

# BRIDGING THE INTELLECTUALIST DIVIDE: A READING OF STANLEY'S RYLE

Jesús NAVARRO

**ABSTRACT:** Gilbert Ryle famously denied that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that, a thesis that has been contested by so-called “intellectualists.” I begin by proposing a rearrangement of some of the concepts of this debate, and then I focus on Jason Stanley’s reading of Ryle’s position. I show that Ryle has been seriously misconstrued in this discussion, and then revise Ryle’s original arguments in order to show that the confrontation between intellectualists and anti-intellectualists may not be as insurmountable as it seems, at least in the case of Stanley, given that both contenders are motivated by their discontent with a conception of intelligent performances as the effect of intellectual hidden powers detached from practice.

**KEYWORDS:** knowing-how, intelligence, intellectualism, dispositions, behaviourism

## 1. The Debate About Know-How: What Is at Stake?

We have assisted in recent years to a live debate about the nature of knowledge-how, but it seems to be difficult to identify what is exactly under dispute in it. The origin of the debate are two famous texts by Gilbert Ryle,<sup>1</sup> where he famously defended that knowing-how is not knowing-that, complaining about the intellectualist slant manifested by those who tried to reduce the former to the latter.

Philosophers have not done justice to the distinction which is quite familiar to all of us between knowing that something is the case and knowing how to do things. In their theories of knowledge they concentrate on the discovery of truths or facts, and they either ignore the discovery of ways and methods of doing things or else they try to reduce it to the discovery of facts. They assume that intelligence equates with the contemplation of propositions and is exhausted in its contemplations.<sup>2</sup>

Attempting to manifest the shortcomings of intellectualism, Ryle would have shown that agents do not know how to  $\varphi$  when they have grasped some

---

<sup>1</sup> “Knowing How and Knowing That,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46 (1946): 1-16; *The Concept of Mind* (London: Routledge, 2009, first published in 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That,” 4.

truths about the practice of  $\varphi$ -ing, but when they have the power to  $\varphi$ , the skill to  $\varphi$  well, the ability to achieve success in  $\varphi$ -ing in the relevant circumstances, etc—all of which are issues related to what the agent is able to do, and not to what propositional attitudes she endorses.

Ryle's views became a kind of general consensus, which was underwritten by Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson's defence of intellectualism in a paper that proved to be as unexpected as influential.<sup>3</sup> According to Stanley and Williamson, there is no fundamental distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, given that the former is, in their opinion, a species of the latter—a view that they defended with the help of much apparently solid linguistic evidence.<sup>4</sup>

In the last years different positions have been proposed on one side or the other of the intellectualist divide, mostly arising from development or criticism of Stanley and Williamson's original proposal.<sup>5</sup> However, in my view, the terms of

---

<sup>3</sup> Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson, "Knowing How," *The Journal of Philosophy* 98, 8 (2001): 411-444.

<sup>4</sup> According to Stanley and Williamson, knowing-how would have exactly the same syntactic structure as knowing-what, knowing-when, or knowing-why, all of which are just a matter of knowing facts, and thus are cases of propositional knowledge. The case of knowing-how would be quite a *sui generis* variety of knowing-that: one where the agent knows *de se* that there is a way for her to perform the action in question, a way that she must grasp under a practical mode of presentation. At the very same time that Stanley and Williamson's seminal paper came out, Jesús Vega was problematizing the Rylean idea of "practical understanding" and showing that it needed a better articulation with propositional knowledge, mediated by experience and practice. See his "Reglas, medios, habilidades. Debates en torno al análisis de «S sabe cómo hacer X»,» *Crítica* 33, 98 (2001): 3-40.

<sup>5</sup> Several authors have followed their way, defending different varieties of intellectualism. For instance: Paul Snowdon, "Knowing How and Knowing That: A Distinction Reconsidered," *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society* 105, 1 (2004): 1-29; John Bengson and Marc A. Moffett, "Know-How and Concept Possession," *Philosophical Studies* 136, 1 (2007): 31-57 and "Two Conceptions of Mind and Action. Knowing How and the Philosophical Theory of Intelligence," in *Knowing How: Essays on Knowledge, Mind, and Action*, edited by John Bengson and Marc A. Moffett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-55; Berit Brogaard, "Knowledge-How: A Unified Account," in *Knowing How*, edited by Bengson and Moffett, 136-160; Yuri Cath, "Revisionary intellectualism and Gettier," *Philosophical Studies* 172, 1 (2015): 7-2; Carlotta Pavese, "Know-How and Gradability," *Philosophical Review* 126, 3 (2017): 345-383. Stanley and Williamson themselves come back to the issue in "Skill," *Noûs* 51, 4 (2017): 713-726. On the opposite side of the divide, the moves have been, with some exceptions, more aggressive or defensive than constructive, by which I mean that different attacks have been levelled at the new intellectualist arguments, but little has been done yet in order to build up a full-blown positive epistemological alternative. Amongst the most recent ones are Ellen Fridland, "Problems

the debate are far from being unanimously established, as well as its proper object. Different positions in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of language and metaphysics interfere with the strictly epistemological problem, making it hard to figure out what the genuine bone of contention is. For that reason, I would like to stipulate for the sake of this paper some basic terminology, differentiating three levels under dispute: epistemological concerns, pre-conceptual assumptions and metaphysical theories.

First, I will use the term “intellectualism” to label a very specific epistemic position about the nature of knowledge-how:

INTELLECTUALISM: Knowing how to  $\varphi$  is knowing that  $p$  is the case.<sup>6</sup>

This epistemic thesis (i.e. a claim about what that particular kind of knowledge is) was the focus of Gilbert Ryle's criticism in the aforementioned papers, both entitled “Knowing How and Knowing That.” Given that Ryle was opposing INTELLECTUALISM, it is not weird that his own opinion was latter labelled as “anti-intellectualism,” but I find this utterly misleading because, strictly speaking, “anti-intellectualism” is no positive thesis, but just the denial of INTELLECTUALISM. At least, that is the sense that I will give to the term here:

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: Knowing how to  $\varphi$  is not knowing that  $p$  is the case.

Notice that ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM, unlike INTELLECTUALISM, just says what knowledge-how is *not*, not making any positive claim about what it

---

with intellectualism,” *Philosophical Studies* 165, 3 (2013): 879-891; “Knowing-How: Problems and Considerations,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, 3 (2015): 703-727; J. Adam Carter and Duncan Pritchard, “Knowledge-How and Cognitive Achievement,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, 1 (2015): 181-199; J. Adam Carter and Bolesaw Czarnecki, “(ANTI)-Anti-Intellectualism and the Sufficiency Thesis,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 98, 1 (2017): 374-97; William Hasselberger, “Propositional Attitudes and Embodied Skills in the Philosophy of Action,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, 1 (2018): 449-76; Carter, J. Adam, y Jesús Navarro, “The Defeasibility of knowledge-how,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 95, 3 (2017): 662-685. See J. Adam Carter and Ted Poston, *A Critical Introduction to Knowledge How* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018) for a critical overview. Finally, a more constructive attitude on the anti-intellectualist side may be found in David Löwenstein, *Know-how as Competence: a Rylean Responsibilist Account* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann: 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, intellectualism is sometimes defined as the much weaker claim that knowing how is *at least partially grounded* in some propositional attitude—see for instance Bengson and Moffett “Two Conceptions,” 7. Nevertheless, for reasons that will be explained, I find it disputable that such a weak thesis was the target of Ryle's original attacks, as Bengson and Moffett themselves seem to assume (*Ibid*, 9 note 11).

actually is.<sup>7</sup> Denying a concrete response to one question does not imply the acceptance of any other particular positive answer to that same question. Ryle might have had a positive thesis on the nature of knowledge-how—what I will later call “Ryleanism”—but I find it utterly misleading to label his alleged positive view as “anti-intellectualism,” since there may be other positive views on the nature of knowledge-how, besides Ryleanism, that would share the negative point that it is not a species of knowledge-that.

In any case, Ryle’s epistemological focus in these papers was framed in a wider philosophical project, whose aim was beyond epistemology (or beneath it). He aimed to impeach a general pre-conceptual understanding of the mind that, according to Ryle, was dominant at his time, which he labels in different ways: “the prevailing doctrine,” “the official theory,” “the intellectualist legend”... a way of thinking that he finds somehow related to INTELLECTUALISM in epistemology. Many of his readers have found it annoying that Ryle does not take any particular author as his enemy, constructing a mysterious “legend” as a kind of straw man that nobody actually ever defended. This accusation is unfair, given that contenders of Ryle were flesh and blood authors,<sup>8</sup> but I still believe that there is an explanation for the uneasiness that Ryle produces in his many of readers by being so reluctant to discuss particular theories. The reason for this is that Ryle was not attacking any explicit theoretical view, either in the field of metaphysics or the philosophy of mind, but a kind of unarticulated and pre-conceptual assumption beneath theoretical activity in those fields. A kind of implicit presupposition that had become a piece of common sense—at least common in the limited academic community. I will articulate that intuition in the following terms:

HIDDEN: intelligence is not something that may be directly observable in the agent’s behaviour, but only predicated of it in so far as it is a manifestation of some hidden state or process, which is not itself observable.

---

<sup>7</sup> Notice that INTELLECTUALISM, thus defined, is even compatible with the views of some authors that consider themselves nowadays as “intellectualists,” such as Bengson and Moffett’s (see note 6), in so far as they assume a weaker thesis than the one that strictly *identifies* knowledge-how with knowledge-that.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Kremer has shown there was a real intellectual debate around intellectualism before the Second World War, with authors who actually held positions very similar to the ones contested by Ryle. See his “Ryle’s ‘Intellectualist Legend’ in Historical Context,” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 5, 5 (2017): 16-39. However, as Kremer convincingly shows, what Ryle was attempting to undermine was the common assumption behind that debate, which shows why his own view ought not be simply understood as the denial of intellectualism. See also Will Small, “Ryle on the Explanatory Role of Knowledge How,” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 5, 5 (2017): 56-76.

Realising that HIDDEN is not some author's thesis, hypothesis or theory is of utmost importance.<sup>9</sup> It does not work as a positive statement that could be made explicit and defended by solid arguments, but as a kind of pre-theoretical assumption that motivates a certain direction in the inquiry about the mental, shaping what any valuable answer may look like.<sup>10</sup> HIDDEN is what commits any explicit philosophical conception of the mind to explain why mental epithets and, in particular, those related to 'intelligence,' may be predicated of people's actions, given that it is not the sort of thing that we could ever *see* in their behaviour. Those assuming HIDDEN are committed to the task of explaining what it is that makes behavioural patterns intelligent—*viz.* in virtue of which kind of inner and hidden processes, unobservable by others, occurring in each agent's private 'grotto,' is their behaviour intelligent.

HIDDEN, in and by itself, is no metaphysical claim—although it could certainly favour some metaphysical views over others. Assuming HIDDEN as an implicit starting point, authors might defend dualist, materialist, functionalist or emergentist views about the nature of the mind, just to mention a few possibilities, because HIDDEN says nothing about the nature of the alleged hidden processes where intrinsic intelligence is supposed to be located, or about the sort of connections that such process have with those occurrences that we actually see. HIDDEN just invites us to look for the mental somewhere else—as opposed to—in what we actually see in behaviour.

One may think that, in contrast to HIDDEN, INTELLECTUALISM is a positive metaphysical statement. But strictly speaking it is not, since it says nothing about the nature of the mind or its processes either, or about the way it deals with propositional contents, or about the kind of relation (causal, functional, explanatory...) that the mind has with those performances that we observe. Unlike HIDDEN, INTELLECTUALISM is a theoretical thesis, but not one that belongs to metaphysics, or to the philosophy of mind, but to the theory of knowledge.

---

<sup>9</sup> Will Small holds that "The central target (...) of Ryle's discussion in the second, third, and fourth chapters of (*The Concept of Mind*) 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" ("Ryle on the Explanatory Role," 59). I would not disagree with Small's exegetical point in those specific texts, but I believe it is important to realise that causalism too is just a case that exemplifies the general pattern that is Ryle's target.

<sup>10</sup> This is the reason why I prefer the label HIDDEN to the one Hasselberger uses for a very similar view, namely "Neo-Cartesian presupposition" ("Propositional Attitudes," 15).

## 2. How Not To Introduce the Debate

My intention while introducing those terminological distinctions is not so much exegetical as instrumental. I do not hold that these are the exact definitions that Ryle had in mind, but that distinguishing the terms in this way will prove beneficial while we approach the theoretical arena.

The predominant strategy that anti-intellectualists have adopted until quite recently has been to defend Ryle against the attacks of the new trend of intellectualism that stems from Stanley and Williamson, either by modifying Ryle's position or by showing that the arguments levelled against it are not solid. My proposal here is to adopt a different strategy, in the wake of what may be considered as a new wave in the anti-intellectualist party: namely, to show that Ryle's views have been seriously misconstrued in this debate.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, I would like to defend Ryle but, most importantly, *not* Stanley and Williamson's Ryle, which in my view is a misconstruction that results, as I will show, from a slanted reading of his work. I will focus in particular on Jason Stanley's later developments of intellectualism<sup>12</sup> with a double intention: first, to put forward a better understanding of Ryle's views resulting from a more charitable reading of his work; and second, to show that, surprisingly enough (at least for me!), this different reading paves the way for a possible understanding between Stanley and what I take to be the original Ryle. Preparing the ground for such understanding is the final goal of this paper, and what explains its title.

Before reaching Stanley, I will stop for a moment to consider the way John Bengson and Mark A. Moffett introduce the debate on knowledge how in their conscientious introduction to the volume they co-edited on the topic, which I find paradigmatic of an unfortunate approach that confuses the different levels that I tried to separate in the previous section:

Intelligence-epithets often modify overt behaviours, such as pruning trees. But Ryle is keenly aware that Intelligent actions, such as pruning trees skilfully, are not distinguishable from non-Intelligent actions in virtue of any *overt* features of the performance; rather, we must "look beyond the performance itself."<sup>13</sup>

In my view, Bengson's and Moffett introduction to the debate dooms it to degenerate into a sort of dispute about which is the better way to respond to

---

<sup>11</sup> Dissatisfaction with respect to Stanley and Williamson's reading of Ryle has been a part of the debate since the beginning, but a milestone in this respect is the monographic issue edited by Julia Tanney in the *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* (2017).

<sup>12</sup> In particular, *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and "Knowing (How)," *Noûs* 45, 2 (2011): 207-238.

<sup>13</sup> "Two Conceptions," 6.

HIDDEN, taking for granted that such intuition must somehow or another be satisfied by any theory we may seriously consider. Bengson and Moffett are quoting Ryle here, but they make sense of his "beyond" in a way that forces him to search for intelligence *elsewhere* when, perhaps, it could be there, at sight, in behaviour itself, in the light of the possibilities and eventualities that it makes manifest. It is right that this "elsewhere" does not have to be inherently mysterious, or essentially inaccessible, but still in Bengson and Moffett's reading it could not simply *be there*, at sight. The possibility of holding that intelligence is *in the act itself* seems to be a non-starter from Bengson and Moffett's perspective. That is why the different positions in the debate show up in their description of the scene as alternative ways to account for one structurally similar intuition:

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.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, HIDDEN appears here as the common ground where all the contenders must find their own place, Ryle included, who is presented as the one who defends the view that the invisible place where we have to look for intelligence is in the agent's abilities or dispositions:

Whereas anti-intellectualism allows that we detect *abilities* or *dispositions* in virtue of witnessing actual performances (in diverse circumstances, on multiple occasions, etc.), intellectualism allows that we detect *attitudes* in virtue of witnessing such performances. Either way, we manage to "look beyond the performance itself" to a power (ability, disposition) or intellectual state (attitude) of the individual that is distinct from any particular overt behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

Bengson and Moffett's apparently balanced formulation is highly problematic on closer inspection because INTELLECTUALISM and ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM are not structurally similar hypotheses—a point that will take some unpacking.

Given that knowledge-that involves a psychological attitude towards some propositional content, defendants of INTELLECTUALISM have to claim that knowledge-how is also constituted by such propositional attitude. That is why INTELLECTUALISM is in natural accordance with HIDDEN: it would give an answer to the question for the 'elsewhere' intelligence stems from: the agent's propositional attitudes. But Ryle's position ought not be introduced by the same sort of argument just by substituting "psychological or propositional attitude" for

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

“ability,” “disposition” or “power.” Otherwise, we could not construe him but as another positive attempt to satisfy HIDDEN.

Quoting in length the passage cited by Bengson and Moffett will help realise the infelicity of their presentation of the different views under dispute:

In judging that someone’s performance is or is not intelligent, we have, as has been said, in a certain manner to look beyond the performance itself. For there is no particular overt or inner performance which could not have been accidentally or ‘mechanically’ executed by an idiot, a sleepwalker, a man in panic, absence of mind or delirium or even, sometimes, by a parrot. But in looking beyond the performance itself, we are not trying to pry into some hidden counterpart performance enacted on the supposed secret stage of the agent’s inner life. We are considering his abilities and propensities of which this performance was an actualisation.<sup>16</sup>

We cannot express Ryle’s views as the claim that the mysterious *something* we must be looking for is the ability, the capacity, the power or the disposition, which may not be directly observable, and must be somewhere hidden in the agent, making it the case that her behaviour manifests intelligence. However, from Bengson and Moffett’s point of view, all contenders would agree on the idea that what makes a performance intelligent is some additional feature that can only be conjectured, hypothesized, or just indirectly inferred, which is precisely the very idea that Ryle intended to criticise. Bengson and Moffett’s introduction to the debate is thus committing all contenders to respond to the intuition of HIDDEN, searching for the place where intelligence *really* happens, given that in principle it cannot be out there, at sight.

### 3. Stanley’s Ryle

I will now focus on Stanley’s 2011 pieces (*Know How* and “Knowing (How)”), which are developments of the view he put forward with Timothy Williamson in their 2001 paper. In section one we have seen that Ryle’s original criticism of INTELLECTUALISM was motivated by the fact that that epistemological thesis is somehow in accordance with the kind of unfortunate pre-theoretical intuition that I have labelled HIDDEN. At this point, it seems pertinent to ask whether Stanley’s defence of INTELLECTUALISM may also be considered as being in accordance with HIDDEN. The answer to this question will be crucial to take a stand on Stanley’s understanding of the Rylean project. The question then is: is Stanley’s aim to defend a notion of intelligence that confines it to the privacy of the mind

---

<sup>16</sup> Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 33.



(HIDDEN) when he claims that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that (INTELLECTUALISM)?

I believe not: a careful reading of his proposal shows that Stanley's INTELLECTUALISM is not a defence of HIDDEN, but a different attempt to escape from it—whether a successful one or not is something that remains to be elucidated. Unfortunately, Stanley does not elaborate on this point, and his position regarding the kind of intuitions I have phrased as HIDDEN remains obscure. Instead of positioning himself explicitly for or against them, he focuses on the epistemological claim of INTELLECTUALISM, raising a direct confrontation with Ryle that, as I will show, loses track of what was originally at stake in his proposal. Had Stanley directly discussed Ryle's main goal, he would probably have found that the kind of position he himself is championing has much in common with Ryle's original project. However, instead of pursuing this line of thought, he reads Ryle in a way that, from the outset, seems to be far from charitable, discrediting him for holding old-fashioned views that “No one thinks anymore,” and are “now universally rejected.”<sup>17</sup> The result is a reading that some authors have found highly disputable.<sup>18</sup>

I will summarise Stanley's reading of Ryle in six points, all of which I find mistaken. According to Stanley, Gilbert Ryle is:

- (1) Unclear about his own positive position.
- (2) A verificationist on meaning.
- (3) A behaviourist on the nature of the mind.
- (4) A fictionalist on mental states and processes.
- (5) A 'preachivist' on knowledge-that.
- (6) A 'distinctivist' on the relationship between action and theory.

The nature of claims (1) to (4) is crucially different from the one of (5) and (6). The former group, which I will analyse in sections four and five, are explicit attacks that Stanley directs towards Ryle, in the sense that Stanley is aware that

---

<sup>17</sup> Stanley, *Know How*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, Stephen Hetherington, “Knowledge and Knowing: Ability and Manifestation,” in *Conceptions of knowledge*, edited by Stefan Tolksdorf (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 73-100; Jennifer Hornsby, “Ryle's Knowing-How, and Knowing How to Act,” in *Knowing How*, edited by Bengson and Moffett, 80-98. In the same volume, Paul Snowdon's contribution (“Rylean Arguments: Ancient and Modern,” 59-79) is also critical, although less strongly. For more recent criticism, see Julia Tanney, “Gilbert Ryle on Propositions, Propositional Attitudes, and Theoretical Knowledge,” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 5, 5 (2017), and both Kremer's and Small's contribution to that volume.

Ryle rejects those accusations. In contrast, (5) and (6) are not accusations, but attempts to objectively paraphrase Ryle's views in ways Ryle would allegedly consider valid, according to Stanley. I will hold that the fact that Stanley sees those two last theses as faithful summaries of Ryle's views is still more pernicious than the fact that he makes the precedent unfair accusations, because it shows that he is missing the core of his opponent's position. That is the reason why, in section six, I will analyse in depth those two later points, contrasting them with a reconstruction of Ryle's original arguments.

#### 4. Lack of Clarity

Even if, at first glance, Ryle's style might be the most crystalline one a philosopher might have ever achieved, the complaint that his positive position on the nature of knowledge-how—what I have called “Ryleanism”—is unclear is quite widespread, even among those who are willing to follow his lead. He did say, quite indisputably, that, when attributing knowing how, we are normally talking about people's abilities and capacities—*viz.* what they are able to do, their powers—, and not about the intellectual truths that they have grasped. And he did say that knowing how “is a disposition, but not a single-track disposition like a reflex or habit.”<sup>19</sup> But would Ryle defend a strict reduction of knowing how to those abilities, powers and dispositions? The answer is anything but clear. Some authors (mostly intellectualists) identify his view with a sometimes called “ability thesis,” whereas others (mostly anti-intellectualists) deny that such a simple view was ever held by Ryle, or at least find the idea disputable.<sup>20</sup>

To make things worse, not only Ryle's positive views on the nature of knowledge-how is enigmatic, but also his positive views about the relationship between knowledge-how and knowledge-that—i.e., his response to what Kremer calls the challenge of “accounting for the unity of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Ryle may be interpreted in at least three possible ways: practicalism, unitarianism and pluralism. First, he may be read as not just attacking INTELLECTUALISM, but as

---

<sup>19</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Jeremy Fantl, “Knowing-How and Knowing-That,” *Philosophy Compass* 3 3 (2008): 455 and n10; Jennifer Hornsby, “Ryle's Knowing How,” 82; Benjamin Elzinga, “Self-Regulation and Knowledge-How,” *Episteme* 15, 1 (2018): 119-140; David Löwenstein, *Know How as Competence*, 6. There is some insightful criticism from an intellectualist position in Natalia Waights Hickman, “Knowing in the ‘Executive Way’: Knowing How, Rules, Methods, Principles and Criteria,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 10.1111/phpr.12488 (2018), 5.

<sup>21</sup> “A Capacity to Get Things Right: Gilbert Ryle on Knowledge,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, 1 (2016): 25.

defending the opposite thesis, attempting to reduce knowledge-that to a species of knowledge-how—a view that is sometimes called “strong anti-intellectualism” or “practicalism.”<sup>22</sup> It is hard to deny that, at some points, Ryle seems to be quite akin to this idea, for instance, when he explicitly claims that knowledge-how is logically prior to knowledge-that,<sup>23</sup> or when he holds that knowledge-that presupposes knowledge-how as its precedent (because one may only know a truth if one is able to previously perform actions that amount to knowledge-how, or because one may only count as knowing that such and such is the case if one also knows how to give good reasons to hold it).<sup>24</sup> And, on top of that, Ryle holds that understanding is a part of knowing how,<sup>25</sup> which, if right, and given that knowing that *p* appears to require understanding *p*, seems to imply that know-how must be at least a constitutive element of knowledge-that.

A second possible reading of Ryle, unitarianism, would construct his view not as the one that knowing-that may be reduced to knowing-how, but as claiming that both concepts have a common root. Such an interpretation has been put forward by Michael Kremer, who holds that there is a core meaning involved in the different uses of the verb ‘knows,’ one that covers both knowing-how and knowing-that.<sup>26</sup> According to his interpretation of Ryle, which he bases on views by John Hyman,<sup>27</sup> to know is to have a ‘capacity to get things right’. Even if Kremer’s reading is compellingly defended, I find it difficult to prevent it from collapsing into some form of intellectualism—as it overtly occurs with an account of knowing how like Hickman’s, that shares with Kremer the influence of Hyman. My worry in this respect is that the idea of correctness involved in “getting it right” seems to strongly suggest that truth conditions are somehow grasped by the agent, and thus that all knowledge is some way or another based on representational states.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Fantl labels the view as ‘strong anti-intellectualism’ (“Knowing How and Knowing That,” 452) and by Hetherington as ‘practicalism’ (“Knowledge and Knowing,” 73), but both are careful enough not to attribute it to Ryle.

<sup>23</sup> “Knowing How and Knowing That,” 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> “A Capacity to Get Things Right,” 28.

<sup>27</sup> “How Knowledge Works,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (197): 433–451.

<sup>28</sup> That is the effect of expressions like “the content of knowledge-how” (Hickman, “Knowing in the ‘Executive Way’,” 17), which I find shocking, even if conceived as non-conceptual. Instead of with idea of “getting it right,” the unitarianist view may perhaps be better defended in terms of achievements or failures, not assuming that the aim is in any sense a correct *representation*. That is: we would need an account of performance assessments that does not rely on how the agent

Finally, a pluralist reading of Ryle would hold that knowing-how and knowing-that are not reducible to each other (as both intellectualists and practicalists hold, in different directions), nor to a third more basic genus (as unitarists hold), but simply different concepts with strong and interesting connections but no common core. David Wiggins, for instance, holds that “Ryle is in a position not merely to allow but also to assert that, in their full distinctness, knowing how to and knowing that need one another.”<sup>29</sup> According to such a reading, theoretical knowledge relies on the practical, and practical knowledge rests on the propositional. The problem with this interpretation is that it would still have to show what response Ryle would give to the challenge of accounting for the unity of knowledge. The disparity and irreducibility of those two concepts could be understood as a denial that there is *one* think called knowledge besides that terminological coincidence—a position that may in the end favour the standard tacit assumption that epistemologists ought only to be concerned with ‘genuine’ knowledge, i.e. of the propositional kind, an unfortunate idea that may be found in virtually all introductions to the field.<sup>30</sup>

By my side, I am reluctant to accept any of these three possibilities because they seem to be involved in a misleading quest for Ryle’s original theoretical views, Ryleanism, as a positive epistemological theory of the nature of knowing-how, whereas I would say that this common assumption is what may be challenged. My point in this respect is that, in general, Ryle was not trying to offer any clear-cut explanatory hypotheses of concepts. We may not find in his work, in particular, any reductive analysis of epistemic concepts, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, and his approach to knowing-how is no exception.<sup>31</sup> A possible explanation of this is that his philosophical method was not really driven towards

---

represents the desired outcome, but on the way or manner in which she is able to conduct performances (successfully, with mastery, skilfully...). For hints in this direction, and doubts about the very idea of non-conceptual content, see Daniel D. Hutto, “Unprincipled Engagements. Emotional Experience, Expression and Response,” in *Radical Enactivism* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 2006): 13-38.

<sup>29</sup> David Wiggins, “Knowing How to and Knowing That,” in *Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy: Essays for P. M. S. Hacker*, edited by Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 264–5.

<sup>30</sup> If the concepts of knowing-how and knowing-that were finally so irreducible to each other, nor to any common term, that would strongly suggest that the former is in the end of no genuinely *epistemic* concern, being more related to the philosophical study of powers. See Vega, “Reglas, Medios, Habilidades,” 7.

<sup>31</sup> Hornsby, “Ryle’s Knowing How,” 81-2.

theory. Stanley himself recognises this anti-theoretical tendency,<sup>32</sup> but still, as I will show, he recurrently reads Ryle as an author that does put forward and defend positive views. In contrast, different interpreters hold today—and I would forcefully agree with them—that Ryle's philosophical project was quite a different one, with important resemblances to Wittgensteinian therapy.<sup>33</sup> Such an intellectual project might not seem as trendy today as it once was, at least for those who expect that their philosophical work will have some clear impact on the mainstream development of cognitive sciences—and I cannot think of many more evident examples than Stanley's case.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, even if one does not sympathise with the kind of anti-theoretical slant that Ryle manifests, approaching his work with the fundamental aim of reconstructing and objectively evaluating his positive theoretical views may not be the most charitable way to read him.

I do not want to deny that Ryle has a positive view on the topic under discussion, nor do I want to hold that his 'logical geography' is fully deprived of positive theses. Still, even if there were such theses, and even if it were evident today that such theses are wrong, that does not invalidate his achievements with respect to his primary negative and therapeutic goal. And, as Ryle himself avows:

My argument has been intended to have the predominantly negative point of exhibiting both why it is wrong, and why it is tempting, to postulate mysterious actions and reactions to correspond with certain familiar biographical episodic words.<sup>35</sup>

If we take Ryle's reflections at face value, any reading of his works that were primarily focussed on constructing his alleged own positive position could run the risk of missing his “predominantly negative point”—and, in this respect, it does not matter much if the interpreter is in favour of Ryle or against him.

---

<sup>32</sup> “Ryle was a committed ordinary language philosopher, unreflectively and immediately hostile to analysis and reduction of any kind.” Stanley, “Knowing (How),” 10.

<sup>33</sup> See Julia Tanney, “Rethinking Ryle: A Critical Discussion of *The Concept of Mind*,” in Gilbert Ryle: *The Concept of Mind*, 60th Anniversary Edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009): xi. Stephen Hetherington discusses the resemblance between Ryle's reflections on know-how and Wittgenstein's ones on rule following in “Knowledge and Knowing,” 31. See also: David Löwenstein, “Knowledge-How, Linguistic Intellectualism, and Ryle's Return,” in *Conceptions of knowledge*, edited by Stefan Tolksdorf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012): 301; Hasselberger, “Propositional Attitudes.”

<sup>34</sup> For a critical view on this trend see Max R. Bennett and Peter M. S. Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 135.

## 5. Verificationism and Behaviourism

Accusations of verificationism (2) and behaviourism (3) go hand in hand. The former is a position in the philosophy of language according to which a sentence may only be meaningful in so far as it is verifiable, at least in principle, and the latter is a statement in the philosophy of mind, that would force us to account for all psychological states and processes in terms of behavioural patterns. Those are supposed to be objectively verifiable, in contrast to psychological states and processes themselves, which (unless they are one's own) allegedly depend on rational reconstruction and speculative hypothesis about the unseen. For that reason, behaviourism shows up as a position in psychology and the philosophy of mind that is in accordance with verificationism in semantics and the philosophy of science. These views are usually assumed as handicaps of Ryleanism, given that they are views that did not survive the arrival of functionalist and cognitivist approaches to the mental. Now, Stanley's reading of Ryle does not just identify his position with these views but, furthermore, reads him as systematically producing positive defences of them, for instance, when he claims that:

*The Concept of Mind* is devoted to advancing Ryle's behaviourist views. It is not immediately evident how the topic of knowing how fits into this now unpopular agenda,<sup>36</sup>

or that:

Ryle assumes a theory of meaning that connects linguistic meaning to verifiability: a term is meaningful only if it is possible in principle to verify whether or not it applies to something.<sup>37</sup>

Stanley's interpretation of Ryle then assumes his texts as pursuing the basic goal of advancing positive theses, behaviourism on the one hand and verificationism on the other, two positions that would both be motivated by one same epistemic fear of the unknowable.

However, at the same time, Stanley is perfectly aware that both positions are explicitly rejected by Ryle, or at least set aside as unclear and problematic—the former in his papers “Unverifiability-By-Me”<sup>38</sup> and “The Verification Principle,”<sup>39</sup> and the later in different papers compiled in *On Thinking*.<sup>40</sup> That is the reason why I call these “accusations,” and not simply “restatements” of Ryle's views. The fact

---

<sup>36</sup> Stanley, “Knowing (How),” 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Idem*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> In Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1971): 126-236.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, 300-306.

<sup>40</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *On Thinking*, edited by Konstantin Kolenda (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

that Ryle explicitly rejects those views, or at least holds that they require much qualification, is certainly not determinant, since he could be a verificationist and a behaviourist *malgré lui*. And it is understandable indeed that both views could seem appealing to somebody pursuing Ryle's project in so far as, if those two theses were correct, we would have excellent reasons to definitely reject HIDDEN. Verificationism and behaviourism bring to the foreground *everything* that is allegedly beyond the performance itself, and *always*—but at too high a price. Ryle is not forced to endorse such radical views in order to hit his target with respect to HIDDEN. If those principles were correct, they would prove that *all* intelligence is out there, and that *all* the mental is at sight for external observers—but Ryle's target requires much less than that. It would be enough for his purposes to show that *some* acts of intelligence may be there, at sight, and that *some* mental attributions are not hypotheses on what happens in the agent's secret grotto, but something that we may actually see in what she is doing. In other words: Ryle does not need the sledge-hammers of verificationism or behaviourism in order to crack the nut of HIDDEN.

Much more could be said about this, but it will suffice to have shown, first, that Ryle puts both behaviourism and verificationism under critical assessment, not being committed to any of them; and, second, that those views seem to be much stronger than the ones he would require to achieve his goal of undermining HIDDEN. It is not clear why Stanley insists so much on Ryle's arguments having these today unfashionable burdens.

## 6. Fictionalism

This point brings us to accusation (4), according to which Ryle can only have a fictionalist account of mental processes.<sup>41</sup> Fictionalism is a view according to which our talk about mental states and processes is nothing but a *façon de parler*, which does not aim at literal truth. Our attributions of beliefs, desires or intentions would not token any real events occurring in the world, and would thus be mere fictions. Once again, such interpretation is an accusation in clear contradiction with what Ryle claims about his own position. It is hard to deny that he *does* explicitly affirm the existence of mental processes occurring in the privacy of the agent's mind, something that we, external observers, cannot see from the outside: as Stanley recognises, silent soliloquies, mental imagery and acts of remembering are present all over his texts as real occurring events.<sup>42</sup> Ryle never denies the existence of

---

<sup>41</sup> Stanley, "Knowing (How)," 9.

<sup>42</sup> In this respect, see Brian Weatherson, "Doing Philosophy With Words," *Philosophical Studies* 135, 3 (2007): 429-437; Eric Schwitzgebel, "Gilbert Ryle's Secret Grotto," in *The Splintered Mind*

private mental processes of that kind. What he denies is their *essentially* private nature, the idea that those processes are something that, in principle, could *never* happen on the outside, at sight of others. Those processes, he claims, may happen in the agent's privacy, but they could have occurred in the public scene just the same. And, most importantly, when they do happen in the public scene, they do not denote intelligence because there is something simultaneously occurring behind the scene, something that makes them be truthful hallmarks of intelligence: the occurrence of intelligent behaviour at sight is not a secondary manifestation of what is primarily happening in the privacy of the agent's mind.

The accusation of fictionalism is related in Stanley's interpretation of Ryle to the attribution of another opinion that seems untenable:

On Ryle's picture of action, intentional actions are not the effects of inner categorical causes. Thus, his picture of knowing how coheres with his conception of intentional action. Ryle's metaphysical picture is widely regarded as implausible, since it involves ungrounded dispositions—that is, the possession of dispositions without any categorical basis.<sup>43</sup>

Stanley is probably identifying Ryle with a variety of the anti-causalist account of rational action, i.e. the idea that *reasons are not causes*, championed by authors like Wittgenstein and Anscombe—a view that Small has recently linked to Ryle's work<sup>44</sup>—, but this view ought not be confused with the blunt idea that intentional actions have simply *no* causes. It may be perfectly defended that rational explanations are not causal explanations without being committed to the much more contentious view that intentional actions have no causal explanation. Anti-causalists may accept that there *is* some causal explanation for every intentional action, but still hold that elucidating such cause is not what rational explanations aim at because such actions are somehow intrinsically normative.<sup>45</sup>

As Small has shown, Ryle holds that intelligence attributions are dispositional but, at the very same time, he is very careful not to identify them with the sort of dispositions that may be reduced mechanical or merely causal explanations, either internal or external, since he does not purport at all to explain

---

(blog), June 15, 2007, <http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2007/06/gilbert-ryles-secret-grotto.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley, *Know How*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Small, "Ryle on the Explanatory Role," 5.

<sup>45</sup> "Our inquiry is not into causes (and *a fortiori* not into occult causes), but into capacities, skills, habits, liabilities and bents" (Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 33). For a defence of the intrinsic normativity of these concepts see Löwenstein, *Know How as Competence*, 13.



knowing-how in terms of pure habits or automatic manifestations.<sup>46</sup> Ryle's dispositionalism would be an attempt to escape such reduction of prudence and intelligence to causal explanations that are blind and mechanical in kind. In order to defend this, he needs to show that at least *some* of our mentalist vocabulary (knowing how attributions, epithets of intelligence or prudence and, in general, all the rich vocabulary that we employ to describe human performances) is not based on causal hypotheses, but that its meaning stems from the way we use this jargon at the personal level. Such vocabulary opens up a logical space where certain kinds of rational assessment and criticism becomes appropriate,<sup>47</sup> expectations of success are backed by some expectations of warrant<sup>48</sup> or control,<sup>49</sup> and new concerns relating responsibility and resilience arise.<sup>50</sup> The impossibility to reduce such explanations to mechanical causes is not a deficit in the explanation itself, but the defining feature of the kind of "imponderable evidence" that constitutes our knowledge of human beings—what since Wittgenstein is known as *Menshenkenntnis*.<sup>51</sup>

## 7. A Reconstruction of Ryle's Argument

In contrast to the former ones, the remaining two theses, (5) and (6), are presented by Stanley as objective restatements of Ryle's positions. That is, according to Stanley, those are views Ryle would be glad to endorse:

PREACHIVISM: acting on some piece of knowledge—that requires an act of contemplating the proposition in question: an occurring mental process of 'preaching' by which the proposition is considered as a reason for action.

DISTINCTIVISM: what guides us in action is a distinct cognitive capacity from what guides us in reflection.

In my view, Ryle does not endorse any of these views, which means that Stanley would not just have levelled some unfair accusations—(1) to (4)—, but furthermore he would have misidentified Ryle's own position. In order to show the reason of the misunderstanding I will have to reconstruct Ryle's argumentative strategy with some detail.

---

<sup>46</sup> Small, "Ryle on the Explanatory Role," 74.

<sup>47</sup> Stina Bäckström and Martin Gustafsson, "Skill, Drill, and Intelligent Performance: Ryle and Intellectualism," *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 5, 5 (2017): 41-55.

<sup>48</sup> Katherine Hawley, "Knowing How and Epistemic Injustice," in *Knowing How: Essays on Knowledge, Mind, and Action*, edited by Bengson and Moffett, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Löwenstein, *Know How as Competence*, 107.

<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Elzinga, "Self-Regulation and Knowledge How," 121.

<sup>51</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) §§358-360.

To be fair, behind the appearances, Ryle's argument is anything but simple. In order to show that INTELLECTUALISM is wrong he puts himself in the shoes of a putative defendant of it, and presents her with a dilemma that has two untoward consequences. The argument is thus a dilemma within a reduction, and the crucial idea that we should keep in mind while recreating such an argument is that, just like any *reductio*, it is *not* based on premises that the author himself would be happy to endorse in any of its branches, but precisely on those that he wants to dismiss—or at least some of them. Failure to notice this is what makes Stanley's reading of Ryle so misguided. He seems to believe that Ryle himself endorses, assumes or at least presupposes the premises of the argument he puts forward.<sup>52</sup>

Let's begin by considering the way Ryle introduces the argument in his Presidential Address:

The prevailing doctrine (deriving perhaps from Plato's account of the tripartite soul) holds: (1) that Intelligence is a special faculty, the exercises of which are those specific internal acts which are called acts of thinking, namely, the operations of considering propositions; (2) that practical activities merit their titles 'intelligent', 'clever', and the rest only because they are accompanied by some such internal acts of considering propositions (and particularly 'regulative' propositions). That is to say, doing things is never itself an exercise of intelligence, but is, at best, a process introduced and somehow steered by some ulterior act of theorising. (It is also assumed that theorising is not a sort of doing, as if 'internal doing' contained some contradiction).<sup>53</sup>

I have quoted Ryle in length because the problem with this introduction is in the final brackets—and in the very fact that it is said in brackets. If we took what is said in them at face value, Ryle would be claiming that the position he targets is simply inconsistent—at least if we identified 'thinking' with 'theorising'—in the sense that the prevailing doctrine would be an attempt to preserve two claims that contradict each other. There would not be much point in writing a paper against a position that is introduced as overtly inconsistent. However, the rest of Ryle's paper is not futile because HIDDEN, as I said at the

---

<sup>52</sup> A similarly unfair criticism may be found in Stalnaker, when he says: "I think the more general intellectualist view that (Ryle) was criticizing is a picture that Stanley should also want to reject. (That is, I think Ryle was right to criticize the intellectualist view of knowing-how. His mistake was to accept, or at least presuppose, an intellectualist account of knowing-that)." (Robert Stalnaker, "Intellectualism and the Objects of Knowledge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, 3 (2012): 755). By my side, I see no mistake in assuming a wrong view in order to reject it by *reductio*.

<sup>53</sup> "Knowing How and Knowing That," 1.

beginning, is no allegedly consistent theory in and by itself, but just an unstructured assumption, some kind of blur desideratum: not a set of well-formed positive theses, but an implicit intuition that guides the authors in their search for the mental. Its lack of consistency is the reason why anybody attempting to respond to it in a positive way will have to confront a dilemma: either she assumes that "thinking" *is* an activity (something that we do), or she denies that it is so, understanding it, or at least its purest manifestations, as static contemplation. Let me label each of those alternatives as:

ACTIONALISM: thought is an activity (a sort of doing).

CONTEMPLATIONALISM: thought is not an activity ("internal doing" is a contradiction).

In order to respond to their own contradictory desiderata, those willing to propose a theory in accordance with HIDDEN have to go either for ACTIONALISM or for CONTEMPLATIONALISM. The former horn of this dilemma leads to the first one of Ryle's arguments: if, for some action to be intelligent, it must be accompanied by some occult act of thought (we thus enter the *reductio* by assuming HIDDEN), and thinking itself *is* a sort of action (and we opt for the first horn of the dilemma: ACTIONALISM), then that further act of thought is something that the agent *does*. But then it must be something she could do intelligently or stupidly. We certainly want her to do it intelligently, but then HIDDEN forces us to assume that it must be accompanied by some further act, which is what makes it intelligent, and an infinite regress is thus initiated.

The consequences of going for the second horn are not more pleasant: if some action's being intelligent means that it must be accompanied by some hidden act of thought (we enter the *reductio* by assuming HIDDEN too), but thinking is *not* itself an action (we opt for the second horn of the dilemma in this case: CONTEMPLATIONALISM), we then have to account for the way thought, as inert static contemplation, may ever have effects in action, which is dynamic, but lacks itself from intelligence. This second horn forces those bewitched by HIDDEN to envisage a sort of impossible mediator, a 'schizophrenic broker,' who should have a bit of theory and a bit of practice, but be none of them. Nothing, according to Ryle, could ever meet such incompatible demands, at least in the framework of HIDDEN. In other words: there is no escape for those assuming HIDDEN: there is an infinite regress waiting for them at the end of the corridor of ACTIONALISM, and a schizophrenic broker at the end of the corridor of CONTEMPLATIONALISM. They'd better leave HIDDEN behind.

Now, the way I see it, the problem with Stanley's reading is that he fails to grasp Ryle's general strategy, the disjunctive structure of this dilemma, attributing

to him each premise of his *reductio* at different moments of his reconstruction. Stanley's Ryle would have somehow assumed both ACTIONALISM and CONTEMPLATIONALISM, in order to defeat a contradictory straw man, which would have gone for *both* horns of his dilemma at the same time. Ryle appears in Stanley's eyes as someone who holds both the view that knowledge—that requires the 'contemplation of propositions,' a sort of inner 'preaching,' and the idea that we have to introduce an impossible broker between thought and action. But none of those are theses that Ryle himself endorses! They are only considered by him for the sake of the argument in different horns of the dilemma he confronts his opponent with. If anything, they are *his opponent's* theses, those he wants to reject in the end, by means of a *reductio*, and not the premises that Ryle himself would endorse as his own positive views.

The failure to see this is what makes Stanley summarise Ryleanism as a form of DISTINCTIVISM, something that he does since the perplexing first lines of his first chapter:

Humans are thinkers and humans are agents. There is a natural temptation to view these as distinct capacities, governed by distinct cognitive states. When we engage in reflection, we are guided by our knowledge of propositions. By contrast, when we engage in intelligent action, we are guided by our knowledge of how to perform various actions. If these are distinct cognitive capacities, then knowing how to perform an action is not a species of propositional knowledge. (...) That there is an important distinction between the kinds of states that guide us in action and the kind of states that guide us in reflection is orthodoxy in much of the most influential work in twentieth-century philosophy. (...) But the most systematic attempt to prove what philosophers and laypersons typically assume, that what guides us in action is a distinct cognitive capacity from what guides us in reflection, is due to Gilbert Ryle, in his major work, *The Concept of Mind*.<sup>54</sup>

I have to admit that reading these very first lines of Stanley's book caused me to jump in my chair—a jump that was somehow my first step into writing this paper. In effect, had Ryle ever claimed this, he would have pictured us all as 'schizophrenic brokers,' divided into the irreconcilable sides of theory and practice, thought and action, contemplation and performance. According to Stanley's Ryle, human beings would be essentially fragmented, having two sorts of 'capacities' or 'cognitive states,' some of them directed at doing and some others at thinking; some being the basis of our know-how, and others grounding our knowledge-that; some would have to do with behaviour, and the others with thought. Stanley is right indeed in denouncing this as a dead end—but it is not Ryle's position. At all.

---

<sup>54</sup> Stanley, "Knowing (How)," 1.

In fact, for those of us that attempt to make a more sympathetic reading of Ryle, it is hard to conceive a less Rylean picture of the human mind.

When placed in Ryle's general strategy, *DISTINCTIVISM* appears not as Ryle's general view about the relationship between thought and action, but as the undesired conclusion behind the second horn of the dilemma: *CONTEMPLATIONALISM*. If Ryle's imagined opponent assumed that genuine thought is not itself a kind of action, but static contemplation, then he would have to introduce something between action and thinking, which is precisely what Ryle wants to show is *not* necessary. Considering his general goal, if we had to restate Ryle's positive views, it is much more sensible to construct Ryle as holding that there is no such thing as a 'distinctive cognitive capacity for reflection' that could be told apart from the sort of capacities that guide us in action: his aim is not to defend that there is a gap between behaviourally inert contemplation and unintelligent mechanical movement, one that would require the introduction of some brokering mechanism, but, on the contrary, that there is *no* such gap to overcome.

To summarise, I find two main troubles with Stanley's reading of Ryle with respect to (5) and (6): first, he considers Ryle's arguments in a summative way, as theses he subsequently endorses, while they should be read as disjunctive alternatives, belonging to different horns of one dilemma. And second, and most importantly, Stanley takes the premises of those arguments as opinions that Ryle himself endorses, or even as the essence of his views on the nature of the human mind, whereas they are only theses he assumes for the sake of the argument, attributing them to his opponent in order to turn an unarticulated preconception (*HIDDEN*) into a viable theory and, then show that such a theory does not stand up to scrutiny. They are thus not positive theses Ryle would be happy to endorse himself at all.

## 8. Bridging the Divide

This should suffice to show where does the misunderstanding begin and how far it gets. Now, although Stanley fails to identify Ryle's views in some crucial concerns, some genuine disagreement remains. As I said at the beginning, the basis of that disagreement is their opposed assessment of *INTELLECTUALISM* as an epistemological thesis, which Stanley affirms while Ryle denies. In the remaining part of the paper I would like to discuss Stanley's positive views on the nature of knowledge-how in order to show that, once Ryle's position is correctly understood, they are not so deadly rivals as it may seem. On the contrary, despite

their divergence on the specific thesis of INTELLECTUALISM, they both seem to share some important attitudes that are utterly against HIDDEN.

Stanley replies to the first Rylean argument (the infinite regress) by claiming that one may act on some piece of knowledge—that with no need to perform any additional act of considering a proposition, in the sense of ‘preaching’. He follows Ginet on this, who rightly defended the point that one may act on a piece of knowledge—that directly, just like one may exercise one's know-how directly, with no need to recall regulative propositions.<sup>55</sup> Even if Ginet holds this view as a criticism of Ryle's opinions, it is hard to imagine Ryle disagreeing on this. If the interpretation I have been proposing is correct, Ryle never makes the positive claim that ‘preaching’ is a necessary requirement for propositional knowledge—that to have practical effects. This is what, in his opinion, advocates of HIDDEN would be forced to assume if they went for the first horn of the dilemma, which he himself never does.<sup>56</sup>

Now, in order to reply to Ryle's second argument, Stanley holds that the function assigned to the schizophrenic broker could be fulfilled by some kind of automatic process, or by a sort of by-product of mental mechanisms, and does not have to be a further action of the agent.<sup>57</sup> He thus defends the possibility of sub-personal mechanisms that are not themselves agential, but implement the machinery of agency. They would be contentful, but nobody would be aware of their contents.<sup>58</sup> This is probably the point where the divergence between Ryle and Stanley would be stronger, and harder to overcome, given that Stanley's functionalist and modular image of cognition seems to be radically alien to a Rylean conception of the mind—an account of intentionality and rationality that is all deployed at the personal level.

However, in my opinion, a better option for Stanley would be to impeach the very need for a schizophrenic broker instead of holding that the broker is conceivable, realising that such a need only arises when one assumes that theorising is not doing. Why should Stanley buy that premise at all? Why should he hold that acts of thinking are not acts, or that ‘internal doing’ implies a sort of

---

<sup>55</sup> Carl Ginet, *Knowledge, Perception and Memory* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1975): 7.

<sup>56</sup> See Hetherington, “Knowledge and Knowing,” 29-31.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley, “Knowing (How),” 26

<sup>58</sup> Fridland provides compelling reasons to suspect that subpersonal automatic mechanisms could ever fulfil the role required by intellectualists (see “Problems with Intellectualism,” 891). Furthermore, such scepticism may be supported by a radical confrontation with the representational cognitivist assumptions that underlie Stanley's approach, in the lines proposed by enactivists, such as Daniel D. Hutto and Erik Myin, *Radicalizing Enactivism. Basic Minds without Content* (Massachusetts: MIT, 2011).

contradiction? Once such assumption is discarded, the need to reply to the challenge disappears. In other words: Stanley does not have to take upon himself the task of finding out a mediator between static contemplation and mechanical action. There is a better way for him to go: to admit a notion of thought that is not alien to practice—a mission for which he could find in Ryle a good ally.

Furthermore, a more sympathetic reading of Ryle's text would show that there are moments where he seems to be preparing the ground for concepts that would later be introduced by Stanley and Williamson in order to understand the particular way in which rules must be grasped by agents in order to be effective in practice. I am referring to practical modes of presentation, which are the ones under which agents are supposed to grasp those regulative propositions that are, in their view, the *content* of know-how.<sup>59</sup> Many authors have claimed in this respect that the notion of practical modes of presentation is a surreptitious way of introducing the very idea that Stanley and Williamson's theory was supposed to explain, namely, know-how.<sup>60</sup> Remember: an agent knows how to perform a certain activity, according to the new intellectualists' theory, in virtue of her knowing a proposition about the way in which she could do it. But grasping that proposition in abstract is not enough: she would have to do it "under a practical mode of presentation," which implies certain dispositions to behave according to the rule. That is what, in Koethe's opinion, commits them to circularly: in order to *know that* that specific way is the right one, the agent would have to *know how* to apply the rule. This criticism is contested by Jeremy Fantl, who objects to Stanley and Williamson's reduction for different reasons.<sup>61</sup> In Fantl's opinion, there is no such circularity, and the problem is quite the opposite one: modes of presentation fall short of being *enough* to guarantee know-how. The fact that the proposition is grasped under a practical mode of presentation is compatible, in his opinion, with the agent being unable to apply the regulative proposition in particular occasions, and therefore it is not enough for her to really know how to do the thing.

I do not want, nor need, to take stance in this discussion. It may well be the case that practical modes of presentation imply spurious circularity, as Koethe claims, or perhaps they do not help solving the infinite regress argument, as Fantl holds. What is relevant for my point is that the very idea of practical modes of presentation is a feature of Stanley and Williamson's account that may be

---

<sup>59</sup> Stanley and Williamson, "Knowing How," 429

<sup>60</sup> See for instance: John Koethe, "Stanley and Williamson on Knowing How," *The Journal of Philosophy* 99, 6: 327; Katherine Hawley, "Testimony and Knowing How," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 41, 4 (2010): 403.

<sup>61</sup> Jeremy Fantl, "Ryle's Regress Defended," *Philosophical Studies* 156, 1 (2011): 129.

considered in accordance with Ryle's central positive views. In other words: *practical modes of presentation are a Rylean seed at the core of new intellectualism*. The very idea is, in spirit, Rylean. This may sound odd, I concede, but an unprejudiced reading of Ryle would help defuse that sense of oddity. For instance, he holds that "even where efficient practice is the deliberate application of considered prescriptions, the intelligence involved in putting the prescriptions into practice is not identical with that involved in *intellectually* grasping the prescriptions."<sup>62</sup> Such a statement leaves the door open for other ways of grasping those same contents, which are more appropriate for that practical function—such as practical modes of presentation.

The fact that Stanley's positive conception on know-how is not so far from Ryleanism could make Stanley's views seem contentious from the point of view of mainstream cognitivism. That is so because some propositions, according to Stanley, would not even be grasped in the relevant way unless properly rooted in the behavioural patterns of the agent. The possibility, or even the necessity, of being disposed to engage in certain kinds of actions would be *constitutive* of the very understanding of their propositional content. Stanley exemplifies this following Gareth Evans, when he holds that the right comprehension of some *de se* thoughts requires the acquisition of some dispositional properties. The same would happen, in Stanley's opinion, with respect to know-how which, in his view, is a variety of *de se* thought. In Stanley's own words, the kind of intellectualism he intends to deploy is based on 'a view of at least some of the constituents of propositions according to which they can only be entertained if one possesses certain dispositions.'<sup>63</sup> They could thus not consist in pure, simple, theoretical *representations*.

I am not sure that such a view is consistent, but if it were correct, there would be processes of intelligence constituted by what happens, or may happen, 'on the outside,' on the body, on behaviour, at sight, and no narrow definition of such 'intellectual' processes could be restricted to what happens in the inner space of the mind. This may be understood as an attempt, by the part of Stanley, to leave HIDDEN behind, at least partially, in that it explicitly rejects its CONTEMPLATIONALIST horn, by defending 'that propositional knowledge is not behaviourally inert—indeed even entertaining certain thoughts is not behaviourally inert, but entails the possession of dispositions.'<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*: 37 (my emphasis).

<sup>63</sup> Stanley, "Knowing (How)," 27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 98.



In other words: even if Stanley's intellectualism claims that knowing how to do something is just a case of knowing that something is the case, it does not follow that know-how may become a purely 'intellectual' process, in the sense that Ryle found problematic: the body may have not merely a causal, but a constitutive role to play, and action itself would be part of the definition of those epistemic states, and not just their external, causal manifestations. Understanding those propositions from a practical perspective, which is, in Stanley's view, constitutive of know-how, would be something necessarily linked to actual performances and personal practice—all events that may happen in the public scene.

I believe that Stanley is so close to Ryle in this respect that one may even wonder whether their allegedly insurmountable dispute is based on any deep disagreement.<sup>65</sup> The introduction of those dispositional features in the very core of some propositional attitudes removes the grasping of those propositions from the realm of passive contemplation. Stanley and Ryle seem to be there on the same page, sharing the aim to take knowledge—that out of the contemplationalist limbo, which is a good part of Ryle's job against HIDDEN. From that perspective, Stanley's "reasonable intellectualist" owes much to Ryle's views—more that he is willing to confess. It may even be considered as a variation of Ryleanism more than as a reaction against it.

Let me finish with one general reflection that may help framing what is at stake in this confrontation: disconcertingly, outside the debate on knowledge-how—but still inside the field of epistemology—Stanley has defended a position that he himself dubs as 'anti-intellectualist.'<sup>66</sup> In that case, he is against the view that knowledge (in general, but he is focusing there on knowledge-that) is a purely epistemological notion. On the contrary, against this 'purist' position he defends, a variety of what would later be called 'pragmatic encroachment,' as the view that pragmatic factors belong to the core of our epistemic deliberations. He has been rebuked for labelling his own positions in such a misleading way, *viz.* as 'intellectualist' on the debate on knowledge-how, and as 'anti-intellectualist' in the debate on knowledge-that, a decision that apparently endangers the consistency of his general account.<sup>67</sup> Of course, it would be easy to dismiss this apparent

---

<sup>65</sup> One may wonder, for instance, if Stanley and Williamson's recent views on skill, as "a disposition to know" ("Skill," 715) may be understood as a restatement of Rylean views on know how under a different terminology. The view does seem quite similar to Kremer's unitarian interpretation of Ryle, discussed in section 4.

<sup>66</sup> Jason Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>67</sup> See for instance Stalnaker, "Intellectualism and the Objects of Knowledge," 754.

inconsistency as merely terminological—as Stanley himself does<sup>68</sup>—, but I believe there is a more remarkable moral to be earned from it: Stanley has set himself the general aim of bridging the divide between knowledge and practice, offering an account of the former that is constitutively linked to the latter. And he does so in those two different moments by confronting those views about knowledge—that which are, in his opinion, too intellectual (as in *Knowledge and Practical Interests*), and those views about knowledge-how which he finds too anti-intellectual (as in *Know How*). I believe this general project is perfectly consistent, just like it is reasonable to build a bridge by starting it from both sides of the river, which does not mean that one is working *against* oneself. The message I have intended to convey with this paper is that, just as Stanley himself may be found at different moments on different sides of the intellectualist divide, while still being coherent in his general aim, he could have been more alive to the fact that Gilbert Ryle's attack on intellectualism was an attempt to attain quite a similar goal. In that case, he would perhaps have found out that his attacks on Ryle's anti-intellectualism were an unfortunate case of friendly fire.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> “Replies to Dickie, Schroeder and Stalnaker,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, 3 (2012): 754.

<sup>69</sup> A very incipient version of this paper was presented at 24th SIUCC Workshop at the University of Valencia in 2015. Thanks to that audience for stimulating discussion and helpful feedback, and particularly to Jason Stanley for his openness and friendly reception of my talk. Drafts of the paper have been read by Teresa Bejarano, J. Adam Carter, José Carlos Cañizares-Gaztelu, Boleslaw Charnecki and Britt Harrison who made insightful comments. I wrote part of this work as an Academic Visitor at the Eidyn Research Centre of the University of Edinburgh in two occasions during 2015 and 2016, and I am also very grateful to its director, Duncan Pritchard. Research for this paper was supported by the Spanish MINECO (Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad) via research Grants FFI2014-51811-P and FFI2015-67569-C2-1-P, and the V Plan Propio de Investigación of the Universidad de Sevilla. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.