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Knowledge as Potential for Action

Stephen Hetherington

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Brent Madison made very helpful comments on a draft of this paper, as did audiences at Soochow University, Australian Catholic University, and Cambridge University.

1. A Question

- 1 Western epistemology has long had a focus upon knowledge-that – knowledge of a truth or fact – when discussing knowledge at all. Within contemporary epistemology in particular, definitional analyses of knowledge-that have abounded, especially since Edmund Gettier's (1963) philosophical bee-sting. He set off a rash of epistemological agreement – allergy-like in its intensity and its speedy spread of the conviction that there is more to knowing than having a true and well justified belief; and putative stories about that 'more' have proliferated. In general, though, even those post-Gettier attempts to understand knowledge's nature¹ have not attempted to do so in terms of knowledge-how.
- 2 Perhaps the closest they have come to doing so² has been within some versions of a virtue epistemology. Ernest Sosa (e.g. 2007, 2011, 2015, 2016) has emphasized the potential role of cognitive virtues within the production of an individual's knowledge. These may be regarded as cognitive skills on the part of the person – skills that could in turn be conceived of as instances of knowledge-how. Knowledge-how would thus be involved in at least a person's *gaining* some knowledge-that.
- 3 But should we contemplate an even stronger link than that causally productive one between knowledge-how and knowledge-that? Might the knowing-how be literally a *part* of the knowing-that, even *after* the knowledge-that has been produced through the agency that is inherent in activating and applying the pertinent knowledge-how? That *metaphysically* (not merely causally) constitutive possibility – about how knowledge-how might be a vital part even of the *nature* of knowledge-that – is this paper's concern.

2. A Traditional Interpretation: Persisting Belief

- 4 We can ease into that discussion by asking about knowledge and *belief*. And initially we can do this via an example. It describes a familiar sort of situation, involving an array of cognitively charged actions. What might it indicate about knowledge, about belief, and about any potentially constitutive relations between those two?
- 5 Imagine being asked whether you know that $58 + 68 = 126$. You reflect for a moment, consciously performing a simple calculation, before replying that, yes, you do have that knowledge. Are you thereby committed to the view also that you believe that $58 + 68 = 126$? You may well claim so. Yet what would be your evidence for those views of yourself?
- 6 At this moment, when you actively ponder those two questions – Do you know? Do you believe? – what you are most manifestly aware of are some *actions* on your part. You notice your engaging in some calculating. You monitor this activity. You might feel yourself accepting the result of that calculating. Then you give voice to – by asserting – that result: ‘126. That’s the answer.’ You hear yourself giving that answer, perhaps as anyone else hears your words, although maybe as only you could hear them.³
- 7 Yet where in all of this have you espied a belief – in the robust sense of a *persisting* or *continuing* belief? Presumably, no such belief is identical with any of those actions by you. Is the belief therefore something beyond or behind these actions, maybe underlying them? You have no direct awareness of interacting with a belief like that. Indeed, you cannot have such an awareness. For you cannot introspectively observe the persisting existence of the belief *beyond* its being interacted with by you. Even if somehow you experience a content within yourself, you experience it only in its capacity as a content present at that time of being experienced. Again, *where* within this experience is the persisting belief?
- 8 For that matter, where – within all of this – is your *knowledge* that $58 + 68 = 126$? For instance, is it wherever the belief is (wherever that is), due to knowledge’s always *being* a kind of belief? Many would say so, in tune with the epistemologically entrenched view – perhaps bequeathed to contemporary philosophy by Plato’s *Meno* (97e-98a) – that any instance of knowledge is a kind of belief, an epistemically enriched belief. The belief (they will say, in explaining that view) is the metaphysically describable ‘stuff’ or substance that, once it is epistemically enriched, is the ‘thing’ that is the knowledge. The belief is the ‘thing’ in which the knowledge’s further required properties – those that are enriching the belief epistemically, properties such as *being true* and *being epistemically justified* – ‘inhere’ or to which they ‘attach.’ Accordingly, is it possible, at least in principle, to describe your belief’s presence in this situation *in advance* of ascertaining whether you also have the knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$?
- 9 Yet how would that happen (if indeed it can)? For example, could you find the belief indirectly, maybe by inference from some of your self-observations in this setting? Various of your actions, such as the calculating, could be said to be *generating* the belief’s presence. Other actions, such as your accepting or your asserting, would likely be taken to be *reflecting* or *arising* from the belief’s presence. The presence of any or all of these actions would supposedly either *explain* or be *explained* by the belief’s own presence. In that spirit, should we say that the *best* explanation of these actions would mention the

belief's presence?⁴ Not only that; are such actions also best explained – in almost the same breath – as somehow generating and/or reflecting or arising from your *knowing* that $58 + 68 = 126$? If knowledge is always a form of belief, then these actions reflect the belief that $58 + 68 = 126$, for example, only if they also reflect – even if possibly not in quite the same way – the knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$.

- 10 Still, is knowledge always a form of belief? For a start, not all of philosophy's relevant history insists that it is. What, indeed, of the strongly contrary picture, on which knowledge and belief are metaphysically *disjoint*, so that to know that *p* is not, even in part, to believe that *p*? That contrary picture was also first painted for us by Plato, this time in the *Republic* (475b-480). On this picture, belief and knowledge are taken to be so deeply distinct in nature as to underlie the idiom, 'No, I don't believe it; I know it.' And if this disjointness thesis is correct, how should we interpret your actions, described in this section, as indications of your believing – or, distinctly, of your knowing – that $58 + 68 = 126$?
- 11 § 9 will discuss this issue more fully, by attending to a recent argument – from Blake Myers-Schulz and Eric Schwitzgebel (2013) – for the disjointness thesis. Until then, however, let us stay with the knowledge-as-a-kind-of-belief picture, given its being the most widely accepted view among contemporary epistemologists as to *what kind of thing* an instance of knowledge is.

3. An Alternative Interpretation: Inner Actions

- 12 The line of questioning introduced in § 2 might remind us of a famous argument by David Hume (1978 [1739-40]: book I, part IV, sec. VI). I have in mind his objection to the thesis that within each person there exists an identifiable, distinct, and persisting personal *substance* – with its continuing existence being an essential explanatory element of a person's numerical identity over time. In presenting his argument, Hume conducted the same sort of self-search as I asked you to perform a moment ago.
- 13 So, look within – for your self (asks Hume) or for your belief (this is my request). Seek that privately persisting substance or that persisting belief. In neither case will you succeed: all that you will *clearly* meet are experiences occurring at that time of their being uncovered by your inner investigation. And whatever else, if anything, these are at a moment of being met by your inner explorations, you can meet such an experience only in its capacity as something itself active, something happening and alive.
- 14 An experience can have a content advertent to more than this moment. And often you may feel that you are meeting within you a persisting *attitude* to that content. But that feeling could be misleading. What you meet at that moment is an attitude present at least at that time; and you do not *thereby* meet something present at another time. Even if the attitude you meet has a content that you feel yourself to be accepting also *for* other times, you are not meeting it *while* it is functioning as an object of acceptance at other times. As Hume says (1978: 252):
- when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist.

- 15 Is that merely a Humean eccentricity? Far from it; the similarity of this Humean reasoning to Descartes' *Cogito*, no less, is striking. In perhaps modern Western philosophy's *most* famous reasoning, Descartes reassured himself that, so long as he was thinking (even if only by doubting), he knew himself to exist – *but only as* that active thinking. He could not know himself within that setting – 'Meditation II' – as a persisting and independently existing substance, even when restricting his known features to mental ones. And with this assessment of what he can know and what he cannot know, Descartes claimed to answer his metaphysically foundational question, 'But what then am I?' (1984 [1641]: 18, 19, 22):

I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist.

[...] But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.

[...] But what am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, I am not admitting that there is anything else in me except a mind.)

- 16 And so far I am saying something similar about your inner experienced self as a knower. You cannot ever know that you are finding within you (at least by introspection) a persisting and independently existing *epistemic* substance – such as a continuing state of belief – able to be the metaphysical 'stuff' of your knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$.⁵ Only inner *actions* – cognitive ones – existing at the time of the introspective search will be knowingly encountered. Yet this should not be surprising. Only *by acting* could you know, as a result of effort at that time, something present within you at that same time. Such acting cannot know that it has found anything inner beyond something existing as an object of such acting. (Some acting is being known, we may suppose. And in order to know something inner and beyond that acting, one has to continue one's inner acting; with which effort, you continue meeting only what is thereby, at any such moment, not existing at any further moment.)

4. Knowledge-that as Knowledge-how

- 17 Is that a worrying picture? Does it confront us with a reason never to regard ourselves as believers, or even as knowers?
- 18 Not if we are prepared to make some correlative conceptual adjustments. Specifically, we can respond to that line of thought about knowledge somewhat as Hume responded to his own about persons. He proposed a reconception of the fundamental *nature* of personal identity. What is a person? Hume's answer was that each of us is a *republic* or *commonwealth* of experiences (1978: 261), a *bundle* of ideas and impressions (1978: 252). What persists as a person's persisting is the bundle as such – not necessarily its particular members, and not a further inner substance underlying and binding together those phenomena. Might an analogous picture illuminate the relationship between a person's persisting *knowledge*, such as her knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$, and her related cognitive actions (such as calculating, accepting, and asserting)? This possibility merits attention.⁶
- 19 First, let me describe it a little less schematically.
- 20 Let those cognitive actions – your calculating, your accepting, your asserting – be *expressions* or *manifestations*, in their different ways, of your knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$. But let them be expressing or manifesting this knowledge, precisely as actions can

express or manifest knowledge-how.⁷ For now, we may think of this as the actions expressing or manifesting associated *abilities* or *skills*.⁸ (Thus, you would be calculating aptly as an expression of your knowing how to do so. The same would be true of the subsequent actions of your accepting, and your asserting, that $58 + 68 = 126$.) Finally, we may also propose or hypothesize that this knowledge-how – this collection of skills – would be your knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$. To describe the knowledge-how would be to describe all that there is in having the knowledge-that.

21 Notice how the relationship being described as obtaining between your actions and your knowledge-how is *metaphysically constitutive*. Your cognitive actions, *in* being the actions they are, express or manifest those attendant abilities or skills, the accompanying knowledge-how. Their *nature* as those actions is to be such expressions or manifestations. They are not merely *caused* by your having the associated knowledge-how.

22 Notice also how a single case of knowledge-how can encompass several – maybe many – distinct kinds of action: knowing-how can be multi-twined in that way. It is a picture with a Peircean tenor. Think of C. S. Peirce's (1931-58: vol. V, para. 265) conception of evidential support:

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premises which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected.⁹

23 Your calculating, your accepting, your asserting: these are actions expressing or manifesting your knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$. Equally, they are ways of expressing some or all of whatever skills are jointly constituting a *commonwealth* or *bundle* of your associated abilities. That commonwealth or bundle may then be regarded as some complex knowledge-how: you have some specific knowledge insofar as you have some pertinent abilities, each of which is such that an action expressing or manifesting it is *thereby* an expression or manifestation of knowing.

24 And so we have this explanatory hypothesis:

Actions that seem to reflect knowledge-that are expressions of knowledge-how; and to note this is to explain all that would be explained in positing the knowledge-that. Hence, if we insist on knowledge-that's being present, we are free to regard the knowledge-that as the knowledge-how. In short, knowledge-that is knowledge-how and nothing else.

5. The Order-of-Explanation Objection and Intellectualism

25 But is that proposed order of explanation actually the *reverse* of what it should be? The objection generating this question would insist (as follows) that the knowledge-that's presence explains the knowledge-how's presence; and *not vice versa*:

You know *how* to reach, accept, and assert '126' as an answer to our mathematical question (and hence, other things being equal, you *do* provide this answer) in a way that is recognizably knowledgeable – only in part because, independently and already, you know *that* $58 + 68 = 126$. You can perform those actions – calculating, accepting, asserting – as expressions or manifestations of the knowledge-how, only *because* you have the knowledge-that. Those skills – your abilities to calculate,

accept, and assert in this circumstance – are means only of putting into effect your knowledge-that. The knowledge-how that enters this simple story amounts only to being your knowing how to manifest or give expression to what is already and independently your knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$.

- 26 This is the order-of-explanation objection. It bespeaks what is for many people a natural conception of how knowledge and action coalesce. The objection gives voice to what Gilbert Ryle (1949, 1971) called *intellectualism*. It was Ryle who brought to epistemology's attention the potential categorical difference between knowledge-that and knowledge-how – their being irreconcilably different *kinds* of knowledge. Whether there is that metaphysically deep difference between them depends upon whether intellectualism is true. Like Ryle, I say that intellectualism is false – demonstrably false.
- 27 Intellectualism concerns what Ryle called *intelligent* actions – what we have been referring to as exemplifications or manifestations of knowledge-how; what Jason Stanley (2011) calls skilful actions. How do these come to exist as actions with this epistemic character? According to intellectualism, they are guided into existence by some knowledge-that, perhaps regulative knowledge-that describing a method or technique. So, go ahead: climb aboard that bicycle. Then start riding. In doing so, you will be applying your knowledge that B – for some proposition B describing enough of what would suffice for successfully riding a bicycle. You will be putting into practice some practical knowledge – your knowledge how to ride a bicycle. But intellectualism claims that you can do this only in part through possessing, and being guided by, some already-present and independently constituted propositional or theoretical knowledge – in this case, your knowledge that B.
- 28 Nonetheless, here is one way in which, by taking our cue from Ryle, we might argue against any such intellectualist picture.
- 29 The intellectualist hears of your riding the bicycle skilfully. She infers that you must have applied some knowledge-that, such as the knowledge that B. But your applying the knowledge that B is itself a further intelligent action. (Although it is perhaps not consciously applied, it is at least reliably directed. And it is relevantly different to digesting, which is also reliably directed yet which you never *learnt*, for example.) Somehow, you skilfully apply your knowledge that B. However, this will likewise attract the intellectualist's attention: she must posit a further piece of knowledge – this time, your knowledge that B_1 – as being applied by you. B_1 is knowledge of some means of applying your knowledge that B (your knowledge of a way of riding a bicycle). Can the intellectualist's analysis end there? Not if this further knowledge has also been applied skilfully. And surely it has; in which case, intellectualism requires you to have been applying yet another piece of knowledge – call it knowledge that B_2 . As before, this new knowledge will be guiding into action the previously hypothesized knowledge – this time, the knowledge that B_1 . And so on: in turn, you will be required to have known that B_3 , to have known that B_4 , etc. More and more knowledge is thus being expected from you, unendingly and impossibly, even to explain just a single intelligent action on your part. For Ryle, the reason for this unwelcome result was evident: namely, intellectualism is false.
- 30 In what follows, I will assume for argument's sake that Ryle was right about this – because he might well have been, and because I am asking what conceptual possibilities are realistic if he was right. If he was, then the following possibility is available as we try to understand how knowledge and action intermingle:

There can be intelligent actions – ones manifesting or expressing knowledge-how – that need not have been guided into existence by knowledge-that.

- 31 This implies that it is possible for at least some knowledge-how not to include knowledge-that within itself. If in each case knowledge-that was to be part of the knowledge-how, then manifesting the knowledge-how would include manifesting the contained knowledge-that. But Ryle's form of reasoning implies that it is possible for an intelligent action to be performed – knowledge-how thereby being manifested – without any involvement by knowledge-that.

6. Knowing Actions

- 32 I am hypothesizing that all knowledge-that is knowledge-how, not that all knowledge-how is knowledge-that. Accordingly, not all intelligent actions – even though they express or manifest knowledge-how – express or manifest knowledge-that. Still, we must face the question of whether all *knowing* actions (as I call them) do so.

- 33 Knowing actions encompass such actions as those that we imagined you performing in response to the question, 'What is 58 + 68?' – your calculating, your accepting, your asserting. Any knowing action has an *apparent* point of manifesting or expressing knowledge. We may parse this as the knowing action's point being that of *conveying* knowledge. Riding a bicycle, for example, is an intelligent action without being a knowing action. In contrast, answering the question 'What is 58 + 68?' with '126' does occur with the aim of conveying knowledge. Hence, it is a knowing action.¹⁰

- 34 Nonetheless, knowing actions remain a kind of intelligent action (in Ryle's sense of the latter). So, at this stage of our thinking, we have no reason not to apply Ryle's general anti-intellectualist argument to them. Courtesy of Ryle, therefore, we may infer this:

Even when knowledge-how is being manifested by a *knowing* action, this need not be occurring because of some knowledge-that's guidance. (Yes, a knowing action typically has a point of conveying knowledge. Even this does not entail knowledge-that's also guiding the action.) In which case, equally, the knowing action need not be occurring under the guiding influence of some knowledge-that's presence. (For according to intellectualism, the pertinent point of the knowledge-that's presence would be precisely to provide such guidance. If – as is shown by Ryle's anti-intellectualism argument – guidance by knowledge-that is not needed, then neither is the presence of knowledge-that.)

- 35 Correlatively, too, we need not posit the existence of some knowledge-that as *accompanying* the knowing action. Doing so would be explanatorily idle. I am not saying that no knowledge-that could be present. But there need not be any, even given the occurrence of knowing actions. The latter actions can be *knowing* ones, given simply some accompanying knowledge-how.

7. Knowledge in Action

- 36 Yet § 6's picture of how we can act knowingly could well sound implausible, along the following lines:

Maybe Ryle was right to deny that an intelligent action such as riding a bicycle must be accompanied, let alone guided, by some knowledge-that. Surely, however, when the intelligent action is also a *knowing* action in particular – such as your asserting an answer of '126' to the question, 'What is 58 + 68?' – knowledge-that

does need to be present, playing some causal role in the knowing action's coming into existence.

- 37 Not only that (continues the objection); presumably some epistemologists will object that if no knowledge-that is present then the actions are knowing ones only in a distressingly weak way. These would be knowing actions only in the sense of being *intended* to convey knowledge.
- 38 But that objection begs the central question to which my proposal is offering an alternative answer. That answer begins by clarifying Ryle's result, as follows.
- 39 What he showed (when his point is formulated more precisely) is that intelligent actions are not guided into existence by some *categorially distinct* knowledge-that. Nor, therefore (I infer), are knowing actions. And the significance of that added precision is its revealing how we have conceptual room for interpreting such actions (intelligent actions in general; knowing actions in particular) as able to exist as expressions or manifestations of knowledge-how – *and thereby of knowledge-that*. The knowledge-that would now *not* be categorially distinct from knowledge-how. So, we may say that, whenever a knowing action occurs, there *is* knowledge accompanying it. However, this knowledge is the knowledge-how that is being manifested or expressed by the knowing action.
- 40 And we can distinguish these cases of knowledge-how – the ones that are knowledge-*that* – from other cases of knowledge-how. We do this, not *categorially*, but by attending to the content of the respective intelligent actions that would be expressions or manifestations of the knowledge-how in question. Your knowledge that $58 + 68 = 126$ is a complex of abilities, each of which aims at conveying a truth. Your knowledge how to ride a bicycle is a complex of abilities, probably none of which aims at conveying a truth.
- 41 Knowing actions are thus instances of knowledge *in action*. Each such action is an instance of knowledge *activated* – knowledge *being* activated. In general, though, knowledge-how can exist even when it is not activated. After all, abilities need not be manifested – put into action – in order to exist.¹¹ And this is as it should be: much of your knowledge does not disappear when you sleep, even when all of your manifestations of that knowledge – the knowing actions distinctive of the knowledge in question – do so.¹² So knowledge is inactive or unactivated other than when knowing actions are expressing or manifesting it. Then it is activated, at least for a while. Your accepting the right answer; your uttering the right answer: each of these is your putting into action the knowledge-how that is your knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$. The knowledge as such, though, remains knowledge-how.¹³

8. Perceptual Knowledge

- 42 We have focused upon a case of mathematical knowledge. How does my account apply to perceptual knowledge?
- 43 Elegantly so. Imagine being outside a field, looking at what seems to be a barn; as indeed it is. So you think to yourself that it is a barn. You do not also consciously note its roof being red. Nevertheless, you can know that the barn's roof is red, by having pertinent abilities. Are you able to picture, if asked, the colour of the barn's roof? Are you able, if asked, to describe that colour? If you have one or both of those abilities, you have the knowledge – even if you are never asked those questions.

44 However, this knowledge could remain inactive if those questions are never posed. In that sense, the knowledge – by being knowledge-how – is a *potentiality* within you. It is your having a potential for many knowing actions, both inner ones and outer ones. It is a potential for answering questions and/or for forming questions and/or for consciously describing an aspect of the surroundings and/or for drawing that aspect and/or etc. If the knowledge was to be activated (such as if you were to be asked about the roof's colour), you might proceed to have a consciously held experience of believing about the roof's colour. Even so, this would not *be* your knowledge of the roof's colour. Your inner experience – even if it feels to you like it is the mere '*tip*' of an inner persisting belief – would instead be only a *manifestation* or *expression* of the perceptual knowledge, the perceptual knowledge-how.

9. Knowledge and Belief

45 I have been outlining how we might begin to conceive of all knowledge as being knowledge-how. The idea has been that, in general, any instance of knowledge that *p* is a complex instance of knowledge-how – complex in the range and number of specific skills or abilities that are somehow bundled together within it, each of them bearing relevantly upon *p*. That idea should now be tested by our trying to answer the question – mentioned in § 2 – of where *belief* fits into this picture of knowledge.

46 The question is pressing because many philosophers would say that the complex potentiality that, on my view, is the given instance of knowledge is present only because, in turn, knowledge is a kind of belief. More fully, the potentiality that, I have suggested, is part of an instance of knowing is actually part of the *belief* that is (by being suitably embellished) the instance of knowledge. And if so, there is no motivation to conceive of knowledge in practicalist terms. Rather (say those epistemologists), we could rest content with a traditional view simply of belief – as a required element within knowledge – as a *dispositional* state: that is, if confronted by a pertinent circumstance (such as one's being asked whether it is true that *p*), one would respond in a *p*-affirming or *p*-reflecting way.¹⁴ Such an action could be an intelligent action, in Ryle's sense. It could also be a knowing action, in my sense. Is a dispositional conception of belief therefore already adequate for capturing the potentialities that I have described as constituting knowledge (and thus as motivating a move to a knowledge-practicalism)? If it is, then maybe knowledge could still be thought of in more traditional terms, as being a form of belief (albeit an epistemically blessed or augmented form). Consequently, we would *not* need to reach – in the less traditional way that I have been advocating – for a practicalism about knowledge's nature.

47 I grant that a belief-manifesting action, say, can also be a knowing action. Hence, I also grant, at least some of the dispositionality within believing could be at least part of the potentiality within a given instance of knowing. But this does not entail that the former dispositionality ever – let alone always – *exhausts* the latter potentiality. After all, there is an alternative explanation of this apparent overlap of potentialities – one that *preserves* a knowledge-practicalism. This alternative explanation also offers us a middle way between the *Republic*-Platonic disjointness thesis – whereby to believe that *p* is to not know that *p*, and to know that *p* is to not believe that *p* – and the *Meno*-Platonic tradition – whereby any instance of knowledge is at least a true opinion or true belief, bolstered by a *logos* (an account, an understanding).

48 Ryle is suggestive here (1949: 133-4):¹⁵

'Know' is a capacity verb, and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off, or get things right. 'Believe', on the other hand, is a tendency verb and one which does not connote that anything is brought off or got right. [...]

Roughly, 'believe' is of the same family as motive words, where 'know' is of the same family as skill words; so we ask how a person knows this, but only why a person believes that [...] Skills have methods, where habits and inclinations have sources. Similarly, we ask what makes people believe or dread things but not what makes them know or achieve things.

49 Ryle thus emphasizes a standard sense in which knowledge *strengthens* belief. One has a success-relationship to a fact that p in knowing that p, a relationship that one need not have in believing that p: knowledge is always factive, while belief is not.

50 Nonetheless, Ryle overlooks a sense – a practicalist one – in which the *converse* strengthening relation can obtain: believing can strengthen knowing. Specifically, when one both knows and believes that p, the belief, even if dispositionally so, opens up some possible ways of *using* the knowledge. By having a belief that p, I suggest, one is able – indeed, one could be *well* able – to perform various actions that (i) can also be manifestations or expressions of the knowledge that p, (ii) do not exhaust the range of possible manifestations or expressions of the knowledge, and (iii) could be unavailable to one in the absence of the belief.

51 In support of that picture, we may consider the cases with which Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel (2013: 374-7) have argued that there can be instances of knowledge *without* an accompanying belief. Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel offer five cases ('the unconfident examinee,' 'the absent-minded driver,' 'the prejudiced professor,' 'the freaked-out movie-watcher,' 'the self-deceived husband') – using these cases as experimental philosophers would. But we can also use the cases *a priori*, while engaging with this question: 'Is there *something missing from what the knowledge could be*, insofar as the knowledge is present yet the belief is not?'

52 The first case will suffice here. It is an adaptation of Colin Radford's (1966) oft-cited case. Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel imagine someone, Kate, being asked, in an exam, 'In what year did Queen Elizabeth I die?' Kate has studied for the exam; but this question arises for her only when the exam period has almost expired – as the teacher announces. Hearing the announcement, Kate panics, tries to recall the answer, fails – and writes, albeit with no confidence, the correct answer. Is that answer knowledge on Kate's part? Is she lacking belief (in the correctness of her answer) at that moment? A significant proportion of respondents surveyed by Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel attributed knowledge but not belief to Kate; as would I. For the sake of argument, therefore, I will accept that Kate has knowledge – not belief, though – as to Queen Elizabeth's dying in 1603.

53 And what does Kate – as that knower – lose by not having that belief? In particular, does she lose anything relevantly epistemic? Indeed she does. For example, deprived of the belief in the way described by Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel, she would lack the confidence to *express consciously* the knowledge, at least in many situations. Seemingly, she would qualify or weaken her answer of '1603' if that action was available to her. And, if not for being forced by the exam's strictures to provide an answer, she might well have opted not to do so. Clearly, there is a respect in which, by lacking the belief in this way, Kate lacks some meta-knowledge: she does not know that she knows the year of Queen Elizabeth's death, even though she does (I am assuming) have the latter knowledge, the

knowledge directly about Queen Elizabeth. And the lack of that meta-knowledge, given its both reflecting and expressing itself for her in a conscious lack of confidence in her having the knowledge about Queen Elizabeth, will itself affect her ability to respond aptly in various circumstances where the latter knowledge is being investigated or sought. So, the lack of belief – as manifested in Kate’s lack of conscious confidence – does weaken her epistemically in this setting. Even if it does not deprive her of the underlying knowledge, it could deprive her of at least some knowing *actions*, ones that would – by expressing the belief – express or manifest the knowledge. It thereby weakens the knowledge’s *power* for her, at least in practise. Again, though, this is not to say that the knowledge is absent: there are still knowing actions that she will perform (such as providing, if forced, the correct answer in the exam). But there are others that she will not perform.

- 54 My practicalist suggestion, then, is that, insofar as knowledge that *p* is present without belief that *p*, a person can *do less* of what would count as manifesting or expressing the knowledge. In not believing that *p*, she loses the ability – the capacity – to perform, in at least some ways in at least some situations, actions that would be natural expressions or manifestations of the knowledge that *p*. Nonetheless, this remains consistent with her having enough other abilities that suffice for her having the knowledge. To believe is thus to have an ability, perhaps dispositional in nature, that can be present as part of having some knowledge – even if its being so is not *essential* for the knowledge’s being present. Other things being equal, a given instance of knowledge’s potential for producing knowing actions can be strengthened by including a belief among the sub-abilities that happen to jointly constitute it as being the complex potentiality that it is. Yet the knowledge that *p*’s being stronger in this way than it might have been is not essential to its mere presence; what it is essential to is knowledge’s having a specific epistemic strength as knowledge that *p*. It is not essential to the complex potentiality’s being strong enough (however strong that is)¹⁶ simply to be present as knowledge that *p*.

10. The State of Knowing

- 55 Implicit in this paper’s practicalism is a metaphysics of knowing, one element of which is the following.
- 56 Insofar as all knowing is knowledge-how, we are free to maintain a view of knowing – and, for that matter, of believing – as a *state*.¹⁷ That is a traditional picture, as far as it goes. But not everyone would accept it. §1 mentioned Ernest Sosa’s recent attempts to develop a virtue-theoretic conception of knowledge. On that conception, both knowledge and belief are kinds of epistemic *performance*.¹⁸ If such a conception succeeds, then epistemic *norms* – of behaviour, of action – are applicable; which is indeed what Sosa deems to be the case. Such a conception goes further in that direction than my practicalism does, in that it treats knowledge, say, as an action, whereas I treat knowledge only as *potential* for actions.
- 57 I take heart, then, from the linguistic data’s being against Sosa in this respect. Matthew Chrisman (2012: 601) explains:

The basic result is that belief and knowledge attributions seem, by virtue of their meaning, to be about something nondynamic, whereas paradigmatic performance descriptions (for example, of arrow shootings [an example used often by Sosa]) seem to be about something dynamic and so nonstative. I think this shows that Sosa’s suggestion that belief is a performance – which when successful (true)

because skillful (justified) is apt and so a kind of knowledge – involves him in a sort of metaphysical category mistake in the way he uses these words.

58 Again, on my picture believing and knowing are states. A belief that *p*, when present as part of some knowledge that *p*, brings with it various possibilities for action; and some of these (as we saw in §9) are possible actions that knowledge-without-belief would not ground. So, a belief-state can *enrich* a knowledge-state. It is not a *mere part* of a knowledge-state: to believe is to have *more* possible actions – specifically, further *knowing* actions – available to one, other things being equal.

59 Nevertheless, I am saying that, even when a person does both know that *p* and believe that *p*, the knowledge is *not itself the belief*. The contrary tradition – the *Meno*-Platonic one – tells us that knowledge *is* a belief, so long as the belief has various epistemically welcome features. Proponents of that tradition are using, in effect, a *substance-attribute* model of what knowledge is. They are treating the belief as needing to be present, and as amounting to some ‘metaphysical unit’ that is the knowledge, so long as it also has various epistemically pertinent features, such as being supported by good evidence. I am arguing, however, that this traditional metaphysical picture is optional at best. I am offering instead a *potentialities model* of knowledge. On this model, *all* that constitutes the knowing is the person’s potential, however this is realised or grounded, for various suitably related actions.¹⁹ I have explained that these actions may be conceived of as *knowing* actions: like other Rylean intelligent actions, they are manifestations or expressions of the knowledge, given its being knowledge-how; unlike some Rylean intelligent actions, though (such as riding a bicycle), these are ones whose point is at least to convey or express the knowledge.

60 These knowing actions can be useful, in turn, for further ends. But in all such circumstances this is *because* the actions express knowledge. C. I. Lewis’s words are apposite here (1946: 3):

The primary and pervasive significance of knowledge lies in its guidance of action: knowing is for the sake of doing. [...] [O]nly an active being could have knowledge [...] A creature which did not enter into the process of reality to alter in some part the future content of it, could apprehend a world only in the sense of intuitive or esthetic contemplation; and such contemplation would not possess the significance of knowledge but only that of enjoying and suffering.

61 I concur; and I extend Lewis’s pragmatist point. His pragmatism is not as far-reaching as it could be, in that he retains the *Meno*-Platonic *structuring* – what contemporary epistemologists usually call the conceptual analysis – of knowledge. He tells us (1946: 9) that knowledge is ‘an assertive state of mind’: that is, knowledge is at least a belief, of some or other form. Surrounding this, he holds in place the standard substance-attribute model that I described above. He says (*ibid.*) this: ‘Knowledge is belief which not only is true but also is justified in its believing attitude.’ In contrast, I say, knowledge is only a potential that *can* include whatever potential is inherent in believing; knowledge is *not automatically* in part an instance of believing.

11. Truth in Action

62 If we are to conceive of knowledge-that as a kind of knowledge-how, it is imperative that we answer this question:

How *radical* a reconception of knowledge is being contemplated? Which of knowledge's constitutive properties (as these have formerly been envisaged by epistemologists) will stay? Which will depart?

- 63 I have already argued that *belief* – persisting belief – is not essential within knowledge. (I have *hypothesized* that knowledge is knowledge-how, having *argued* that knowledge need not include a persisting belief.) What now of *truth*? Where is it to be located within this alternative picture – what I have elsewhere (e.g. 2011a) called a *practicalism* about the nature of knowledge-that?
- 64 Certainly we *expect* knowledge to incorporate truth. But this requirement must be formulated carefully. Suppose we say that part of your knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$ is its being true that $58 + 68 = 126$. Well, it remains true that $58 + 68 = 126$, *regardless* of what it is to know this truth. So, that formulation was not quite correct. The question is one of how the specific truth is to be *part of* the knowledge – included in the knowledge – rather than of how the truth is to obtain regardless of the knowledge's nature. Traditional accounts of knowledge say that knowledge includes truth because knowledge includes a belief (or something similar) and because this belief's content is true. How will my practicalist analysis replace that supposed explanation? On my picture, *what* within the person is true (if not necessarily a belief)? I have not said that believing is never present within a case of knowledge. I have denied only that it always need be present: believing is just *one* of the possible ways of manifesting or expressing the knowledge in question.²⁰ When believing is present, it could be true – making the knowledge true – in the usual way. Nonetheless, that is not an adequate explanation, on my conception of knowledge. I need a more *general* account of truth's presence, covering also the *other* possible manifestations or expressions of the knowledge-how that is the knowledge-that.
- 65 Accordingly, I welcome Richard Campbell's (2011) discussion of the concept of truth. His key contention is that we need not restrict ourselves to what he calls the *linguistic* conception of truth (*ibid.*: ch. 2); for that is not the most fundamental or general conception of truth. A traditionally motivated focus upon belief-contents as the only way in which truth can be part of knowledge would reflect only that more restrictive conception of truth. Campbell argues (*ibid.*: chs. 4, 5) that we may think of truth first and foremost as a feature of *actions* (and only derivatively as a feature of believings, say). Reflect on how readily we *do* speak of an action's being true. Let us take such talk literally, by saying that an action is true when it is reliable or faithful. (For example, a kick can be true, as can a swimming stroke – in each case, pure and clean and effective and thus what it should ideally be, other things being equal.) We may then extend that insight. A true friend, for instance, is likewise reliable and faithful (*ibid.*: 104). She can be relied upon in her actions, or she will be faithful in her actions – all of this, given her character (*ibid.*: 110-1). We thus begin to understand how truth can be a property of actions and even of their agents. An action is true insofar as it treats – rather than represents – things as they are (*ibid.*: 123).
- 66 We may thereby speak similarly of your knowledge-how – including the particular knowledge-how that is your knowing that $58 + 68 = 126$ – being reliable and faithful. This will be part of *your* being reliable and faithful in relevant respects. *You* can be relied upon, and *you* will be faithful, in how you act when in relevant situations – all of this, when you are asked related questions, when you undertake to think about them, when you offer answers, etc. Such actions – including knowing actions – by you will thus be true. Hence, this knowledge-how of yours can *incorporate* truth. It would be true as a friend is true. It

would be true in a ‘larger’ way. More technically: it would be true in a supervenient way, by at least most²¹ of its actual or possible manifestations – the knowing actions expressing it – being true. These would be true by *treating* the world aptly. And all of this is so, on any of the more specific ways in which the knowledge-how could be expressed or manifested by a knowing action.²²

12. Conclusion

- 67 Arguments by Hume, Descartes, Ryle, and Peirce helped to motivate this paper’s reasoning. I will close with another pattern of welcome historical resonance.
- 68 Berkeley’s idealism about physical matter is surprisingly relevant. He faced the conceptual challenge of accounting for the nature of *unobserved* physical matter. How does a tree in the quadrangle continue to exist once no one observes it? We are aware of Berkeley’s answer: God observes the tree even when none of us does so.²³ We are also aware of John Stuart Mill’s phenomenalism attempt to preserve Berkeley’s idealist emphasis upon acts of perceiving, without relying on any Berkeleian talk of God. This was Mill’s suggestion (1979 [1865]: 183): ‘Matter may be defined, a Permanent Possibility of Sensation.’ Matter thus has a modal dimension – this inescapable sort of permanent possibility. That dimension constitutes the physical object’s persistence, when the object is not being perceived.
- 69 I regard knowledge in similar terms. I have been advocating an analogue of a Millian phenomenalism – mine is about knowledge-that as knowledge-how – built upon an analogue of a Humean bundling – mine is of manifestations or expressions of the knowledge-how that is the knowledge-that. That combination has generated the following picture.
- 70 Whenever you have a particular piece of knowledge-that, there are various actual and/or possible knowing actions standing to your knowledge much as various actual and/or possible perceptual experiences stand to an object’s physicality. The knowledge is partly potential – a permanent possibility of being manifested or expressed. The knowledge is thus modal in its metaphysics, even if not its content; for it is knowledge-how; which is a more or less complex skill or ability; which will or can typically be manifested or expressed by various knowing actions; but which also might never be manifested or expressed. Still, when those actions do occur, they amount to the knowledge *in action* – that is, to activated knowledge. There need not be anything beyond those actions, uniting them, other *than* the particular knowledge-how to produce them – that particular potential for such performances. This is what knowledge is; or so I am proposing.

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NOTES

1. For overviews of these attempts, see Shope 1983, Lycan 2006, and Hetherington 2016a.
2. Apart, that is, from Stanley & Williamson 2001 and those epistemologists responding to them. Stanley and Williamson's aim was to understand knowledge-how as knowledge-that. (See also Stanley 2011.) §8 will discuss that issue.
3. Here, I am thinking of Anscombe's account (1963) of one's knowledge of one's own intentional actions: perhaps only you know *qua* intentional action what you are asserting. (Of course, you might have uttered your words inwardly, too, perhaps rehearsing before giving them a public performance. That would be a *distinct* way in which only you would know of your words.)
4. And could one use that sort of explanation in a special way, in crediting *oneself* with having a continuing belief? I have two responses to that question. (1) Such a way of reaching an

attribution of persisting belief to oneself is an onlooker's way, an external way. It bespeaks no pre-theoretical hint of privileged access. It could not be one's knowing of one's inner belief in a way that is possible only for oneself. (2) If we are restricted to such onlooker's knowledge of our persisting beliefs, we have a perspective from which the alternative account proposed in this paper is even *better* supported. I will be talking of a person's ability to do this or that. Such an account (i) can accommodate the same data as would be explained by talking of a persisting belief, and (ii) fortunately has no pretension – unlike beliefs – to being able to be known introspectively.

5. I mention introspection here because it was what Hume and Descartes were using.

6. Here is a possibly significant aspect of it upon which I will not dwell (partly because it arises as a general question about Hume's picture): How could one know introspectively that there is a bundle present at all, since one does not introspect the bundle's limits or boundaries?

I have two tentative suggestions. You could observe (i) some *bundling*, if memory is available to you when you are introspecting, and/or (ii) a bundle as it is present *so far*, even if perhaps not thereby what might be the completed or final bundle.

7. Stanley (2011) talks at times of various actions as manifesting some knowledge-*that*. But actions more clearly manifest knowledge-how than knowledge-that, since knowledge-how is knowledge how to perform some sort of action. In any case, we will soon return to this issue, when we discuss what I call *knowing* actions.

8. On this way of conceiving of knowledge-how, see Hetherington (e.g. 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2015) and Glick 2012.

9. That advice is from Peirce's 1868 paper, 'Some consequences of four incapacities'. An echo of it, apparently, drives Wittgenstein's (1958: para. 67) concept of family resemblance: "Why do we call something a 'number'? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres."

Importantly for this paper's conception of knowledge, Wittgenstein continues thus:

"But if someone wished to say: 'There is something common to all these constructions – namely the disjunction of all their common properties' – I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: 'Something runs through the whole thread – namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres'."

10. 'But is your calculating intended to *convey* knowledge? Or is its aim instead to *reach* the knowledge?' The latter could be parsed as the action's aiming to convey the agent to the knowledge. I will not complicate my presentation with this detail.

11. 'Yet how could one know that one has a persisting ability to perform such actions, if (as was argued earlier) one cannot know introspectively of one's having a persisting belief?' I have noted that abilities are in general not aspects of oneself that we would pre-theoretically expect to be known introspectively. In contrast, people do expect to be able to access purely by introspection at least many of their beliefs. (In my terms, though, that expectation misleads them. They self-attribute a persisting belief when what they experience is at most an *active manifestation* of what would be such a belief. Still, the expectation is present.) But an ability, by definition, is not like that. We expect in general that an ability's presence is known, if at all, not purely introspectively at a given time. This is so, even for cognitive abilities.

12. Elsewhere (2011b), I have argued for a distinction between knowledge and knowing. But in this paper I am not relying upon the details of that distinction.

13. I am not sure that Ryle himself saw this. He does say (1949: 134) that, when one knows that p, one acts in related ways. He also says (*ibid.*: 135) that, for example, to say of someone "who keeps to the edge, [that he does so] because he knows that the ice is thin, is to employ quite a different

sense of 'because' [...] from that conveyed by saying that he keeps to the edge because he believes that the ice is thin."

Could this 'because' in the person's knowing be due to the actions being more an *expression* of the knowledge than, say a *mere consequence* of it? Ryle does not say. Kremer (2017) portrays Ryle as offering a picture of knowledge-that and knowledge-how as inter-related. But the relations described by Ryle (and by Kremer on Ryle's behalf) are only causal, not metaphysically constitutive. My focus is on the question of whether there are metaphysically constitutive relations here that reveal at least part of what it is to know even a particular truth.

14. For this traditional conception of belief, see Cohen 1992, for example.

15. For discussion of Ryle on this issue, see Scheffler 1968, Myers-Schulz & Schwitzgebel 2013, and Kremer 2017.

16. See Hetherington (2011a: ch. 1) on the many respects in which traditional epistemology has side-stepped answering this implicit question. See Hetherington 2001 on the general idea of some knowledge that p's admitting of being better or worse – stronger or weaker – as knowledge that p.

17. Is that state only ever of a person – and of nothing else in addition? For the idea of some knowing being attributable not only to the person, but to the person *plus* some epistemically pertinent factors, see Hetherington 2012.

18. See, for example, Sosa (2011, 2015, 2016) for statements of this approach. Reed (2016: 108) accommodates it in this way: 'even if knowledge is not itself an action, this is no bar to its being *action-like* in important ways.'

19. And because it *could* be a potential grounded in the person as such (I have said nothing to the contrary, at least), the potentialities model has the capacity to preserve what, for some, is an insight that belongs with virtue-theoretic accounts of knowledge – the idea that the virtues in question *are* whole-person rather than more narrowly cognitive. That idea is particularly prominent within character-based forms of virtue epistemology, such as Zagzebski's 1996. But it is also part of Sosa's reliabilist form of virtue epistemology: see Reed 2016 for an elegant explanation and expansion of its role within Sosa's approach.

20. 'How does a belief – which is a state, not an event, let alone an action – express or manifest knowledge-how?' From §2's argument: what we find, when introspecting to ascertain what we believe, are *believings* – actions or occurrences to which we may choose to apply the term 'belief' but whose continued life past our interacting with them we are *not* experiencing. They are, in effect, themselves expressions or manifestations of belief.

21. An infallibilist would replace this 'at least most' with 'all.' My formulation is thus fallibilist. For more on the nature and viability of knowledge-fallibilism, see Hetherington (1999, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2013, 2016b).

22. There is a noteworthy overlap between this conception of the truth condition within knowledge, and Craig's 1990 influential view of our concept of knowledge. He regards that concept as reflecting our needs for *reliable informants* – people upon whom we can rely as we seek information. In Campbell's sense, Craig's approved informants are true, in that they are reliable and faithful in what they convey to us.

23. God is at least aware of the tree. Does He ever really observe it? Apart from our having to use a physical perceptual mechanism, we must await the tree's presence before we can observe it. Unlike God, we are partly dependent on contingent aspects of the tree, aspects beyond our making or our control. If that is perception, God does not perceive.

ABSTRACTS

Can we conceive cogently of all knowledge – in particular, all knowledge of truths – as being knowledge-*how*? This paper provides reasons for thinking not only that is this possible, but that it is conceptually advantageous and suggestive. Those reasons include adaptations of, and responses to, some classic philosophical arguments and ideas, from Descartes, Hume, Peirce, Mill, and Ryle. The paper's position is thus a *practicalism* – a kind of pragmatism – about the nature of knowledge, arguing that all knowledge is knowledge-how to act – to do this, to do that. Such a conception can include, too, a distinctive view of the metaphysical relation between knowledge and belief. We see that, contrary to what most contemporary epistemologists say, knowledge need not be a form of belief. Instead, a belief that *p* can be a way simply of enriching or strengthening knowledge that *p*. It can do this in a practicalist way, by allowing one to *do more* with the knowledge.

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