

# Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy

Volume 5, Number 5

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## Ryle on the Explanatory Role of Knowledge How Will Small

Contemporary discussions of knowledge how typically focus on the question whether or not knowing how to do  $\phi$  consists in propositional knowledge, and divide the field between intellectualists (who think that it does) and anti-intellectualists (who think that it does not, and that it consists instead in the possession of the ability to  $\phi$ ). This way of framing the issue is said to derive from Gilbert Ryle. I argue that this is a misreading of Ryle, whose primary interest in discussing knowledge how was not epistemological but rather action-theoretical, whose argument against intellectualism has for this reason been misunderstood and underestimated (by Jason Stanley, among others), and whose positive view aims to chart a middle course between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism.

*Special Issue: Gilbert Ryle: Intelligence, Practice, Skill*  
Edited by Juliet Floyd and Lydia Patton

# Ryle on the Explanatory Role of Knowledge How

Will Small

*... whatever 'applying' [rules or criteria, etc.] may be, it is a proper exercise of intelligence and it is not a process of considering propositions.*

–Gilbert Ryle (1946a, 224)

## 1. Introduction

What it is to know how to do something, and what it is to exercise such knowledge in action, are topics that have recently been much discussed. The contemporary debate is typically organized around a dispute between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. This way of framing things is typically traced to Gilbert Ryle, who, in summing up his argument against what he called “the intellectualist legend”, said that “‘Intelligent’ cannot be defined in terms of ‘intellectual’ or ‘knowing how’ in terms of ‘knowing that’ ” (1949, 20). As the contemporary debate sets things up, intellectualism about knowledge how is the view that to know how to do something is to know a proposition, and Ryle, in the landmark discussions that gave currency (in analytic philosophy) to this allegedly distinctive species of knowledge (1946a; 1949, chap. 2), rejected this view; he is thus identified by recent commentators as the paradigm anti-intellectualist.

I will argue that this way of framing the debate is mistaken. There is more than one way to reject intellectualism: there are different reasons for rejecting the claim that to know how to do something is to have a piece of propositional knowledge, and different positive views of what it is to know how to do something if it is not, or not simply, to have some propositional knowledge. A careful reading of Ryle reveals that his discus-

sion is critical not only of intellectualism, but also of a view for which the name “anti-intellectualism” seems apt. (Ryle does not use the term “anti-intellectualism” at all.) The contemporary debate’s failure to recognize that there are three positions in play in Ryle’s discussion (the two he is criticizing and his own favoured alternative) has led both Ryle’s positive view and his criticism of intellectualism to be misunderstood and underestimated. I suspect that this failure is due in part to a tendency to approach knowledge how solely or at least primarily as a topic in epistemology, while neglecting its place in the philosophy of action—and, moreover, to read this approach back into Ryle. If I am right, Ryle’s topic, his criticism of intellectualism, and his positive view have all been misunderstood. Ryle’s aim is to give an adequate account of the intelligence of intelligent action. He thinks we explain the intelligence of an agent’s intelligent actions in terms of her knowledge how to do what she does: the challenge—which Ryle thinks neither intellectualism nor anti-intellectualism meets—is to provide an account of knowledge how that can play this explanatory role.

In §2, I will sketch a reading of the place of Ryle’s argument against intellectualism in the context of his wider project in *The Concept of Mind*. This reading reveals that the question of whether knowing how to do something is propositional knowledge could not have been Ryle’s primary concern. I will then, in §3, provide an interpretation of Ryle’s argument against intellectualism that shows what goes wrong in Jason Stanley’s recent attempt to defuse it by distinguishing between two forms of intellectualism. Stanley (correctly) thinks that Ryle makes a genuine problem for a form of intellectualism—one that Stanley deems idiosyncratic and inadequately motivated—but he (incorrectly) thinks that his “reasonable” intellectualism is left untouched by Ryle’s argument. Finally, in §4 I will explain why it is a mistake to characterize Ryle as an anti-intellectualist, and why his positive view promises a middle path between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism.

## 2. Knowledge How and Philosophy of Action in *The Concept of Mind*

The contemporary debate about knowledge how has focused primarily on a question that is, on the face of it, straightforwardly epistemological: whether or not knowing how to do something is propositional knowledge. Ryle is regarded as the contemporary originator of the thesis that it is not. Arguing for this thesis is assumed to be Ryle's primary goal in the second chapter of *The Concept of Mind* (Ryle 1949; hereafter, *CM*) and in his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society (Ryle 1946a), which are both called "Knowing How and Knowing That". But when epistemologists look at these texts to evaluate Ryle's arguments for his thesis, they are often frustrated:

[T]here is little agreement over not only the status but also the very structure of the best version of a regress argument against intellectualism. Part of the problem is that Ryle's own regress argument is not an argument against the view that knowledge-how is a kind of knowledge-that. Rather, the target of Ryle's argument is what he called *the intellectualist legend*—which is a view about the nature of intelligent actions, not knowledge-how. (Cath 2013, 358–59)

Ryle's argument that knowing how is not a species of knowing that is indirect. The principal target of the argument is the intellectualist view of what it is for an action to have an intelligence property . . . . [I]t is supposed to follow from the falsity of this conception of intelligent action that knowing-how cannot be defined in terms of knowing-that . . . . (Stanley 2011a, 12)

The target of Ryle's arguments is not the claim that one knows how to  $\phi$  just in case one possesses some piece or pieces of propositional knowledge; it is something he calls "the intellectualist legend", which is a view about what makes it the case that human action can be evaluated as intelligent or unintelligent. Cath and Stanley thus suppose that Ryle argues against the intellectualist legend in order to show that intellectualism

(understood as the claim that knowing how is knowing that) is false. They think that he fails in this endeavour because intellectualism is merely compatible with, but does not entail, the legendary conception of what it takes to exercise or manifest knowledge how in skilled or intelligent action.

My goal in this section is to show that this interpretation of Ryle's aim in arguing against the intellectualist legend is mistaken: the central issue for Ryle is not whether knowledge how to  $\phi$  has propositional or non-propositional content. In order to show this, I will recast Ryle's famous discussion of "knowing how and knowing that" in the broader context of his argument in *CM*. Though the focus of the contemporary debate on whether or not knowledge how is propositional knowledge is explicable given Ryle's presentation, this focus is unfortunate: it threatens to obscure the deeper questions that were his real concern—how human behaviour comes to be invested with those "qualities of mind" that are markers of intelligence—and to give the impression that the topic is merely an epistemological curiosity. The usual interpretive practice is to take the title-sharing chapter and essay as a unit to be examined in isolation (or perhaps against the backdrop of Ryle's alleged commitment to behaviourism). But in fact the second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters of *CM* form a unity, and their central topic is not anything particularly epistemological. Indeed, their topic is not even so much what passes by contemporary standards as philosophy of mind; it is, rather, philosophy of action. Getting a proper understanding of how these chapters relate to each other will facilitate a proper understanding of Ryle's aims and arguments in his discussions under the heading "Knowing How and Knowing That".

### 2.1. Causalism and dispositionalism

Human action characteristically displays intelligence, and when it doesn't, it is often subject to criticism; it is such as to be evaluated or assessed, and praised or criticized, for its intelligence.

Human action is also characteristically intentional and voluntary, though some of it is unintentional and/or involuntary; these characteristics open up another dimension along which we praise, blame, and excuse agents.<sup>1</sup> And human action is characteristically done from motives, or for reasons; this opens up a third dimension of evaluation and criticism of those reasons and motives as good or bad. These three aspects of human action and their corresponding dimensions of evaluation interact, but they exhibit a certain degree of independence: intelligent or skillful actions may be performed from bad motives, intentional actions may be stupid, and so on.

What it is for an action to display intelligence, to be intentional or voluntary, and to be done from a motive (or “for a reason”, on one natural construal of that expression) are the central topics of the second, third, and fourth chapters of *CM* respectively. Ryle’s primary goal in each chapter is to create difficulties for the suggestion that in each case the explanation will consist in identifying an inner, “mental” cause of a mechanical bodily movement that is intrinsically unfit to receive “mental” predicates. (In the book’s first chapter, Ryle provided an overview of his overall target, “Descartes’ Myth,” according to which, as he put it “with deliberate abusiveness,” a human being’s mind and body are related as “the Ghost in the Machine”, *CM* 5.) Thus he argues that *intelligent* action is not bodily movement caused by an *intellectual operation* in virtue of which the bodily movement is credited, derivatively, with intelligence (*CM* chap. 2); that *voluntary* action is not bodily movement caused by a *volition* in virtue of which the bodily movement is deemed to be something the agent does, rather than something that happens to him, or something he does at will, rather than against his will or without his will’s involvement (*CM* chap. 3); and that “to explain an action as done from a specified motive or inclination is

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<sup>1</sup>Or rather, at least one such dimension: see Hyman (2015) for the claim that voluntariness is, whereas intentionality is not, an ethical concept.

not to describe the action as the effect of a specified cause” (*CM* chap. 4, p. 97). Evidently he sees his treatment of the operations of each of what he takes to be the traditional three parts of the mind or soul—“Thought, Feeling and Will” (*CM* 50)—as of a piece, writing, for instance, that “the doctrine of volitions is a causal hypothesis, adopted because it was wrongly supposed that the question, ‘What makes a bodily movement voluntary?’ was a causal question. This supposition is, in fact, only a special twist of the general supposition that the question, ‘How are mental-conduct concepts applicable to human behaviour?’ is a question about the causation of that behaviour” (*CM* 54).

The central target, then, of Ryle’s discussion in the second, third, and fourth chapters of *CM* taken together is the view that to credit some piece of behaviour with displaying qualities of mind we must appeal to inner mental causes of it. I will call this general view *causalism*. With respect to each aspect of human agency Ryle argues against causalism and seeks to defend a *dispositionalist* alternative: in each case (intelligence, voluntariness, motives/reasons) he suggests that instead of looking for *causes* of behaviour in virtue of which their effect—the behaviour, some bodily movement—is an intelligent, voluntary action performed from a motive, we should view actions as the manifestations of “multi-track dispositions”.

Crucially, however, there is a running concern throughout Ryle’s discussions of intelligence, the will, and motives/reasons: namely, that his proposed revision in the form of explanation employed with respect to behaviour displaying “qualities of mind”—replacing “infer[ence] to occult causes” with “subsum[ption] under hypothetical and semi-hypothetical propositions” (*CM* 38)—will make it impossible to distinguish the rational, intelligent, self-determined exercises of agency that are his quarry from the “blind” and “automatic” manifestations of “pure habit” that can resemble the actualizations of the dispositions of non-rational creatures and things. For this reason, Ryle

at various points provides indications of the differences between different kinds of dispositions, and he frequently introduces the idea of an agent's doing something "thinking or heeding what he was doing" as a characteristic feature of the exercise of a skill or competence that distinguishes it from the manifestations of a "pure habit"; these distinctions and this all-important idea are explicitly thematized and further pursued in the fifth chapter of *CM*. In each case, Ryle aims to undermine causalism and offer a dispositional alternative—without, however, lapsing into a merely mechanical, animal, or sub- or non-rational dispositional explanation of the relevant aspects of human action.

## 2.2. Causalism and the intellectualist legend

What is at issue in both of Ryle's discussions under the title "Knowing How and Knowing That" (1946a; *CM* chap. 2) is *causalism about the intelligence of intelligent behaviour*.<sup>2</sup> (As we have seen, qualities of intelligence do not exhaust qualities of mind.) Here is a generic statement of causalism about intelligence: a piece of intelligent behaviour inherits its title from the intelligence of a mental cause; in itself, the behaviour is intrinsically dumb.<sup>3</sup> A piece of behaviour, on this view, is never intrinsically intelligent; if it is intelligent, it is so in virtue of being caused by

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<sup>2</sup>Perhaps more precisely, it is causalism about the intelligence of intelligent action, for it is a view not only about "outer" or "bodily" action but about "inner" or "mental" action too. Ryle's discussion in *CM*, occurring as it does in the context of problematizing the "Cartesian" conception of the relation between mind and body, focuses more on the intelligence of bodily action, or "behaviour".

<sup>3</sup>Not stupid, but, as it were, "a-intelligent": intelligence predicates, whether positive or negative, get a grip on behaviour only in virtue of its being caused by something to which they originally and non-derivatively apply—namely, a mental state or operation. A bodily movement, according to the causalist, is—like Pluto's orbit—intrinsically neither intelligent nor unintelligent.

something mental that possesses intrinsic intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

However, Ryle's actual target—the intellectualist legend—is a more specific version of causalism about intelligence, which involves a number of further commitments. For our purposes, the crucial further claims are (i) that intelligence is the work of "the Intellect", the fundamental acts of which are intellectual or theoretical operations and activities; and (ii) that intellectual operations and activities aim at and paradigmatically involve "knowledge of true propositions or facts" (*CM* 15).

Ryle describes himself as aiming "not to deny or depreciate the value of intellectual operations, but only to deny that the execution of intelligent performances entails the additional execution of intellectual operations" (*CM* 36). His goal is to replace a conception on which intellectual or theoretical activity is the home of intelligence, from which it enters into practical activity only derivatively, with one on which, as he puts it in the essay, "intelligence is directly exercised as well in some practical performances as in some theoretical [i.e. intellectual] performances" (1946a, 223).

However, Ryle's presentation sometimes runs together two related but distinguishable criticisms that he makes of the view he opposes: his criticism of the idea that to credit some act with

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<sup>4</sup>John Bengson and Marc Moffett "believe that one of Ryle's most important contributions was to uncover a general, theoretically significant fault line in the theory of knowledge, mind, and action, to which these terms ['intellectualist' and 'anti-intellectualist'] helpfully—and quite naturally—apply. The core contention of the intellectualist side of this line is that states of Intelligence and exercises thereof are at least partially grounded in propositional attitudes. The core contention of the anti-intellectualist side, by contrast, is that states of Intelligence and exercises thereof are grounded in powers (abilities or dispositions to behavior), not in propositional attitudes" (2011b, 18). But the issue is not, in the first instance, whether the qualities of mind displayed by human behaviour are "grounded in propositional attitudes"; it is rather whether to adopt a causal account, on which intrinsically unintelligent behaviour "inherits" qualities of mind from states or acts of mind (whether propositional or not). Moreover, the "theoretically significant fault line" that Ryle identifies goes beyond the explanation of the *intelligence* of behaviour (see §2.1).

displaying qualities of mind we must appeal to an inner mental cause, and his criticism of the idea that the fundamental mental activity consists in the apprehension of truths. The point of distinguishing the commitments that constitute the intellectualist legend as a determinate form of causalism about intelligence is to make it clear what Ryle must think his arguments against it need to show, and what form his alternative, which is supposed to emerge from the wreckage, is supposed to take. For example, we already have enough to see that Stanley misinterprets Ryle in an important way. Stanley writes:

According to Gilbert Ryle, . . . knowing how is a distinctive kind of non-propositional mental state . . . (Stanley 2011b, 207)

The [intellectualist] view must be formulated so that its falsity allows Ryle to conclude that intelligent action is a matter of being guided by a non-propositional state of knowing how. (Stanley 2011a, 12)

Because Stanley fails to see that Ryle's "discussion of knowing how" is part of a larger project in what would now be called the philosophy of action, he ends up ascribing to Ryle a position that falls squarely within Ryle's more general target of causalism about intelligence. To see this, suppose that "knowing how is a distinctive kind of non-propositional mental state", and that a piece of behaviour is intelligent (is such as to be evaluated for its intelligence or lack thereof) just in case it is appropriately caused (and, let us say, guided) by this non-propositional mental state. Such a position would maintain the distinction between knowledge how and knowledge that that the contemporary debate typically represents as the all-important issue for Ryle, but it would evidently be a form of causalism about intelligence. Thus the question whether knowledge how is propositional or not cannot be the essential issue, even for Ryle—his titles and slogans notwithstanding.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the essential task is to provide an adequate account of the intelligence of intelligent action.

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, earlier readers of Ryle seem not to have taken the title "Knowing

### 3. Ryle's Argument Against Intellectualism

#### 3.1. "Reasonable" intellectualism

According to Ryle, 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. (CM 19)

Stanley (2011a, 13–14) apparently concedes that "the consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid". But he denies that intellectualism requires that "for any operation to

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How and Knowing That" to give a good indication of the topic of chapter 2 of CM: J. L. Austin, in his review of the book, says, after giving an overview of its first chapter, that Ryle "proceeds to deal in successive chapters with Intelligence, Will, Emotion, Self-Knowledge, Sensation, Imagination and Intellect. In the middle (for no very apparent reason) is a chapter in which he expounds some of his principal techniques, more particularly the logic of 'dispositional' words and of 'achievement' words; and a concluding chapter discusses the roles, actual, possible and impossible, of psychology" (1950, 46). And Anthony Kenny writes in the preface of his book *The Metaphysics of Mind* that its "structure . . . is modeled on that of *The Concept of Mind*, and the ten chapters of which it consists divide the field of discussion in almost exactly the same way as the ten chapters which Ryle published in 1949. . . . Ryle's second chapter was entitled "Knowing That and Knowing How". The distinction between these two types of knowledge has, unlike some of Ryle's other distinctions, become a philosophical commonplace; and the chapter of *The Concept of Mind* in any case ranged more widely than its title suggested. I have, accordingly, retitled my second chapter 'Body, Soul, Mind, and Spirit' " (1989, vi–vii). More recently, Greg Sax claims that "the Fundamental Distinction between (what [Ryle] 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" (2010, 508).

be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently". He writes: "The reasonable intellectualist about intelligent action will hold that an action is intelligent in virtue of being guided by propositional knowledge, but deny that this entails that intelligent action requires a prior act of self-avowing the propositional knowledge that guides one's action" (2011a, 14).<sup>6</sup> Only an *unreasonable* intellectualist would actually claim that a prior theoretical operation is required for propositional knowledge of how to do something to put into practice. This kind of intellectualist—one who subscribes to the intellectualist legend—does indeed face a vicious regress. But to reject intellectualism for this reason would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater, Stanley thinks: Ryle's argument shows only that a certain theory of what it takes to exercise or manifest propositional knowledge how is untenable; so long as an alternative can be found that avoids the regress, intellectualism can be maintained.

By Stanley's lights, Ryle's disregard of *reasonable* intellectualism is unjust, because he (Ryle) evidently supposes that knowledge how as he (Ryle) conceives of it, can be put into practice without any prior theoretical operation. Stanley makes the point by appeal to an often-quoted passage from Carl Ginet:

... all that [Ryle] actually brings out, as far as I can see, is that the exercise (or manifestation) of one's knowledge of how to do a certain sort of thing need not, and often does not, involve any separate mental operation of considering propositions and inferring from them instructions to oneself. But the same thing is as clearly true of one's manifestations of *knowledge that* certain propositions are true, especially one's knowledge of truths that answer questions of the form 'How can one . . . ?' or 'How should one . . . ?' I exercise (or

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<sup>6</sup>It is worth contrasting the regress argument attributed to Ryle by Stanley (2011a), which targets the intellectualist legend's conception of the intelligence of intelligent behaviour, with that attributed to him by Stanley and Williamson (2001), which seeks to establish directly that knowing how is distinct from knowing that.

manifest) my knowledge *that* one can get the door open by turning the knob and pushing it (as well as my knowledge *that* there is a door there) by performing that operation quite automatically as I leave the room; and I may do this, of course, without formulating (in my mind or out loud) that proposition or any other relevant proposition. (Ginet 1975, 7)

I take it that no one would deny Ginet's claim that it is possible to act on one's propositional knowledge that one can get the door open by turning the knob and pushing it without contemplating, formulating, considering, or self-avowing the proposition—or performing any other theoretical operation on or with it. We put such knowledge into practice all the time. But, as is so often the case in philosophy, our question is not whether it is actually the case that we do this, but how it is possible that we do it. More precisely, Ryle's intellectualist had promised an account of what makes some piece of behaviour—someone's opening a door, let it be—such that intelligence predicates apply to it. What makes someone's opening the door by turning the knob and pushing it intelligent (if it was) or stupid (if it was)?

### 3.2. Ryle's challenge: the selection and execution of means

An agent may know, of many different ways of opening the door, that they are ways in which she could open it. She may know that she could open it by turning the knob and pushing it with her left hand, or by doing the same with her right. She may know that she could open it by lunging at the knob with her knee in an effort to drag it around, or by kicking it hard near the knob, or by pressing the button next to the door, or on the remote control, or by ordering a subordinate to open it, or by letting an admirer know she'd like it to be open, or . . . , or . . . . Her opening it in one of these ways rather than another might earn her deed different intelligence epithets. (Ryle, *CM* 19: "what makes [the agent] consider the one maxim which is appropriate

rather than any of the thousands which are not?”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, suppose she made an intelligent *selection* from her stock of door-opening knowledge: still, her *execution* of her selected means can be assessed for *its* intelligence. Someone who knew that she could get the door open by turning the knob and pushing it (with her right hand), but who didn’t know her own strength, might twist the knob so hard she ripped it off and pushed the door so hard she tore it off its hinges. This would be a stupid thing to have done, even though it was more intelligent to try to open the door by turning the knob and pushing than by kicking it open. (Ryle, *CM* 20: “how am I led to make a suitable application of the reason to the particular situation which my action is to meet?”)

To put these points more abstractly: Someone who wants to do *D* may know that she can do *D* by doing *A*, or by doing *B*, or by doing *C*. She must decide which means to take, and her selection may be rational, irrational, intelligent, stupid, judicious, injudicious. . . . Suppose she decides to do *A*. Still, *do A* is an action form or type that can be instantiated on different occasions by different concrete actions. In doing *A*, the agent realizes the action form, and if she succeeds in doing *A*, there is a token action of that form: an event that was a doing of *A*, by her, at a certain place and time, that took a certain length of time, and that had various (other) accidental properties. The concrete action and the process of realizing it—the agent’s execution of the way of getting what she wanted that she selected—are also

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<sup>7</sup>On the problems attending the intelligent selection among known facts of those on which to act, cf. Dreyfus (1992): “Open-structured problems, unlike games and tests, raise three sorts of difficulties: one must determine which facts are possibly relevant; which are actually relevant; and, among these, which are essential and which inessential. . . . What counts as essential depends on what counts as inessential and vice versa, and the distinction cannot be decided in advance, independently of some particular problem, or some particular stage of some particular game. . . . This situational character of relevance works both ways: In any particular situation an indefinite number of facts are possibly relevant and an indefinitely large number are irrelevant” (257–58).

assessable in terms of intelligence concepts. As I understand Ryle, he charges the intellectualist with the following explanatory burden: to account for the intelligence of the *selection* and *execution* of a particular piece of actionable propositional knowledge. These are the two “salient points at which this regress would arise” that Ryle immediately goes on to discuss after presenting his “crucial objection to the intellectualist legend” (*CM* 19), and they correspond to the “two directions” that the “vicious regresses” led to by “the prevailing doctrine” of the intelligence of intelligent activities are said to take in his Presidential Address (Ryle 1946a, 223).

### 3.3. Reasonable intellectualism does not meet Ryle’s challenge

In my view, Stanley’s reasonable intellectualism does not meet Ryle’s challenge to explain the intelligence of the intelligent selection and execution of means. According to Stanley, practical knowledge how to do things consists in knowledge of a “special kind of facts” (Stanley 2011a, viii): an expert’s knowledge how to  $\phi$  (the knowledge she manifests in skillfully  $\phi$ -ing) consists in her knowing, of some way  $w$  of  $\phi$ -ing, that  $w$  is a way in which she herself can or could  $\phi$ —that it is a way for her “to achieve counterfactual success at  $\phi$ -ing” (2011a, 129)—where she is able to think of  $w$  under a “practical mode of presentation”. To be sure, this account has the resources to explain certain aspects of the intelligence of actions. For instance, an agent might falsely believe that  $w$  is a way that provides her with counterfactual success at  $\phi$ -ing and yet nevertheless successfully  $\phi$  in way  $w$  on this occasion. Presumably her  $\phi$ -ing would be deemed lucky, not skillful, as it also would if she had believed truly but without justification that  $w$  is a way that provides her with counterfac-



tual success at  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not an agent's beliefs about how she can or could  $\phi$  are true, and whether or not (and to what degree) they are justified provide dimensions along which Stanley can explain the intelligence of intelligent actions. But Ryle's point is that there is more to explain than this: the fact that an agent believes truly and with justification that some way  $w_1$  is a way that provides her with counterfactual success at  $\phi$ -ing cannot explain either (i) the intelligence of her selection of  $w_1$  from among the ways of which she knows that they bring her counterfactual success at  $\phi$ -ing or (ii) the intelligence of the details of her  $\phi$ -ing in that particular way. To see this, it helps to think about how to individuate the ways of  $\phi$ -ing to which Stanley's account appeals.

Suppose ways are individuated so finely that there could be no question of intelligence being involved in their execution. This would, of course, put more weight on the task of explaining the intelligence of the selection of the proposition, say, *that  $w_7$  is a way for the agent to  $\phi$*  from the agent's stock of propositional knowledge about how she can  $\phi$ . Knowledge of the proposition *that  $w_7$  is a way for her to  $\phi$*  doesn't suffice to explain the intelligence of  $\phi$ -ing in way  $w_7$  rather than in way  $w_{13}$  (of which she also knows that it is a way for her to  $\phi$ )—yet it might be that, in these particular circumstances,  $\phi$ -ing in way  $w_7$  was just what was called for, whereas  $\phi$ -ing in way  $w_{13}$  wouldn't have been nearly as good.

If ways of  $\phi$ -ing are individuated more coarsely, on the other hand, the explanatory burden shifts back to the intelligence of execution: of, as it were, the particular way in which the agent  $\phi$ s in way  $w$ .<sup>9</sup> But the proposition concerning a way of  $\phi$ -ing

<sup>8</sup>Stanley conceives of the epistemic significance of practising a skill in terms of an agent's acquiring greater inductive evidence for the truth of such propositions as (as she would put it, while thinking of the ways of  $\phi$ -ing under practical modes of presentation) " $w_1$  is a way for me to  $\phi$ ", " $w_2$  is a way for me to  $\phi$ ", and so on (2012, 764).

<sup>9</sup>On these difficulties for an account of the individuation of the ways of  $\phi$ -ing that Stanley's account calls for, see Fridland (2012).

will necessarily be general ( $\phi$  is an action form or type,  $w$  is a property that is instantiated by token actions), whereas the action that manifests it will necessarily be completely specific (as a concrete, fully determinate token action). Assuming that (some aspects of) the action's intelligence might be due to (some aspects of) its specificity, there is no proposition knowledge of which could completely account for the intelligence of an action that manifested it. On the face of it, it seems implausible to insist that no aspect of the action's intelligence could reside in a feature of it that is more specific than that which figures in the specification of the way of  $\phi$ -ing of which the agent's knowledge how (as it is conceived of by Stanley) is knowledge.<sup>10</sup> But even if an intellectualist tried to bite that bullet, it would only serve to push the problem back to the intelligence of selection.

Therefore, knowledge how, as Stanley conceives of it, cannot completely explain the intelligence of its manifestation. But Stanley does not think the knowledge manifests itself. He thinks that automatic mechanisms are required to bring behaviour into conformity with knowledge how. An expert's skill or expertise, Stanley says, "consists not just in the possession of [a] large body of propositional knowledge [about ways that will give her counterfactual success in doing the thing in question], but also in the fact that the automatic mechanisms responsible for applying standing epistemic states of an agent are well-aligned to her propositional knowledge about [the activity]" (2011a, 185). I

<sup>10</sup>Some might think that appealing to practical modes of presentation could help Stanley at this point, but I doubt it. According to Stanley, one might express what one knows, when one knows how to  $\phi$ , by giving a practical demonstration of the way of  $\phi$ -ing one's knowledge is knowledge of. But the device of "creative ostension", as it were, that expresses the practical mode of presentation with which one thinks of that way of  $\phi$ -ing, does not and cannot latch onto the full determinacy of the concrete action that exemplifies the way known. For one thing, the knowledge is supposed to figure in the action's causal history. Therefore, the concrete action itself, or its properties, considered *as* its, cannot figure in the knowledge, which, by hypothesis, existed when the concrete action did not (and so could not be thought about).

will not broach the question of whether postulating these mechanisms can in fact account for the flexibility and control displayed by skilled action.<sup>11</sup> It will be sufficient to show that the account precludes the details of a skilled movement from counting as *intelligent*.

According to Stanley's reasonable intellectualism, the manifestation of knowledge that *w* is a way to  $\phi$  in skillfully  $\phi$ -ing in way *w* is not an intelligent process at all, but rather an automatic, mechanical one. When Stanley and John Krakauer say that "skills are composite states, requiring both increasing knowledge of required actions, and practice-related improvement in the selection and acuity of these actions" (2013, 10), they discharge the tasks of selection and execution ("acuity") to non-rational, bodily ("motor") systems. Stanley repeatedly speaks of skilled action as "guided by" propositional knowledge, of the former as being "under the direction" of the latter. But what do these metaphors amount to? As Ellen Fridland notes, "[Stanley and Krakauer] do not even gesture towards an explanation of how knowing various propositions will govern the execution or implementation of those propositions in a nuanced, detailed, particular, controlled way" (2014, 2739; the same goes for Stanley's other writings).

It is true that the image of an agent and/or her mental states "guiding" her bodily movements is frequently used in the philosophy of action. And it is also true that if an agent guides her actions, her guidance cannot itself be an action: "Otherwise," as Harry Frankfurt put it in an early discussion of the idea, "action could not be conceived, upon pain of generating an infinite regress, as a matter of the occurrence of movements which are under an agent's guidance" (1978, 74). But Frankfurt also noted that not all guided movements are the actions of some agent, let alone of some human agent. He gave pupil dilation in fading light as an example of a purposive movement guided by mecha-

nisms that does not amount to any agent's doing anything. The agent's pupils dilate; but, Frankfurt said, "he does not dilate them . . . because the course of the movement is not under *his* guidance. The guidance in this case is attributable only to the operation of some mechanism with which he cannot be identified" (73). If the movement's guidance is something that *happens to or within* the agent, it will not amount to "his" guidance, and so the movement guided will not amount to action; but if the movement's guidance is something that the agent *does*, a regress threatens. As far as I am aware, neither Frankfurt nor anyone else has actually unpacked the metaphor of guidance so as to navigate between these unacceptable alternatives.<sup>12</sup>

Thus we can see that the supposedly unreasonable form of intellectualism Ryle criticized was motivated after all. Its prior theoretical operations, though regress-inducing, were at least imputable to the agent, and thus she could be credited with (or blamed for) the intelligence (or lack thereof) manifested by the behaviour they were supposed to be able to cause. In postulating these operations, Ryle was not foisting a "manifestly absurd" (Stanley 2011a, 14) phenomenological claim about the exercise of propositional knowledge on his opponents.<sup>13</sup> Rather, he was using his opponents' own commitments to assemble an

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<sup>12</sup>Frankfurt's (1978) discussion frequently slides back and forth between the requirement that what makes some movement an action must be *intrinsic* to it, and the (weaker) requirement that it must not be *temporally prior* to it. His appeal to guidance by "causal mechanisms" as the distinctive feature ensures that he satisfies the latter requirement, but I do not see how it satisfies the former (which is what his criticism of "the causal approach" to "the problem of action" establishes, if it establishes anything); even if it did, it is far from clear that the causal mechanisms he has in mind *can* be "identified" with the agent herself.

<sup>13</sup>Nor is it the case that Ryle's focus on the intellectualist legend while ignoring reasonable intellectualism is a consequence of a bizarre attachment of his own to a conception of propositional knowledge as something that can be employed only if one knows how to employ propositional knowledge (cf. Cath 2013, 371ff.).

<sup>11</sup>Though see Fridland (2014) for an argument that it cannot.

explanation of what he (Ryle) challenges them to explain: the intelligence manifested in the agent's selection and execution of the particular piece of propositional knowledge her action manifests, and the possibility of crediting that intelligence to the agent herself. (Ryle's intellectualist, recall, thinks that if some operation is *intelligent*, it must be so because it somehow involves *intellectual* activity, which is oriented towards true propositions, and consists, in the fundamental case at least, in the speculative contemplation or consideration of such truths.)

Stanley replaces the inner theoretical operations that Ryle postulated on behalf of his opponent with the idea that manifesting knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\phi$  in skillfully  $\phi$ -ing in that way is not an intelligent process at all, but rather an automatic, mechanical one. Consequently, he cannot explain the intelligence of intelligent action. On the one hand, the intelligence of the selection of one available means rather than another, and of the details of the execution of the means selected, cannot in general be explained by the agent's knowledge how, as Stanley conceives of it. On the other hand, the "guidance" of bodily movement by propositional knowledge—through the general automatic mechanisms that "apply the propositional knowledge to specific situations" (Stanley 2011a, 183–84) via the subpersonal bodily abilities that constitute "motor acuity"—is not something that can be attributed to the agent herself. The "unreasonable" intellectualism of the legend falls prey to a vicious regress in attempting to explain the intelligence of intelligent action; but "reasonable" intellectualism avoids the regress only by failing even to attempt to give an account of the explanatory role of knowledge how.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ryle always states causalism in terms of mental *events*—volitions, contemplations of regulative propositions, agitations of feeling or desire—with respect to which the agent herself is frequently, and problematically, cast as agent, rather than the mental *states*—that are not the agent's, not anyone's, deeds—that figure in contemporary causal theories of action. Perhaps Ryle simply didn't see this possibility. But perhaps he ignored it because he couldn't

#### 4. Ryle's Rejection of Intellectualism and Anti-intellectualism

Stanley's failure to see that his response to Ryle's argument—his adoption of "reasonable" intellectualism in place of "unreasonable" intellectualism—misfires stands in a relationship of mutual support with his failure to get Ryle's alternative conception of intelligent action in view. After briefly considering the objection that "If our action is merely *guided* by a reason, one might worry that acting in accordance with it does not amount to rational agency" (2011a, 21), Stanley concludes that even if the objection were to have something going for it, Ryle could not possibly be in a position to press it:

To say that rational action is a matter of one's action manifesting a behavioral disposition is tantamount to an enthusiastic endorsement of the view that "mere guidance" is all there is to rational action. (Stanley 2011a, 22)

It is certainly true that if the dispositionalism with which Ryle hopes to replace causalism about the intelligence of intelligent action appeals to dispositions that are manifested automatically and mechanically, then he would be in no position to claim *both*

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see how behaviour caused by such states could count as a person's actions simply in virtue of the relevant mental states being *her* states: that is, perhaps he did not want to saddle his opponent with a view that "leaves the agent out", as David Velleman (1992), Jennifer Hornsby (2004a; 2004b), and others have complained that the "standard story of action" does: "In this story, reasons cause an intention, and an intention causes bodily movements, but nobody—that is, no person—does anything. Psychological and physiological events take place inside a person, but the person serves merely as the arena for these events: he takes no active part" (Velleman 1992, 461). It is beyond the scope of this essay to evaluate comparatively the "disappearing agent" objection and the idea that processes of guidance—of (presumably) the same sort as those in virtue of which pupil dilation is an instance of purposive movement but not any agent's action—could constitute the intelligence and "action-hood" of bodily movements by virtue of the fact that states of propositional knowledge are (in some as yet unspecified way) doing the guiding.

that it is a genuine requirement on an account of knowledge how that it explain the intelligence of the intelligent selection and execution of means *and* that Stanley's reasonable intellectualism does not meet this requirement. And it is no surprise that Stanley assumes that Ryle's dispositions must have this character, for he thinks, as many contemporary philosophers think, that Ryle is an anti-intellectualist. Of course, Ryle rejects intellectualism. But that is merely to say what he doesn't think, not to say what he does think. As I understand it, the positive claim of anti-intellectualism is that, as Bengson and Moffett put it, "*x* knows how to  $\phi$  in virtue of *x*'s having some power—some ability or disposition—to  $\phi$ , rather than propositional attitudes" (2011c, 162), where these powers, abilities, and dispositions are of the sort that "can be enjoyed even by mindless entities or automata, such as simple machines and plants" (2011c, 161). Such powers could at best account for no more than mere guidance. Therefore my claim that Ryle's argument against intellectualism has been misinterpreted and underestimated—that it shows why reasonable intellectualism as well as the intellectualist legend fails—depends on showing that Ryle's positive view is not a form of anti-intellectualism.

Showing that is the main task of this section. First, however, it is necessary to deal with another objection. I have argued that contemporary intellectualists misconstrue Ryle's agenda by interpreting him as arguing for the epistemological thesis that there is a fundamental distinction between knowing how to  $\phi$  and knowing that *p*. But it might be objected that, in summing up his objection to the intellectualist legend, Ryle does indeed write that "'Intelligent' cannot be defined in terms of 'intellectual' or 'knowing *how*' in terms of 'knowing *that*'" (CM 20). So didn't Ryle at least see the epistemological thesis as at least a corollary of his argument? I don't think so. I agree with Jennifer Hornsby: "Ryle had no need of a general account of what it is to know how to do something—an account of what it is to

know how to  $\phi$ , for arbitrary  $\phi$ "; "[he] is misunderstood . . . if he is taken to have entered any claim about the correct treatment of the schematically given general category—knowing how to  $\phi$ " (2011, 81–82). Ryle uses the expression "knowing how" to pick out that which explains the intelligence of intelligent action, whatever that turns out to be. Given the reasoning reconstructed above, an adequate explanation cannot be furnished by appealing only to propositional knowledge. This use of "knowing how" is evidently a restricted one: there may well be good reason to say that someone knows how to open some door in that she knows that one must turn the knob to the right and push it in order to open it; but insofar as this knowledge does not suffice to explain the intelligence of her intelligently opening the door, it does not suffice for knowing how to open the door in the restricted sense.

#### 4.1. "A special procedure"

Ryle concludes his argument against the intellectualist legend in CM by saying, "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 20). The equation of "doing something intelligently" and "doing something thinking what I am doing" is not a casualty of the argument. What is rejected is only the factoring of *doing something thinking what I am doing* into two acts, one of thinking what to do and one of doing it. Ryle does not even consider giving up on the idea that thinking what I am doing is an essential aspect (though not component) of doing something intelligently. If he were to, he would, by his own lights, downgrade the intelligence of human action to the level exemplified in brutes and machines:

The well-regulated clock keeps good time and the well-drilled circus seal performs its tricks flawlessly, yet we do not call them

‘intelligent’. We reserve this title for the persons responsible for their performances. 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 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. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right. This point is commonly expressed in the vernacular by saying that an action exhibits intelligence, if, and only if, the agent is thinking what he is doing while he is doing it, and thinking 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. (CM 17–18)

Though this bit of vernacular might appear to lend itself to an intellectualist treatment, the regress argument shows that that cannot work. Ryle’s goal, then, is to provide a satisfactory alternative explanation of what it is to do something thinking what one is doing—of what it is to do something applying criteria, to do it regulating one’s performance. To acquiesce in the view “that ‘mere guidance’ is all there is to rational action” would be to give up on this task.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Misleadingly, Ryle continues the passage just quoted as follows: “Champions of [the intellectualist] legend are apt to try to reassimilate knowing how to knowing that *by arguing that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria*” (CM 18, my emphasis). This makes it sound as if he is going to argue that intelligent action does not involve the observance of rules or the application of criteria, which contradicts the line of thought he had just endorsed, summed up in the bit of vernacular that he proposes to rescue from the intellectualist’s attempt to co-opt it on behalf of the legend. But the sense in which the observance of rules or the application of criteria figures in the legend is quickly revealed: Ryle continues, “It follows that the operation which is characterised as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria,” and the rest of the paragraph goes on to point repeatedly at the aspect of the intellectualist legend that is problematic—namely, that doing something intelligently factors into an intelligent mental operation and a dumb practical one (“He must preach to himself before he can practice”; “to do a bit of theory and then to do a bit of practice”; “the double operation of considering and executing”).

As Hornsby points out, Ryle’s pursuit of this goal requires “exteriorizing philosophers’ conceptions of the thinking involved in successful bodily action”; the resulting picture is one on which “the states of mind implicated in intelligent bodily action are inseparable from the bodily action itself” (2011, 87). And Ryle’s constant worry, from the moment he begins his positive account of knowing how, is that in avoiding the blind alley of the intellectualist appeal to separable mental states and operations, he will not be able to distinguish intelligent action, the characteristic exercise of skill, from the merely automatic behaviour that manifests “pure habit”:

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. For there need be no visible or audible differences between an action done with skill and one done from sheer habit, blind impulse, or in a fit of absence of mind. A parrot may squawk out ‘Socrates is mortal’ immediately after someone has uttered premisses from which this conclusion follows. One boy may, while thinking about cricket, give by rote the same correct answer to a multiplication problem which another boy gives who is thinking what he is doing. Yet we do not call the parrot ‘logical’, or describe the inattentive boy as working out the problem. (CM 28)

As I noted in §2.1, Ryle’s discussion in the first half of CM is marked by a strongly felt need to distinguish pure habit and impulse (and their unthinking, automatic manifestations) from the kinds of abilities, liabilities, and tendencies (and their actualizations) that figure in his dispositional alternatives to the causalist accounts of intelligent action, voluntary/intentional action, and action done from motives that he aims to discredit.<sup>16</sup> “Habits are one sort, but not the only sort, of second nature,” he writes; “the common assumption that all second natures are mere habits

<sup>16</sup>See e.g. CM 94–97, 118–31, 155–62.

obliterates distinctions which are of cardinal importance for the inquiries in which we are engaged" (CM 30). The distinctions between these different kinds of second natures is crucial to his project, because, as he conceives of habit, its manifestations "are not characterized as sensible or silly, though of course the agent may show sense or silliness in forming, or in not eradicating, the habit" (CM 96). If Ryle's explanation of the intelligence of some intelligent action is to be provided by appeal to the notion of skill, then skill had better be distinguished from habit, on pain of the account's being as unfit for purpose as is Stanley's "reasonable" intellectualism.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.2. Distinguishing skill from habit

Ryle identifies four related features that distinguish skill from habit. First, it is characteristic of, or it belongs to, the exercise of a skill—by contrast with "instinctive and purely habitual or reflex actions" (CM 126)—that the agent is "paying heed" to what she is doing. She knows what she is doing, or is "alive to" it. This is not to say that a skill cannot be exercised heedlessly, but rather that the heedless exercise of a skill will be a conceptually secondary, and very possibly defective, case. Crucially, the knowledge that an agent has of her skilled action in progress is not knowledge that arises from any process of monitoring her ongoing performance. It is indeed possible to monitor one's own actions, but this is something distinct from carrying them out

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<sup>17</sup>Ryle's obsession with distinguishing skill and intelligent action from habit and automatic behaviour shows that he would reject Stanley's contention that "[e]ven if knowing how to do something were an ability or a complex of dispositions, an agent needs to have automatic mechanisms that are responsible for the application of the ability or the complex of dispositions to the particular situation at hand" (2011a, 185). (Stanley takes this to be something that Ryle ought to acknowledge—cf. p. 26.) No doubt automatic mechanisms will figure in a neurophysiological account of neurophysiological behaviour; but—by Ryle's lights anyway—they have no place in a philosophical account of how human action is invested with qualities of mind.

with heed. When one is doing something *monitoring* what one is doing, one *is* doing two things. And the second order thing may frequently get in the way of the first.<sup>18</sup> The knowledge of what she is doing that is internal to and constitutive of an agent's doing something intelligently is, Ryle says, non-observational and non-inferential (see CM 120). This is not a phenomenological point about how things feel (cf. Stanley 2011a, 187–88), but rather a metaphysical point: knowledge based on observation or inference is necessarily a distinct reality from that of which it is knowledge, whereas in doing something thinking (knowing) what I'm doing, my doing and my thinking are not two things, but one—"what is being described is one operation with a special character and not two operations" (CM 120).<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, the possession of a skill enables the agent to do "some correct or suitable thing in *any* situations of certain gen-

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<sup>18</sup>Monitoring an ongoing performance that is not being done with heed will result in awareness that one is doing it, but this is not the kind of *constitutive* awareness that would make it a case of doing something intelligently: "the precise force of this expression 'thinking what he was doing' is somewhat elusive. I certainly can run upstairs two stairs at a time from force of habit and at the same time notice that I am doing so and even consider how the act is done. I can be a spectator of my habitual and of my reflex actions and even a diagnostician of them, without these actions ceasing to be automatic. Notoriously such attention sometimes upsets the automatism" (CM 95).

<sup>19</sup>Ryle's own doctrine of the "systematic elusiveness of 'I'" (CM chap. 6) *may* be incompatible with the best version of his conception of intelligent action as essentially involving, and not as a distinct act of mind, thinking what I am doing. When it came to self-knowledge, it seems to me that Ryle did not, or did not successfully, pursue his usual method of finding a middle path between the Cartesian and materialist accounts. By contrast with Ryle, whose characterizations of the knowledge of what one is doing that is constitutive of intelligent action tell us only what it is *not* (it is *non-observational*, *non-inferential*), G. E. M. Anscombe offers to tell us what it *is*: she calls it "practical knowledge", and says, following Aquinas, that it is "the cause of what it understands" (1963, §48). And she seems to think that there is some sort of internal relation between practical knowledge in this sense—the distinctive knowledge an agent has of her intentional actions in progress and in prospect—and the sort of knowing how to do things that Ryle thinks of in terms of skill. I discuss Anscombe's account of practical knowledge in Small (2012).

eral sorts. It is becoming prepared for *variable* calls within certain ranges" (CM 129). The exercises of a skill are flexible: the better one's skill, the better one can deal with the particularities of the situation, and the more kinds of situations one will be able to deal with. By contrast, having a routine down as a matter of pure habit may lead to extremely reliable performances of the routine, but, because the performance is automatic, it is not flexible: the possessor of a pure habit is able to do some particular thing, under particular conditions. It is no part of having a pure habit that it one should be able to manifest it when conditions are not propitious, or to manifest it in a different way from normal because the situation calls for it.

This is related to the third point. Skills and habits are both acquired dispositions, but their modes of acquisition differ. Skills are acquired through learning (through being "taught" or "trained" or "educated") whereas mere habits are acquired ("habituated") through drill.<sup>20</sup> Drill involves the same routine being performed over and over again, which is what makes it

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<sup>20</sup>Ryle seems to think it would be something like a mere pun to call both forms of acquisition "habituation" (1967, 468; a similar point is made by Annas 2011, 101–02, and see note 27 below). But he acknowledges that the training through which skill is acquired will embody plenty of drill. Skill involves tendencies as well as abilities, and it does have a mechanical aspect. Ryle was aware of this ("naturally skills contain habits", Ryle 1946a, 234), but he did not think this relation through properly (the best effort of which I am aware is his discussion of two kinds of "performance-rules", "Procrustean rules" and "canonical rules", in his 1946b, 240). Because he is interested in distinguishing the qualities of mind that interest him from the manifestations of "mere" or "pure" habits, he ignores many interesting and important distinctions within the class of habits. For instance, he treats the soldier's ability to slope arms and the habit of smoking as if they were the same sort of thing, when the former is an ability and the latter a tendency, the former the inculcation of a particular action-form as routine, the latter a disposition of the will (which, *pace* Ryle's claim, CM 31, that it is a "single-track" disposition in the sense that it is manifested in tokens of a single action type, is manifested in various smoking-related activities: buying cigarettes, hunting through pockets for cigarettes, asking for cigarettes, looking for matches, etc., as well as smoking).

automatic and inflexible—sometimes an extremely useful combination, but one that does not belong to intelligent action. By contrast, the kind of learning involved in the acquisition of skill is such as to result in the agent being prepared for variable calls, so, "though it embodies plenty of sheer drill, [training] does not consist of drill" (CM 31). Given the first and second points, training will, minimally, involve developing the agent's abilities to recognize and discriminate between different practical situations in order to intelligently and flexibly respond to them, and to evaluate her own performances in order to correct them, now and in the future: "It is of the essence of intelligent practices that one performance is modified by its predecessors. The agent is still learning" (CM 30).

This last feature of the third point exemplifies the fourth: for Ryle, the skill of, say, playing the piano is not exercised or manifested only in intentional actions of playing the piano.<sup>21</sup> Skills are exercised in all manner of other activities: in *perceiving* and *recognizing* situations in normatively-laden ways (for instance, perceiving an arrangement of chess pieces in terms of threats and opportunities), *appreciating*, *understanding*, and *evaluating* one's own and others' performances, *practicing*, *teaching*,<sup>22</sup> *imagining*, *reflecting*, *correcting mistakes*, *explaining errors and successes*,

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<sup>21</sup>Compare Stanley and Krakauer (2013, 4): "manifestations of skill possession are (typically? invariably?) *intentional actions*".

<sup>22</sup>In his Presidential Address, Ryle said: "When a person knows how to do things of a certain sort (e.g., make good jokes, conduct battles or behave at funerals), his knowledge is actualised or exercised in what he does. It is not exercised (save *per accidens*) in the propounding of propositions or in saying 'Yes' to those propounded by others" (1946a, 228). But though the "propounding of propositions" of the sort one might use to instruct a pupil is not what the fundamental exercise of (most) practical skills consists in, Ryle's "*per accidens*" cannot be right. This is because the "propounding of propositions" surely belongs to, though it does not exhaust, teaching (see CM 126, 130–01, 262–63), and without being (characteristically) acquired through teaching, an acquired disposition is not a skill. For more on the internal relation between possessing a skill and being able to transmit it through teaching, see Small (2014).

*predicting outcomes*, and so on (see esp. [CM 39–43](#)). These other activities are not exercises of related though distinct abilities; they are exercises or manifestations of the skill itself (“the capacity to appreciate a performance is one in type with the capacity to execute it” [CM 43](#)). The “multi-track” character of the kind of disposition that a skill is, then, is not restricted to the “indefinitely-heterogeneous” ([CM 32](#)) exercises that constitute concrete acts of, say, playing the piano; it involves all these other sorts of thing as well.<sup>23</sup>

### 4.3. Why Ryle was not an anti-intellectualist

Ryle is always and everywhere concerned to avoid recoiling from causalism into a form of dispositionalism that can do no better than picture the distinctively human aspects of agency as “blind” and “automatic” manifestations of “pure habit”. But why think that this shows that he was not an anti-intellectualist, instead of thinking that it shows the distinctive shape his anti-intellectualism takes?

In contemporary discussions of knowing how, the label “anti-intellectualism” is sometimes used merely to pick out the negative view that knowing how to do something is not propositional knowledge. It is sometimes used to pick out a positive view: for instance, Stanley and Williamson say that, “[a]ccording to Ryle, an ascription of the form ‘*x* knows how to *F*’ merely ascribes to *x* the ability to *F*” ([2001](#), 416). Now, *this* positive view is clearly not Ryle’s. For one thing, as we have just seen, to ascribe knowledge how to play the piano to an expert pianist is, at least typically, to ascribe many more abilities than simply those that are exercised in acts of playing the piano (or to ascribe an ability that may be exercised in acts of types other than playing the piano). More fundamentally, however, Ryle’s discussion of the different kinds

<sup>23</sup>Thus Ryle’s conception of “multi-track dispositions” differs significantly from that of [Vetter \(2013\)](#).

of dispositions, capacities, and abilities—or, as he was sometimes apt to put it, “different uses of ‘can’ and ‘able’ ” ([CM 110](#)), of which he distinguishes at least seven—surely quashes any suggestion that he thinks *ability* is a straightforward concept, one fit to account, with no further explanation, for knowledge how (cf. [Fantl 2008](#), 455). Indeed, though the view that one knows how to  $\phi$  just in case one has the ability to  $\phi$  is often criticized by intellectualists, it is rarely actually put forward by anyone.<sup>24</sup>

A more sophisticated view holds that skill is not just some sort of capacity, ability, or disposition that is not constituted by the possession of propositional knowledge: it is, more specifically, a distinctive kind of non-rational, non-conceptual, capacity. Philosophers who think of skill in this way often think that skills, so conceived, are more basic than, and ground or make possible, “higher-order” cognitive, conceptual, and rational states and episodes. It is not uncommon for them to hold that non-human animals, and perhaps infants, have skills or know-how, when they are not (in the case of infants, not yet) rational animals or capable of conceptual activity. Hubert Dreyfus’s work on “skillful coping” clearly exemplifies this view. For instance, he writes:

... embodied skills, when we are absorbed in enacting them, have a kind of content which is non-conceptual, non-propositional, non-rational ... and non-linguistic ... ([Dreyfus 2007b](#), 356)

... mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping ... ([Dreyfus 2007b](#), 353)

<sup>24</sup>Of course, intellectualist criticisms of the view that the ability to  $\phi$  is necessary and sufficient for knowledge how to  $\phi$  have themselves often been criticized, but this is not the same thing at all as the critics’ critics advancing the view. In a recent paper, Kieran Setiya ([2012](#)) comes close to doing so: he says that “*in the practical sense* knowing how to  $\phi$  is being disposed to act on the relevant intention when one has it” (298), though he insists that knowing how “does not imply ability in the conditional sense: if I were to intend, I would” (296). Thanks to Hille Paakkunainen for reminding me of Setiya’s view.



... analytic philosophers [have worked] on the upper stories of the edifice of knowledge, perfecting their rigorous, fascinating, and detailed accounts of the linguistic, conceptual, and inferential capacities that are uniquely human, while leaving the ground floor—the nonlinguistic, nonconceptual discriminations of everyday perceivers and copers such as infants, animals, and experts—to the phenomenologists . . . (Dreyfus 2005, 61)

The philosophical challenge is to do justice to both worlds and both kinds of openness, and then to figure out how the nonconceptual world opened by absorbed coping and its norms grounds our capacity for stepping back and experiencing a world permeated by conceptuality. (Dreyfus 2007a, 109)

In my view, Dreyfus's position well deserves to be thought of as a kind of anti-intellectualism.<sup>25</sup> Not only does Dreyfus deny that skill or know-how can be understood in terms of the possession of propositional knowledge, he insists that thought, mindedness, and rational capacities are not involved when skilled agents are functioning at their best.

Ryle's view is very different. After rejecting intellectualism, Ryle does not recoil to a position on which reason plays no role

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<sup>25</sup>Dreyfus argues for this view of skill on phenomenological grounds. But a phenomenological approach is not necessary: for my purposes, what matters is not how a proponent of this sort of view of skill develops or justifies her view; what matters is that she thinks that practical skills are non-conceptual, non-rational, etc., and more basic than conceptual and rational (etc.) capacities. Compare Stanley's discussion of what he takes to be the widespread view that his intellectualism is supposed to counteract:

Most contemporary philosophers find the view that knowing how is definable in terms of propositional knowledge alarmingly radical. Perhaps one reason for this reaction is the sense that states like dispositions and abilities are in some sense prior to the capacity for propositional mental states. This thought has several manifestations. One is that what we creatures capable of propositional thought share with creatures not capable of propositional thought are dispositions and abilities. Another is that a naturalistic reduction of mentality must ultimately ground the capacity to have propositional mental states in abilities, dispositions, and capacities of the agent. One might find it natural to express such points in terms that involve 'knowing how'. For example, one way in which one might put the point that creatures with a capacity with propositional knowledge share something with creatures that lack this capacity is that both know how to do things. (Stanley 2011b, 234)

in skill. If thought and reason played no role in skill, as Dreyfus holds, then not only would non-rational, non-conceptual accounts of skilled action and the perception involved in it be needed; similar accounts would be needed of the other internally-related exercises of skill Ryle identifies (including teaching, reflecting, explaining errors and successes). And regardless of one's views on the merits of understanding perception and skilled action as involving "nonconceptual content", nonconceptual accounts of the rest seem like complete non-starters. Ryle, who holds that thinking what one is doing belongs essentially to intelligent action, and that there is a "perfectly general notion of thought, as what is partly constitutive of all specifically human actions and reactions" (1962, 437), could not be further away from Dreyfus, who holds that "the enemy of expertise is thought" (2007b, 354).<sup>26</sup>

As I have interpreted Ryle, he could agree with Stanley, against Dreyfus, that "the fact that expertise requires fluid responses to novel situations has no bearing on the thesis that skilled action is acting on the basis of reasons. Skilled action may involve fluid *acquisition* of reasons for acting in novel situations, reasons that are only accessible to one when one is in that situation" (Stanley 2011a, 182). But this does not show that the intelligence of skilled action is explained solely by reference to propositional knowledge: an agent can act "on a reason" only because she can apprehend it as such (which may involve the recognitional abilities involved in skill, that enable seeing situations in terms of the normative structure that articulates it—opportunities, threats, invitations, and so on) and because she can intelligently de-

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<sup>26</sup>In the course of a well-known exchange with Dreyfus, John McDowell argues that that Dreyfus is committed to what he (McDowell) calls "the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect" (2007a, 349; 2007b) and "the Myth of the Mind as Detached" (2013). Many of the points that McDowell makes against Dreyfus are anticipated by Ryle: see, for instance, his discussion of the tennis-player's thoughts (1962, 436). From a Rylean perspective, one might say that Dreyfus assumes that all cases of thinking in action must be cases of *monitoring* action.

termine and execute a means in response to it (which neither legendary nor reasonable intellectualism can explain). Ryle's conception of knowledge how and the skilled and intelligent action in which it issues challenges the identification—accepted by intellectualists and anti-intellectualists alike—of reason and propositional knowledge. The dispositions that figure in his positive accounts of the ways in which human action is invested with qualities of mind are essentially rational dispositions.<sup>27</sup>

I do not take myself to have provided an adequate account of these essentially rational dispositions (capacities, abilities, tendencies) or of their exercises and manifestations, which are supposed to be characterized by the agent's thinking what she is doing in the special sense Ryle identifies. Indeed, I do not think that Ryle does either. After posing himself the question "what is the difference between . . . saying that the soldier [obediently fixing his bayonet] is, but the bird [migrating] is not applying his mind or acting on purpose?" he writes:

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<sup>27</sup>I have provided purely systematic and textual reasons for thinking that Ryle was neither an intellectualist nor an anti-intellectualist. In a fascinating paper, Michael Kremer (2017) provides compelling historical evidence for the same claim based on the intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century in philosophy and related disciplines. As far as my interpretation of Ryle's positive view goes, the claim that the capacities, abilities, and dispositions that are exercised and manifested in distinctively human agency are essentially rational undoubtedly has an Aristotelian ring to it. This is no accident: in my view it is vastly more profitable to read Ryle's invocation of capacity- and dispositional-explanations as an Aristotelian manoeuvre rather than as a behaviourist one. As we have seen, Ryle accords great significance to the category of *second nature*, and to distinguishing different kinds of second nature. And elsewhere he writes that "Aristotle . . . was the first thinker, and is still the best, systematically to study the notions of ability, skill, training, character, learning, discipline, self-discipline, etc."—indeed, he complains that Aristotle is "grossly mistranslated" when his "key-ideas [are rendered] by such terms as 'habit' and 'habituation'" because such terms may suggest that bearers of *technê*, *arête*, and *phronesis* act "quite automatically and without thinking what [they are] doing or how to do it . . . by blind habit or . . . like a marionette" (1967, 467).

At least a minimal part of the answer is this. To say that a sugar-lump is dissolving, a bird migrating, or a man blinking does not imply that the sugar has learned to go liquid, that the bird has learned to fly south in the autumn, or that the man has learned to blink when startled. But to say that a soldier obediently fixed his bayonet, or fixed it in order to defend himself, does imply that he has learned some lessons and not forgotten them. (CM 128)

This is surely a part of the answer, but I doubt that it can be the whole answer: simply pointing to the fact that reason was at work in one's acquisition of a capacity neither shows that it is at work in one's subsequent masterful exercise of the capacity nor explains why that exercise should be, not accompanied, but constituted, by thinking what one is doing.<sup>28</sup> The rest of the answer is not explicitly provided, as far as I am aware. But I take the following passage to contain a clue:

The way in which rules, standards, techniques, criteria, etc. govern his particular performances is one with the way in which his dispositional excellences are actualised in those performances. It is second nature in him to behave thus and the rules etc. are the living nerves of that second nature. (Ryle 1946a, 233)

Ryle appears to suggest that what it is for an agent to be applying criteria in doing something intelligently (in the sense in which doing so is constitutive of so acting) is not merely for the disposition(s) actualized to have been acquired in a particular way or for the actualizations to have any particular features but for *the way in which the disposition is actualized* to be distinctive. The kind of power that a skill is is distinctive not only in that the things it is a power to do are distinctive, or that how someone who has it came to have it is distinctive, but that the disposition–manifestation relation here takes a distinctive form, one to which it belongs that she who manifests it knows she is manifesting it (as such) and where this knowledge is not a distinct reality

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<sup>28</sup>A similar answer to a similar question is given by Annas (2011, 110–11). I have similar doubts about it.

from the manifestation of which it is knowledge. This is what it is for the capacity to be essentially rational—one whose “living nerves” are “rules, standards, techniques, criteria, etc.” All of this wants working out, of course, but I hope to have shown why trying to work it out matters.

## 5. Conclusion

A standard narrative of twentieth century epistemology tells us that Russell distinguished knowledge by acquaintance from propositional knowledge and that Ryle went on to distinguish a third kind of knowledge, knowledge how. When confronted with Ryle’s texts, though, we find him primarily discussing the intelligence of human agency. It seems to me that many of Ryle’s readers impose the standard narrative on Ryle, assuming that his aim is to show that knowing how cannot be defined in terms of knowing that, and that his discussion of intelligent action is therefore a means to establishing that conclusion. Moreover, when they engage with his treatment of intelligent action, they bring to bear the standard narrative of twentieth century philosophy of mind, which tells us that Ryle was a behaviourist. These two assumptions—that Ryle’s primary aim in his discussions under the heading “Knowing How and Knowing That” was to establish an epistemological claim and that his positive accounts of mental phenomena are given in terms of the automatic manifestations of dispositions that are conceived of as differing only in complexity, but not in kind, from the dispositions of lower animals, plants, machines, and so on—have led both his argument against intellectualism and his positive alternative to be misunderstood and underestimated.

I have argued that by paying careful attention to the larger argumentative structure of *The Concept of Mind*, we see that his aim is to reject a causalist account of what makes it so much as possible to evaluate human action as intelligent (or unintelli-

gent) while—just as importantly—avoiding lapsing into a form of dispositionalism that purports to explain how human action is invested with qualities of mind by appeal to “pure habit” and its automatic manifestations. I argued that Ryle challenges intellectualism to explain the intelligence of intelligent action in terms of propositional knowledge: in particular, to explain the intelligence of the intelligent selection and execution of means. The intellectualist legend “explains” this only by embarking on a vicious regress. But Stanley’s “reasonable” intellectualism, which he distinguishes from the “unreasonable” intellectualism of the legend, avoids the regress only at the cost of failing to offer any explanation of the intelligence of selection and execution. Stanley misses this because he fails to distinguish the kind of dispositionalism Ryle rejects from the kind he endorses. Indeed, like the majority of participants in the contemporary debate about knowledge how, Stanley thinks that intellectualism and anti-intellectualism exhaust the options, and that Ryle was an anti-intellectualist for whom “mere guidance” can be all there is to rational and intelligent action. But Ryle’s argument against the intellectualist legend and his positive view both presuppose that an adequate account of intelligent action requires more than mere guidance. I have sought neither to present a full defence of this presupposition nor to resolve the question whether a Rylean alternative to both intellectualism and anti-intellectualism can be made to work. My hope is that by bringing his aspiration to light I have shown that the contemporary debate’s representation of Ryle is distorted in a number of ways and given reason to think that a proper understanding of his work is not merely of historical interest but may still be a source of insight for thinking about skill, knowledge, and intelligent action.

## Acknowledgements

Versions of this paper were presented at a workshop on Virtue and Skill at the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature at Universitetet i Oslo, a workshop on Ryle at Åbo Akademi, and the Canadian Society of Epistemology 2015 Symposium at Université de Montréal. Thanks to the participants for feedback and discussion, and to two anonymous reviewers.

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