryle's theory has propositional content.

Despite Stanley's and Williamson's insistence (and the agreement of their critics), Ryle's rejection of intellectualism in favor of  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  in no way need be a denial of the contentfulness of know-how.<sup>34</sup> The Rylean issue isn't *possession* of propositional content but the *form* or *mode* in which it is possessed. In accordance with  $R_1$ ,  $R_2$  embodies an acknowledgment that the content of know-how and the performances that manifest it must be implicit or practical.

## 6. *The Rylean strategy*

The central difficulty in developing a theory of the implicit or practical constitution of the content of human actions is to indicate or characterize (non-circularly, non-regressively, and without begging the question) the facts in virtue of which a particular performance has its specific content and to do so without explanatory recourse to explicitly contentful posits. In effect, that is the task that Ryle took on in constructing a theory of know-how grounded on the dispositional facts in virtue of which (he believed) skillfully produced performances implicitly or practically possess the intelligence (and, thus, the contents) explicit in performance criteria. I don't suggest that we accept Ryle's historical theory, for further adequacy criteria on the explanation of contentful performance provide good reasons, beyond the limits of this paper, to reject Ryle's sort of dispositionalism.<sup>35</sup> But the permanent suppression of intellectualistic regress that  $R_1$  requires does not mandate dispositionalism; any fundamentally non-intellectualistic theory would be equally successful in achieving that. So, reasons to reject Ryle's actual theory are not reasons to reject the considerations driving his explanatory strategy.

On the other hand, the carelessness of the contemporary discussion gives ample reason to recapitulate the important themes comprising the Rylean strategy for explaining the role of intelligence in human action. Deliberately, intentionally intelligent performances are often the result of explicit deliberation or intention, but there are just as many cases in which performers neither explicitly deliberate nor articulate their intentions. Nevertheless, such performances occur both on purpose and for a purpose; they are both intended and intentional. They involve, that is, applications of intelligent criteria that explicitly describe the intended performances. However, (1) a characteristic regress opens an explanatory

gap between intellectual deliberation upon an explicitly intelligent criterion and an intellectual intention to follow it (the theoretical form of intelligence) and the intent, deliberateness, and intelligence inarticulately inhering in the subsequent performance (the practical form of intelligence). Therefore, (2) the intent, deliberateness, or intelligence implicit in practice cannot be fundamentally a form of, nor fundamentally explained in terms of, explicitly contentful intention or deliberation (or any other sort of explicitly contentful episode). Thus, (3) contentful intent, deliberateness, and intelligence have two Fundamentally Distinct forms: the explicit and the implicit or practical. (4) The theoretical role of know-how is to bridge this explanatory gap by explaining how explicit intention or deliberation guides and informs subsequently intentional, deliberate action in terms of the know-how, propositionally contentful know-how, for grasping and enacting what is explicitly thought or, more generally, for bringing performance into accord with explicit criteria. To do that in such a way as to avoid the lurking regress, (5) the know-how for translating an explicit articulation into correlative performance must be fundamentally implicit or practical.

These considerations don't sum to a theory of human practice. But they constitute criteria of explanatory adequacy that frame the central issue for that theory: the constitution and explanation of implicit or practical know-how. These Rylean considerations show that all forms of intellectualism are inadequate, and this can be summed up in a negative explanatory thesis that expresses the deeper significance of  $R_1$ : no explicitly contentful posit can fundamentally constitute or explain the content implicit in an attitude, state, performance, or event. When we turn to the explanation of explicit content, the Rylean strategy suggests a positive explanatory thesis: explicit content must be constituted implicitly or practically. (A theory that satisfies the positive thesis automatically satisfies the negative thesis and, thus, suppresses intellectualistic regresses generally.) These two theses express what to my mind was most distinctive and remains most relevant in Ryle's discussion of human intelligence.

I'll mention a few merely illustrative examples. The negative thesis focuses critical attention on theories of performance content that posit maps, diagrams, programs, or languages (or hierarchies of intellectual *homunculi*) in the minds or brains of humans and other animals.<sup>36</sup> Ordinary maps, for example, explicitly articulate their contents. So, if the neural or mental maps that such theories posit are like ordinary maps, then they unleash intellectualistic regress. If, on the other hand, the posit is only a map by analogy, then the theory offers no explanation until the essential similarity is brought to light. Equally, if the posit is supposed to be implicitly contentful, then the theory offers no explanation until it explains how such content is implicit constituted, which is the problem the Rylean strategy highlights.<sup>37</sup> The positive thesis highlights the explanatory

limitation inherent in mental theories of intentionality, which take linguistic meaning to be constituted by the contents of speakers' beliefs and intentions, when these don't provide explanations of fundamentally implicit thought content. Equally for linguistic theories of intentionality, in which the content of a thought is explained in terms of the linguistic meaning of utterances that explicitly express it, the meanings of those utterances then must be constituted and explained implicitly (in terms of their uses, say). If, on the other hand, the meanings of those utterances is explained in terms of the content explicit in some further posit, then the chain of explanation stops either with a posit whose content must then be explained implicitly – that is, it stops prematurely – or with an abstract entity (like a proposition) whose explicit content is not further explainable, or it doesn't stop. (It isn't obvious that either of the last two options provide more understanding than does an infinitely regressive theory.)<sup>38</sup>

Neither explanatory thesis is news, far from it. For different reasons and under different designations, most philosophers interested in these issues adopt both theses. In effect, the Rylean strategy thrives in a wide array of distinctive theories of performance content which traffic in, for example, putatively fine-grained performance dispositions, the nexes of causes (or typical causes, or optimal causes, etc.) that embed performances, the functions that performances fulfill, or the biological evolution of some of those functions. However, the very lack of novelty that all of this active research illustrates shows the pivotal importance of understanding the explanatory role and constitution of implicit or practical content and, so, the continuing relevance of the Rylean strategy. It also shows how little insight into characteristically human modes of thought and practice is to be gained by ignoring or obfuscating that strategy.

### *Conclusion*

Stanley and Williamson conclude their article with the remark I've frequently quoted:

All knowing-how is knowing-that. Neglect of this fact impoverishes our understanding of human action, by obscuring the way in which it is informed by intelligence. (p. 444)

Meant to indict a familiar, old distinction, this is a puzzling charge, for Ryle had no special interest in knowledge (properly so called), and it was exactly because of his more general concern with intelligence and the ways that human acts manifest it that he didn't. More importantly, it is in *pursuing* '... our understanding of human action...' that the Fundamental Distinction arises and structures an insightful explanatory program. Stanley's and Williamson's analysis of ascriptions of knowledge-how, on

the other hand, offers no insight into how to pursue that understanding. To the contrary, they and some of their most respected critics neglect the Fundamental Distinction and the strategy it grounds. And it is '[n]eglect of this fact,' I've argued, that '... impoverishes our understanding of human action' precisely 'by obscuring the way in which it is informed by intelligence.'

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ryle then argued that this ability, in turn, consists in a battery of various dispositions.

<sup>2</sup> I use 'Rylean' rather than 'Ryle's' because I reject Ryle's historical theory and develop features of his discussion that he did not highlight.

<sup>3</sup> I have ignored several details in their reconstruction that will not affect the discussion.

<sup>4</sup> They are not explicit, but I presume that the sense in which they mean that the instructor knows how to perform the stunt is that she knows how it is done, for example that one must keep one's elbows tucked in, push off on the downhill ski, etc.

<sup>5</sup> 'Here are a few of the more determinate adjectives of this family: "clever," "sensible," "careful," "methodical," "inventive," "prudent," "acute," "logical," "witty," "observant," "critical," "experimental," "quick-witted," "cunning," "wise," "judicious," and "scrupulous"' (Ryle, 1949, p. 25). Ryle soon adds (on p. 28) 'correct,' 'efficient,' and 'successful.'

<sup>6</sup> 'The main object of [chapter 2] is to show that there are many activities which directly display qualities of mind, yet are neither themselves intellectual operations nor yet effects of intellectual operations' (Ryle, 1949, p. 26).

<sup>7</sup> Among the dozens of passages in which Ryle speaks of intelligent performance, efficient practice, and the like, there is a small handful like:

When a person is described by one or other of the *intelligence-epithets* . . . , the description imputes to him not the knowledge . . . of this or that truth, but the *ability* . . . *to do certain sorts of things*. Theorists have been so preoccupied with the task of investigating the nature, the source and the credentials of the theories that we adopt that they have for the most part ignored the question what it is for someone to *know how to perform tasks*. (Ryle, 1949, pp. 27–8, my emphases)

The easy way that Ryle transits from 'intelligence-epithets' to 'ability . . . to do certain sorts of things' to 'know how to perform tasks' shows, I think, that the epistemic idiom is only a figure of speech for describing practical intelligence.

<sup>8</sup> This certainly isn't a philosophical theory. It's much too simple. Indeed, it's just a somewhat refined description of what a theory must target.

<sup>9</sup> Among the many passages in which Ryle speaks of intellectual acknowledgments of principles and internal acts of considering propositions, a very few use the epistemic idiom; but, like the beginning of the long passage just cited in the text, these usually provide a clear explication. In the passage cited in note 7, for example, '... knowledge . . . of this or that truth . . .' is immediately paraphrased as '... the theories that we adopt . . .' Similarly, in the lecture of 1945, Ryle contrasts:

... having the . . . *knowledge of* . . . *facts* and knowing how to use or apply it,

but immediately paraphrases this as a contrast between:

... *acknowledging principles in thought* and intelligently applying them in action. (Ryle, 1945–6, p. 8, my emphases)

He does try to make his slide from mere avowing and acknowledging to knowledge less jarring:

When we speak of the intellect, or, better, of the intellectual powers and performances of persons, we are referring primarily to that special class of operations which constitute theorizing. The goal of these operations is the knowledge of true propositions or facts. (Ryle, 1949, p. 26)

<sup>10</sup> ‘According to the [intellectualist] legend, whenever an agent does anything intelligently, his act is preceded and steered by another internal act of considering a regulative proposition appropriate to his practical problem. But what makes him consider the one maxim which is appropriate rather than any of the thousands which are not? Why does the hero not find himself calling to mind a cooking-recipe, or a rule of Formal Logic? Perhaps he does, but then his intellectual process is silly and not sensible. Intelligently reflecting how to act is, among other things, considering what is pertinent and disregarding what is inappropriate. Must we then say that for the hero’s reflections how to act to be intelligent he must first reflect how best to reflect how to act?’ (Ryle, 1949, p. 31).

<sup>11</sup> ‘... [H]ow am I led to make a suitable application of the reason to the particular situation which my action is to meet? For the reason, or maxim, is inevitably a proposition of some generality. It cannot embody specifications to fit every detail of the particular state of affairs. Clearly, once more, I must be sensible and not stupid, and this good sense cannot itself be a product of the intellectual acknowledgement of any general principle. Knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or any other maxims’ (Ryle, 1949, p. 31).

<sup>12</sup> ‘... [T]his reduces to absurdity the theory that for an operation to be intelligent it must be steered by a prior intellectual operation’ (Ryle, 1949, pp. 31–2).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Even where efficient practice is the deliberate application of considered prescriptions, the intelligence involved in putting the prescriptions into practice is not identical with that involved in intellectually grasping the prescriptions’ (Ryle, 1949, p. 49).

<sup>14</sup> For the classical example of this sort of regress argument, see Lewis Carroll, ‘What the Tortoise Said to Achilles’ (Carroll, 1895, pp. 278–80).

<sup>15</sup> More carefully, Ryle’s historical argument relies too heavily on a model of conscious deliberation, but this is incidental. The core of intellectualism is its explanatory role for explicit description, not conscious introspection.

<sup>16</sup> As Ryle put it, ‘... knowledge-how cannot be built up by accumulation of pieces of knowledge-that’ (Ryle, 1945–46, p. 14).

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Ryle’s idiom makes it possible for the sentence ‘knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that’ to express both theses.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth examining the two passages from Ryle in which Stanley and Williamson claim to locate his argument (as they put it) ‘against the thesis that knowing-how is a species of knowing-that’:

... I rely largely on variations of one argument. I argue that the prevailing doctrine leads to vicious regresses, and these in two directions. (1) If the intelligence exhibited in any act, practical or theoretical, is to be credited to the occurrence of some ulterior act of intelligently considering regulative propositions, no intelligent act, practical or otherwise, could ever begin. ... (2) If a deed, to be intelligent, has to be guided by the consideration of a regulative

proposition, the gap between that consideration and the practical application of the regulation has to be bridged by some go-between process which cannot by the presupposed definition itself be an exercise of intelligence and cannot, by definition, be the resultant deed [Ryle, 1945–46, p. 2].

The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this. 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 [1949, p. 30]. (Stanley and Williamson, 2001, pp. 412 f)

As we see, Ryle makes no mention *at all* of any sort of knowledge in these clearly explanatory (and not analytical) remarks. He speaks only about ‘intelligence exhibited in any act’ and ‘any operation . . . intelligently executed,’ on the one hand, and only about ‘consideration of propositions’ on the other.

<sup>19</sup> An attentive referee objects that my conclusion of irrelevance is too strong because it is insensitive to the full breadth of Ryle’s considerations. Summarizing the objection as best I can:

I’ve argued that (as the referee puts it) ‘. . . Ryle is only interested in cases of someone’s knowing how to perform a certain activity in which the person in fact *performs* the activity intelligently.’ But, this seems wrong. In the first place, Ryle claims that ‘knowledge-how’ consists, not in singular abilities, but in complexes of various abilities. (I will discuss this in Part 5A.) To cite just one of many passages that supports the referee’s claim:

You exercise your knowledge how to tie a clove-hitch not only in [*a*] acts of tying clove-hitches and in [*b*] correcting your mistakes, but also in imagining tying them correctly, in [*c*] instructing pupils, in [*d*] criticising the incorrect or clumsy movements and [*e*] applauding the correct movements that they make, in [*f*] inferring from a faulty result to the error which produced it, in [*g*] predicting the outcomes of observed lapses, and so on indefinitely. (Ryle, 1949, p. 55)

In the second place, Ryle considers cases like the ‘. . . good dramatic critic [who is] indifferent as an actor or playwright . . .’ (Ryle, 1949, p. 56) in which the subject possesses critical and correctional expertise ([*c*]-[*g*]) but lacks performance expertise ([*a*]-[*b*]). Such cases show that Ryle (in the referee’s words) ‘. . . allows that knowledge how comes in degrees.’ Therefore, Ryle seems willing to grant that the drama critic and, so, Stanley’s and Williamson’s ski instructor and pianist have (in the referee’s words) ‘. . . some form of knowledge how to *F* even if they do not have the ability to *F*.’

But, this conclusion isn’t accurate. To begin, I haven’t argued that Ryle is ‘. . . only interested in cases of someone’s knowing how to perform a certain activity in which the person *in fact performs* the activity intelligently.’ Rather, I’ve only cited Ryle to show that his is an inquiry into the intelligence manifest in performance, and, as such, it targets the *ability* to perform intelligently (which is just what ‘knowing how’ (from Ryle’s pen) denotes). Thus, it is not surprising that in each of Ryle’s examples (without exception so far as I can see) of someone who ‘knows how’ to perform an action, the complex of abilities the person is thereby taken to possess includes the ability to do that thing. For example:

It should be noted that the boy is not said to know how to play, if all he can do is cite the rules accurately. *He must be able to make the required moves.* (Ryle, 1949, p. 41, my emphasis)

Finally, it is essential to realize that Ryle deploys his example of the dramatic critic in his section (9) – ‘Understanding and Misunderstanding,’ – and, as that title suggests, the subject there under discussion isn’t ‘knowing how’ to perform an action (which includes

the ability to do it intelligently) but 'knowing how' to follow, criticize, and appreciate the performances of others (which, of course, includes abilities to do these things intelligently). Now, Ryle's conclusion in section (9) is that the abilities constitutive of 'knowing how' to perform include the abilities constitutive of 'knowing how' to critically appreciate the performances of others. But, he doesn't assert the converse, that is, when one 'knows how' to follow performances, one thereby 'knows how' to produce them. Thus, Ryle does not defend the claim that '... knowledge how comes in degrees.' (More carefully, Ryle makes no such assertion in the sense that the referee intends. In the summation of section (9), Ryle does append that '... it is proper and normal to speak of a person knowing in part how to do something, i.e. of his having a particular capacity to a limited degree. An ordinary chess player knows the game pretty well but a champion knows it better, and even the champion has still much to learn' (Ryle, 1949, p. 59). But, this last-minute attempt to align his idiomatic usage of epistemic terminology with ordinary usage doesn't enable us to say that the subjects in Stanley's and Williamson's cases 'know how' to do the relevant things 'in part,' for they do not have a '... capacity to a limited degree;' they simply lack the relevant capacities altogether.)

In sum, Ryle's fully-detailed position on Stanley's and Williamson's ski instructor and pianist is that they 'know how' to follow and critically appreciate how others do the stunt and play the instrument even though they do not 'know how' (even to some degree) to do those things.

Thus, I haven't overstated the complaint against Stanley and Williamson then: their counterexamples are irrelevant to  $R_2$ , for that thesis pertains only to know-how, that is, the abilities that explains the intelligence manifest in actual performances.

<sup>20</sup> Still, Rosefeldt's own construal of intellectualism is inaccurate:

... Ryle never *identifies* what he calls the 'intellectualist legend' with the claim that knowledge-how is a kind of knowledge-that. ... Ryle only wants to refute *one* attempt to reduce knowledge-how to knowledge-that. ... It is this attempt which he calls the 'intellectualist legend'. (Rosefeldt, 2004, p. 371, author's emphasis)

Again though, (proper) knowledge has nothing to do with it. As Ryle unepistemically put it in 1945:

The prevailing doctrine holds: (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. ... 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 theorizing. (Ryle, 1945-46, p. 1)

<sup>21</sup> Or better, this is my best attempt to impose constructive steps on a more disorganized, freely flowing discussion in which Ryle often was not as clear as he should have been. Thus, I speak of 'Ryle's theory' in what follows with some historical inaccuracy of stress.

<sup>22</sup> 'What is involved in our descriptions of people as knowing how to make and appreciate jokes, to talk grammatically, to play chess, to fish, or to argue? Part of what is meant is that, when they perform these actions, they tend to perform them well, i.e. correctly or efficiently or successfully. Their performances come up to certain standards, or satisfy certain criteria' (Ryle, 1949, p. 28).

<sup>23</sup> 'A parrot might squawk out "Socrates is mortal" immediately after someone has uttered premises from which the conclusion follows. ... Yet we do not call the parrot "logical" ...' (Ryle, 1949, p. 40).

<sup>24</sup> 'To be intelligent is not merely to satisfy criteria, but to apply them; to regulate one's actions and not merely to be well-regulated. A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if . . . [h]e applies criteria in performing critically . . . ' (Ryle, 1949, pp. 28–9).

<sup>25</sup> ' . . . [W]hatever "applying" may be, it *is* a proper exercise of intelligence and it is *not* a process of considering propositions' (Ryle, 1945–46, p. 3, author's emphases). ' . . . [E]xercises [of knowing how] are . . . the application of criteria, but they are not tandem operations of theoretically avowing maxims and then putting them into practice' (Ryle, 1949, p. 46).

<sup>26</sup> For example, mental states like a neurotic's repressed intention or a sleeper's dispositional belief, even if not themselves explicit episodes, would not count as fundamentally nonintellectual if they were further explained in terms of what one would explicitly intend or believe if one's need for denial were treated or one were awake and appropriately questioned.

<sup>27</sup> Ryle interchangeably refers to 'skills, tastes, and bents,' 'intelligent capacities,' 'competence and skills,' 'abilities and propensities,' and 'aptitudes' (Ryle, 1949, pp. 33, 42, 49).

<sup>28</sup> 'We observe, for example, a soldier scoring a bull's eye. Was it luck or was it skill? If he has the skill, then he can get on or near the bull's eye again, even if the wind strengthens, the range alters and the target moves. Or if his second shot is an outer, his third, fourth and fifth shots will probably creep nearer and nearer to the bull's eye. . . . [W]e . . . take into account more than this one success [but also] . . . his subsequent shots [and] his past record . . . ' (Ryle, 1949, p. 45).

<sup>29</sup> ' . . . [T]he boy is not said to know how to play, if all that he can do is to recite the rules accurately. He must be able to make the required moves. But he is said to know how to play if, although he cannot cite the rules, he normally does make the permitted moves, avoid the forbidden moves and protest if his opponent makes forbidden moves' (Ryle, 1949, p. 41).

<sup>30</sup> 'A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth . . . in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right' (Ryle, 1949, pp. 28–29). ' . . . [G]ood marksmanship is . . . [having] the skills, and . . . us[ing] them by making [a] shot with care, self-control, [and] attention to the conditions . . . ' (Ryle, 1949, p. 45).

<sup>31</sup> Just as the skilled chess player reliably castles early, controls the center, *and so on*, the relevant dispositions are, ' . . . in general, not single-track dispositions, but dispositions the exercise of which are indefinitely heterogeneous . . . [and] . . . admitting of a wide variety of more or less dissimilar exercises' (Ryle, 1949, pp. 44, 56).

<sup>32</sup> I don't say that Ryle would defend, or even espouse, this conclusion. (After all, Ryle was part of a generation of philosophers who rejected philosophical concepts of content and intentionality. Indeed, such concepts seem to be part of what Ryle dismisses with his sustained attack on the 'dogma of the ghost in the machine.')

Still, I do say that this conclusion can be drawn from Ryle's theory of know-how.

<sup>33</sup> Similar remarks can be made to apply to Ryle's notion of a skill, the batteries of abilities constitutive of skills, and the disposition-complexes that comprise such batteries.

<sup>34</sup> Indeed, if we grant that all cases of know-how are cases of (proper) knowledge-how, then nothing prevents the Rylean from complete agreement with Stanley's and Williamson's analysis: to assert, 'Smith knows how to escape from such-and-such circumstances' is to assert (*inter alia*) that Smith knows that moving thus-and-so is a way to escape from such-and-such circumstances.

<sup>35</sup> To mention just one, many studies in the rich literature on the (so-called) rule-following problem, which began with Kripke's study on Wittgenstein (Kripke, 1982) and proliferates under descriptions like 'the problem of misrepresentation' (Dretske, 1986), 'the disjunction problem' (Fodor, 1990), 'the Kripke-Wittgenstein problem' (Millikan, 1990), and sometimes 'the normativity of meaning' (many authors), conclude that dispositional theories of perfor-

mance content are neither sufficiently specific nor precise, for the performance dispositions posited by these theories convey onto disposed performances putative contents that are generic, ambiguous, or inaccurate. (Or, some of these theories strive to achieve the requisite fineness of grain through characterizations of their posited dispositions that further analysis reveals to be circular or question-begging.) Ryle's elliptical characterization (in endnote 31) of '... dispositions the exercise of which are indefinitely heterogeneous ... [and] ... admitting of a wide variety of more or less dissimilar exercises' highlights this problem.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Fodor, 1968 and Stalnaker, 1984. For nonhuman animals, see for example Hauser, 2000; Allen and Bekoff, 1997; and Cheney and Seyfarth, 1990.

<sup>37</sup> Similar remarks apply to theories invoking radical interpretation. See for example Dennett, 1971. (For an informative discussion, see Brandom, 1994.)

<sup>38</sup> Obviously, these remarks merely indicate general sorts of difficulty. Further development may avert them, but only if theorists appreciate the nature of the threats.

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